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The Curious Jew

Looking for God in humanity.

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

Being Gay In The Orthodox World: A Conversation with Members of the YU Community

Tonight, December 22, 2009, the YU Tolerance Club and Wurzweiler School of Social Work hosted an event entitled "**Being Gay in the Orthodox World: A Conversation with Members of the YU Community.**" I transcribed the event so that those who do not know any homosexual people or who were unable to make it could have the opportunity to learn a little bit about the choices people must make when in that situation.

Now more than ever I want it to be clear that this is as accurate a transcription as I could render but there definitely are parts that are missing. This is not verbatim. It is unofficial. It would be wrong to treat every word as divine. Any and all mistakes are mine. I would like to offer a forum for people to learn and to discuss, but not a forum for people to bash, malign or otherwise hurt others. **Some names have been changed and that is deliberate.** Do not reveal the identity of anyone associated with this event; if I've changed the name it was purposeful. **Do not quote from this article for any official purpose; contact the people who spoke if you wish to quote them.**

~

(There was an incredible turnout of people. The whole room was full and others were sitting on the floor. I would say 400 800 or more.)

Panelists: Avi Kopstick, Josh, Mordechai Levovitz, Jonathan

Moderated by: Rabbi Yosef Blau

Dean Gelman of [Wurzweiler](#) also in attendance.

Rabbi Blau: In order for this program to work, especially with such a huge crowd of people, a number of you feel very strongly about things, passionately, I have to ask that everyone cooperate with the parameters that we set for this evening. This – Wurzweiler actually had been running programs with a much smaller turnout apparently (laughter) in the past. The shift to involve this broader audience very much was influenced by two articles by students, one that appeared last year in the Kol Hamevaser and another that appeared this year in The Commentator which was a call to be taken seriously and to be heard. It's not an occasion for debating halakha, for making halakhic suggestions. The halakha as expressed explicitly in the Torah and in the Chachamim is clear to everyone here. And this is not what we're here to discuss and I'm making the point in the sense that if someone does try to discuss halakha, I will ask them to stop. It's not appropriate in the context of what we're doing. Secondly, as far as the various psychological theories and interpretations and shifts in the APA statements about homosexuality, again, this is not the forum for that discussion. We have a number of mental health professionals working for Yeshiva who have worked with students who wanted to discuss this issue with them but this is again in a different context. Dr. Pelcovitz who is sitting on the stage after the four presentations will make a few remarks to give a certain context. What we WILL be doing is addressing the pain and the conflict that is caused by someone being gay in the Orthodox world. Our four panelists, one present student and three alumni of Yeshiva, will be speaking about their own lives and experiences. I would ask you not to take pictures of them and not to record to respect privacy. Recordings have an unfortunate tendency to enable someone to take out a snippet and then use it for various and sundry purposes. The program will conclude at 10:00 PM. There will be an opportunity for questions, they'll be written down and I'll present them to the panelists. The questions should be to the panelists, not to me. Anyone in Yeshiva knows I'm around and if they want to discuss anything, halakhic or otherwise with me, they can always find me. One last request: No matter what you feel, do not interrupt any speaker, show respect to people. I trust it won't be necessary to ask someone to cooperate. I really really hope that I'll be able to maintain control. If we lose control, unfortunately, I'll have no option but to simply end the program. We're not going to allow any chaos. I thank you in advance for your cooperation. Our first speaker is Joshua . (Thunderous applause.)

Joshua: Oof, there's a lot of people here. Hi, everybody. Okay, I guess no better place to start than at the beginning. First of all, thank you very much to all of the institutions that allowed for this to happen- to the University, Rabbi Blau, Dr. Pelcovitz, moderators and safety nets, maybe- we'll see how that goes as we go- thanks to everyone for coming. It's exciting to be able to dialogue with you, think with you, talk with you about this part of ourselves. And then lastly, actually, I just wanted to start with an apology. There are faces that I see in this room who I have relationships with before the last 30 seconds and I haven't had the chance to talk about this part of myself and I'm sorry I haven't had the chance to talk to you yet if it's surprising- we can talk about it later, find me on Facebook.

Here's my story. In some ways I actually suspect my story is a bit unlike some of the other panelists

Welcome!

Hello and welcome to "The Curious Jew." My name is Chana. I'm glad to meet you! You can email me at thecoruscation at gmail. In any case, here are some important pieces of mine to check out.

- This pretty accurately introduces you to [my personality](#)
- These are all of [My Lecture Notes](#)
- These are all of [My Stories](#)

As for me? Well, I'm just a stargirl.

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that you are about to hear because I don't think I ever had the courage to admit to myself that I was gay. I'm from Toronto originally, went to dayschool, yeshiva highschool, two years at Gush and then YU. And all along the way I'm not sure that I ever was ready to admit to myself that I was gay. There was a moment in yeshiva where I think I developed – I guess you could call it a crush on a chavrusa I was learning with- and I told myself this was just a normal development. Carried on this way through my 20s- I tried dating- there are actually a couple people in the audience that I think I've been on dates with (laughter) but really for all my teen years and my 20s I was not in any way prepared to admit to myself that I was attracted to members of the same sex. Even coming home from a date I would feel that something wasn't right but...It would usually be during Al Chait times that I would think about the feelings that I had and would clop al cheit for having these feelings and then I would bury it deep, deep down. I think my breaking point came somewhere in the middle of my 20s when I did develop feelings for a friend and it became obvious to just about everybody but me. I fell into a serious depression at the time- doubly depressed that one, it was clearly unrequited and two, that I had these feelings at all. And it wasn't until a very good friend of mine helped me to see what was happening that I could confront my demons for the first time. And I'll be forever grateful. The first years or months was definitely depressive months. I'd be lying if I said I didn't have thoughts of ending my life at that time. Long period of intense medication and therapy and medications and the whole list- really baring all today – but I finally started the process of coming out to people, sharing my news ,a part of myself with people, and that began to make it real and in some ways more manageable. More – a little more able to cope with it in some ways. I remember before telling anybody or really just talking to my therapist being asked 'what comes next' and I could envision nothing. No future. The whole future that we hope for- raising a family and raising a family of Jewish existence all melted away- I could imagine no future that would be there. Although I guess the process of telling people has been helpful and healthy.

Three different ways in which my life has profoundly changed by virtue of this being part of who I am-

1. Halakhically- I'm not going to talk about halakha but just my own halakhic feelings or religious
2. Insitutional
3. Cultural

Big question was how to be a halakhic person and be true to this part of myself. Second was way that I would be able to participate in my community- would it be possible once I was out that I wouldn't be able to get aliyot at shul. I was recently at a friend's wedding where I was asked to give a toast at the reception because I found out a friend had asked me not to be involved in the chupah lest it disqualify the kiddushin and that matters to me quite a lot. Cultural- almost overnight I had gone from being part of an 'us' to being a 'them.' It was as if the ground had shifted under me. Gay people when talked about at Shabbat meals are a 'them'- far away from an 'us.' Against the very fiber of my being, I had suddenly become a 'them' when I just yesterday was a 'us' when people didn't know I was a member of this 'them.'

Three different ways that my life has been better since starting to come to terms with this:

1. No longer feel like a conflicted self. I have benefited a ton from reading articles in Tradition and online and feel more comfortable putting on tefillin and tzitzis and davening three times a day now that I've just accepted sometimes life will be full of contradictions and this is the part of the person that I am rather than worry about breaking point where I am no longer able to be frum.
2. I think since coming out I've developed a better relationship with my family. While I was hiding, I think that I was hiding more of myself from my family than they deserved for me to hide. When my folks came to visit, I remember walking in Midtown and seeing two men holding hands and my father snickered and I remember thinking to myself I couldn't share this part of myself with my family because of that. And I've been proven wrong over and over and over again. But it's funny how even the smallest things- so a word of caution about the words and language we choose to use about 'thems' that are really 'uses.' My parents have been really fantastic, really supportive people. After I came out to them, my father sent me an email apologizing, and his apology was that all of these years, I've had to struggle without parents who were there with me struggling and worrying along the way I suspect my parents haven't found the same support that they need.
3. Friends- I've had a tremendous outpouring of support and inclusion from friends. I suspect that my time is just about up so I'm going to step down. I think that a lot of people have asked: What do you want? What's there to want, what's to be gained from some kind of meeting like this? If I had to make just a single request: To think about the differences between the 'uses' and the 'thems' and the 'thems' are not really that far away. There are faces that I see in this crowd – they probably don't know it- but they are definitely the reason that I am I think alive today. And that wouldn't be the case probably if I had been treated as a 'them,' an outcast, as someone who didn't get to be part of a shul

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community and circle of friends. I'm thankful for the uses in my life and my hope would be that others who want to feel like uses can continue to feel that way – like they are a part of that us.

Rabbi Blau: The second speaker is Avi Kopstick.

Avi: Good evening. First I want to say thank you to all of my friends who are joining me on the panel, thank you to Rabbi Blau, Dean Gelman, Dr. Pelcovitz, my professors who I emailed and asked if they could come support me and with a lot of encouragement they told me they would all be here, I have family here and friends- thank you for all coming. As a lot of you probably know, I'm a student at Yeshiva University. Most of you see me on a daily basis. Usually I'm happy, engaging, affable, confident and secure. Truth is, I haven't always been this way.

I always knew I was different- didn't consider myself to be homosexual till I was 18. But in many ways I only knew that I was 4. When I was 4 I had this indigo winter jacket- my siblings and cousins would always use to make fun of me and I would say no, it's blue, Ima told me so. I do remember that jacket and how much anxiety I felt. When I was 6 I learned to ride a two-wheeler on my sister's hand-me-down bike. It was pink and white frills on the handlebars and I hated that bike and I didn't know why it caused me so much panic and distress. In Grade 3 I made a best friend, I never had one before, we did everything together but I remember thinking one day – you know- it's not that I LIKE him, like him; he's going to hang out with girls when he's older and I'm just jealous. I can already look back and say by the time I was 8 I had some clues at, least when people say 'when did you know.' When I was 11 my sister looks at me at the Shabbos table and says, 'Stop being so gay.' My mother screamed at her and said, 'Don't say that- maybe he'll turn out that way.' I pretended I didn't care but it made it much harder coming out to my mother 18 years later- no, that was bad math- 13 years later. Sorry Mom, I became one. By the time I was 12 I already knew for sure that I had some attraction to guys and thought to myself but everyone does, right, right? (Laughter) And I tried to keep this denial going as long as I could. I said, all right, fine, maybe it's just a phase and I'll go through it and I'll be attracted to girls and build a family. Maybe I am more attracted than I thought- maybe I'm bi- but it doesn't matter because I'm still going to build that big Jewish family that I've always wanted and everyone expects of me but after a while no matter how much I tried to reason this way I could not deny how much more my heart beat around guys that I liked vs. girls I felt more platonic toward. I never did anything about it but I still felt in some sense that I was letting everyone down not because of what I did but what I might be. When I was a sophomore at yeshiva high school, one time I spoke with my rabbi in the office. It was awkward for me because I never really spent time with rabbis. One long teenage angst why can't we go to movies, why can't we listen to non-Jewish music and started breaking down in this rabbi's office and was crying and I like movies a lot, but (laughter) and he didn't really know how to console me. He just kept saying, "I don't know- we just don't trust you (laughter)" – I cried in that rabbi's office that day not because of things I could say. The one thing that caused me such despair and hopelessness I couldn't say out loud.

I did come out to myself in my year in Israel. I said out loud to myself, 'I am gay.' I didn't go down without a fight. I decided to date my best friend in the whole world because if I didn't feel some attraction to her and wasn't in love with her then it couldn't be anybody. But I did call up my rabbi in Toronto and am hiding on some patio outside my yeshiva in the night and I say, "I'm not really that into girls" and he says, "Are you gay?" and I say, "I'm not sure- I'm going to try dating some girls." Without that rabbi's support I don't know how I would have survived those two years (fire alarm starts. It's insane. We stay put.) So that rabbi sent me tons of literature – online, elsewhere- he kind of knew where to find everything. And he left me to my own discretion and said make up your own mind and supported me no matter what.

(An administrator states: A fan shut down in an elevator which triggered the fire alarm- we're okay.)

He told me to look into the issue and no matter what I decided he would support me. He supported me when I came out to him, when I said I was going to go out with my best friend, he cautioned me and told me what might happen and supported me when I eventually had to break up with her crying in the hall in some random office building next to Ben Yehuda street. It was devastating, the whole thing, my best friend and I was hurting her more than anyone had ever hurt her and no matter how hard I tried I couldn't come out to her because I was still in yeshiva so I tried some half-truths and it didn't come out well. "I'm just not that attracted to you...you're beautiful...but..." and she sent me an email, "You think you know someone and then they turn out to be the biggest jerk in the world." I'm not a jerk but what I did to her was unforgivable. That was when I finally realized, concluded that I'm gay and nothing I can do. I fought for six years, every Rosh Hashana, denying who I am, every Yom Kippur with tears streaming down my face asking God to take it away. My test is not that Hashem made me gay and I have to become straight but my test is to live with it. I came out to friends- most accepted me. I came out to a couple of rabbis- they exceeded expectations. Most of the rabbis I did tell were probably some of the most brave, tolerant people that I know.

I told everyone except the people that mattered most which was my family. Coming out to my family was very difficult. The more I pushed it off, the harder it got. The anxiety from being in the closet-

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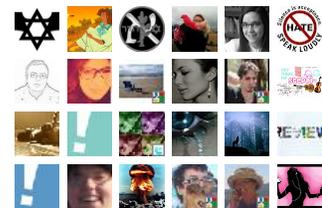
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"A fly also lives." ~The
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when you are hiding something, basically it permeates into the rest of your life. I started pulling away, preemptively as I thought they were going to reject me. I figured I'll just run away to Israel and then all my problems will be solved. I kept people out of my room, off my computer, kept all phone calls with my family short and curt. I sounded lethargic and depressed on the phone to my father- I probably was. I felt these relationships with my family dwindling away. I knew that if I wanted to maintain any connection with my family I would have to tell them the truth – fortunately I didn't have to. My father asked me, my sister asked me and my brother said he always knew. I was 21, went out for beers with my mother and I told her I was gay and she didn't want to hear it. And I said 'Your perfect Avi who you thought was going to give you tons of grandchildren is no longer perfect.' She doesn't like to talk about it still but at least she knows. Felt an instant reconnection to my family. Granted it is not all flowers and rainbows. My father still sometimes hopes I can change. Sister and brother sometimes upset about it. Sometimes, not intentionally my father says things that are very hurtful like 'gay people shouldn't be allowed to get married- all they want to do is have sex all the time.' Alternative lifestyle- what alternative lifestyle? All I do is hang out with my straight friends all the time and watch movies and hang out. And he's surprised that I have straight friends. I don't want to blame him. He has an internal conflict and it's persistent because of the dissemination of misinformation from rabbis and community leaders. He'll say 'I spoke to a rabbi today and every gay person I've met or most of them had some sort of trauma in their life in their younger years.' Complete anecdotal evidence. For the record, I have never been sexually molested. I had a very pleasant childhood- don't tell me that I have some memory that I'm repressing because it's only going to create false memories that weren't there and make me more depressed and it's not worth it. So like I said, the fears that I had that my family would cut me off, that I would be kicked out of the house- these were unfounded but not illegitimate. Other people not as fortunate have been kicked out of their houses. My brother's chances for a shidduch might have been hurt. My parents are probably judged as being bad parents. Do I need to be so vocal about it (being gay?) My mother would probably say no. I like to think that I am doing something positive. I'm speaking for people who have no voice, for kids who hide who they are, or who speak but are anonymous. In my rabbi's office, there's something that you want to say but it causes so much strife and you want to but it hurts. So I am out. A gay Jew in Yeshiva University. All right. Scandalous. (laughter) Truth is, I guess I'm a little bit ambivalent about my experience here- not with the school. The rabbis, most have been completely caring and sympathetic. The administration has been as ____ they can be. The reality is that I face homophobia all the time. Sometimes it's deliberate when people write 'fag' on Ely Winkler's campaign signs or when people ask my roommate if they are afraid of me coming on to him at night. Or when people liken me to adulterers or people who commit bestiality or incest. Or in Sociology when people raise their hands and say, "I'm not homophobic; I just wouldn't let my kids near gay people." At the same time it's easier having started the Tolerance club. At the same time have made such amazing friends at YU who accept my differences and make me happy, empathize with where I am coming from. The pasuk 'a man shall not lie with another man because it is an abomination' is not just my problem because I am gay but their own challenge. How could a religion that is supposed to be so compassionate put an individual through so much suffering? Hashem made me that the only way I can feel loved is with another man and then tells me to abstain from it. I'm not saying how to solve that but to understand that struggle. You don't have to legitimize or accept me. Hope we will be able to universalize the struggle and share in it because I just can't carry it alone any longer.

Rabbi Blau: The third speaker is Mordechai Levovitz.

Mordechai: It's like musical chairs. All right. First of all, I just want to express how incredibly overwhelmingly emotional it is to see this many people coming here because they are interested in talking about this subject. All my life, when I was in yeshiva, when I was a kid, whenever I even thought about bringing up this subject people would say 'this is not something we talk about because nobody wants to hear about this, this is something of which we were ashamed.' This is something I have to tell myself even now, after I leave, that this is something people do want to talk about – that's the lesson that I'm learning right now. It's the silence, like Avi just said, the feeling that you want to say something, something that is obviously the issue but you won't and then it becomes you can't and you shouldn't and then it just lives inside of you and burns and you start feeling, gosh, there's something wrong. There's something evil. It's not something necessarily that you become a victim to because people call you names because all kids are bullied. It's the notion when I was a kid that there was something inside of me that was hurting other people and not hurting strangers but hurting the people I loved the most. You know, all kids have to deal with thinking about disappointing their parents and that's something again, a rite of passage. We want to make our parents proud. Ever since I was a kid what I was afraid of was embarrassing my parents just by opening my mouth. I may have been a kid but I wasn't stupid. I knew that just by walking around the way I did, talking the way I did, things that just the way I was at 4, 5, 6 or 7- I went around and my hadn was like this and that's true and it is funny- but it wasn't funny to me then because when I knew that when I did this and I looked at my father and my father's eyes in public I saw how embarrassed I was. I saw how I, who loved him- he was so embarrassed and that killed me. When I was a kid, like I said, you know the type- there's always one kid who is a 'little girly boy' – the stereotypes are true because they're true and that's who I was and I'm not going to apologize for it. When I went to weddings, I loved weddings- my family is very frum and very yeshivish family. My relationship with my father was based on the

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time I would learn with my father at night- when I was 9 we were discussing R' Chaims, etc and it was amazing. One of the best things about growing up in a frum home was the weddings. From a very young age I would get very excited to go to these weddings to be in the women's section because it wasn't exciting in the men's section. The women with their beautiful gowns and the dances. And at one point my father got nervous and said come, come, come dance with me. And I was a chutzpadik kid and I said, "Why would I want to leave this wonderful place to go be with a bunch of retarded smelly penguins?" That was another time where there was silence. It was funny but so embarrassing for him because other people heard it, too. They took me to therapists at the time. They talked to rabbis so they said it's a very easy answer, take me to a therapist. But even the therapist I went to till I was in high school would not bring up the subject of being gay- it was like they were embarrassed.

I just spoke with my mother today- because I would go in and then the therapists would speak to my mother. With all these therapists that I went to, did any of them ever tell you that there was a possibility that your son could end up gay and how you would react to that? And she said absolutely not. It's the silencing, not the people who yell 'faggot' or put up posters about bestiality. It's the something that there are no words for because that's scary. The first time this silence broke was when I went to Camp Monk- I wasn't big into sports obviously but drama, fireplace, circus, camping- these things were so exciting for me and I really did love it. It was the first time that I was away from my parents. I didn't have to see that look of shame and embarrassment on their faces- I went to camp and I was fabulous. I could sing Les Miserables, etc. This drove people crazy. I grew up in Boston, Massachusetts and I wasn't ready for how New Yorkers relate to this. I figured what am I, I'm 10, not doing anything wrong. My counselor who is a 17-year-old guy comes up to me and says to me, "Mordechai, I have something very serious to ask me." He says: "Do you like other guys?" So I was excited- finally somebody gets me! And I say, "Yeah! Yeah, I do, I kind of like this one over there." And the next day my parents were called in to Rabbi Monk's office. And he takes off a book from the shelf by a rabbi who happens to be my father's great-uncle and he says 'there's no natural desire for homosexuality. It must be that it's only rebellion against God and it only happens after you've explored every other taivah and then he looked at me.' I was TEN. Only ten! And it made sense to everyone in the room. Except me. And I was kicked out of camp. And we can laugh about it now but they were crazy and I was kicked out. Do you know how embarrassing that was? We get riled up in yeshiva- cheftza gavra, etc, but when you get very passionate about this issue and put up signs 'bestiality and stuff' – the people that you're hurting are the kids who are most vulnerable, who are in the closet. Kicking a kid out of camp because of a passionate understanding or misunderstanding of some great Gadol is hurting children. I can take it. NOW- bring it on now. I talk to the rabbi, great relationship. It's wonderful NOW. It's the kids who hurt, the closeted kids who hurt. That's homophobia nad being violently passionate about this and people yelling outside- they're not hurting me- they're hurting those kids in the audience who might have contemplated committing suicide. They're hurting the kids who are so afraid because they want to live their parents' dream for them- that's who they are hurting. I can't imagine that that is in sync with the values of Judaism. It's not what my parents taught me or what my rabbeim taught me.

In general, I went out – I went to yeshiva; I loved yeshiva even though I was me. I had some run-ins with other rosh yeshiva about this subject. When my rosh yeshiva wanted to talk to me about this, "Mordecahi, I think that you may be" and I was ready for "gay" and he said "evil." Maybe I wasn't 10, but what, 14? A 14-year-old boy is evil?

I went to a very black-hat yeshiva. So I figured go to the Modern Orthodox yeshivas in Israel so I went to Shalavim, it was very exciting, I'm going to wear a kippa serugah. During the day we sit in the beis midrash and we argue about whether a chosson and kallah can have sex on Shabbos on the first night and biah she'lo k'darka so I can also talk about homosexuality. So six weeks later the Mashgiach pulls me aside and says, "Mordechai, we are just not equipped to deal with you- you're making everyone really uncomfortable" and kicked me out of yeshiva. And sent me to Gush! Where apparently all the gays go. (Insane laughter.)

When I went to Yeshiva University I still wasn't ready to call myself gay. I knew how many doors that closed and I didn't think anyone wanted to hear it and I needed to hold on to a dream. And I thought sexuality is fluid, all right. So I called myself bisexual, pansexual (at the time it was a very hip term.) I needed that at the time. I knew even though I called myself that that when it comes to actual sexuality, sexual fantasy- I can love a woman, think she's pretty but didn't feel the same way about a woman that I felt about a guy. But it doesn't matter. A good Brisker method is the head guides the heart. Doesn't matter what I feel- this is the road. This is the right road. So at the time I went to the Rav and told him I was pansexual. He said, "What?" and in the end he said all right, did some research and found an organization for helping people like me, Jews who want to be straight. So I went to a therapist and started dating a great girl from Stern. I was head-over-heels-fascinated by her. I went to an all-boys yeshiva and I never had the time to know a girl like that and we dated, always hoping that one day I will have a dream about her ,fantasize about her. Finally, a year or two into our relationship I had to tell her. And she said, "I think I'm" and she answered it for me, "gay." And I said, "How'd you know?" and she said, "Mordechai, everybody knows." Yeah, I guess. She said, "I love you and I know you love me but frankly, I want to sleep with you. I dream about you- I'm excited when you

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call. I don't hear that in your voice and I know that you love me and you want to be part of my life and you can – you can be my friend forever but I deserve more from a husband. I need someone who makes me feel attractive, like I'm the most attractive person in the world and you do, too." This blew my mind. I mean, why have I not talked to girls? Wow! They're doing something right in Stern. I mean, to this day, we are best friends. She's married now and I just spent Chanukah at her house. The breakup with her went much better than the breakup with the psychologist.

I went to the psychologist and said, it's been a year, and I said, I don't think I'm getting any sexual attraction. And he said well, what is sexual attraction and the first thing he told me was, "I never really thought you were very into this to begin with." What? I wasn't committed? I gave up everything I wanted- head and heart and Brisk and my mother and father. And then he caught himself and said, "You know what? I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. If you want to be gay, I wish you every success in life." And that hurt me much more than the 'you're not committed.' If I want to be gay? Do I want to embarrass my mother? Maybe it's happening because after a year of therapy, \$200 a session, maybe there was something wrong with that- no it is my problem because I don't WANT to live a straight life. Everything clicked at that point. I thought of what my ex-girlfriend said and it finally made sense. And maybe Briskers and Litvaks need to learn it made another kind of sense- in my neshama. What I knew was morally right and fit into the mold of yahadus. I need to find, I need to be true, I need to look at the metzius in my life and learn how to make the mundane holy. But you can't change the metzius. And I'm going over probably. Yes.

There's enough time for questions after. The point is that after that I found a lot of other gay frum guys like myself who have also been in the closet. Every yeshiva I was at I wasn't the only one but I didn't know it. Same way I didn't know there were all of you out here, people ready to be supportive. And sometimes you have to make things like this to find out that people are more supportive. We created a small community of people who come from frum backgrounds who are gay- not with any agenda- some are trying still to change, some who are gay and live with a gay lifestyle and some struggling still. We all learn from each other, all argue and discuss and accepted. No one can stand in another person's shoes. That organization is called JQY and there are over 300 people- all kids under 30 who grew up in Yeshiva who befriend each other. We're no longer alone and nobody has to be alone and when you look at this crowd, you know that, too. So thank you so much and we'll get to other things during the questions.

Rabbi Blau: In order to move things along, Nava will be handing out cards for people who want to write down questions. Raise your hand and she'll give you a card because we're running off schedule which is not Jonathan's fault but Jonathan.

Jonathan: Hi everybody. First of all, it takes a lot of courage for the four of us to get up here and talk to you guys (lots of applause). I'm shocked to see everybody here. Thank you so much for coming. My name is Jonathan, I'm 23 years old and I'm a proud alumnus of Yeshiva University. I don't know if many of you know who Mitt Romney is. He was the runner-up for President in _____. You'll find Romney starting a speech thanking me for bringing him to Yeshiva University for having the opportunity to unveil to the world his views on foreign policy. I was the President of an important student club here at YU. I raised a profit of \$130,000 dollars for YU. I was also 100% closeted. Never did I ever for the first 22 years of my life publicly acknowledge that I am gay. Can you blame me? Have you been to YU?

Being closeted was survival. It was even more than that. I remember thinking in those years: How can I accomplish anything as a gay guy? Gay isn't mainstream. Gay is my mother's hairdresser. I would never forget when I would meet someone new at YU, sometimes it would happen when a person met me they would turn to a friend of mine, "Is Jonathan gay?" So they would respond, "Well, he just comes off that way. But he's not. He's just from LA."

So my senior year me and all my friends started dating. In the dorms we would ask each other how's your plate, who have you pushed off to the side for now, etc. My friends were dating girls and I wanted to date girls, too. I mean, this is how we were raised, this is what we want for ourselves. This is the only model of happiness that we know for ourselves. Allow me to provide a little bit of background. I have the best parents. They gave me the best childhood. Every Shabbos my dad would play football with me. He introduced me to a stock market game he thought I would like, we played it every Shabbos and it was love at first profit. I'm a hardcore Miami _____ and I work in finance and vote Republican. How am I gay?

Looking back, I remember at five I saw 'cinderella' and knew I was going to meet a prince charming and that's just hindsight. ____ remember seeing a girl, imagined building a home with her, raising kids together with her and that was just when I was 8. That's what we all imagine for ourselves. The fact that when I hit puberty and my sexual drive started to kick in and it was oriented exclusively toward guys. That wasn't part of the cards, my aspirations, and so getting back to when I was a senior at YU and my friends started dating women, so did I. And I would take out these girls and by the sixth date the girl has told all her friends about me and she's really into me. You go on the date and it's palpable. (Joking) Who wouldn't be? I'm adorable. Yet. I had no feeling for her. It dawned on me that the way I

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viewed women romantically when I was 22 was exactly the same way I viewed them romantically when I was 8. They weren't just some angelic princess that would be an accessory on my arm helping me achieve the dreams of a white picket fence and a Golden Retriever. These women were adults and wanted to be wanted. These women wanted to be craved, wanted to be loved, wanted to be respected. They deserved that. They were feeling this for me and yet I wasn't feeling this for them. It was simply unfair. And then I thought to myself, not only was this unfair to them but also unfair to me. I also deserve to be loved and craved.

So when I graduated YU I knew I had to explore being gay. I wanted to meet a gay religious person. I looked online to find someone to talk to and so I did, a guy in his 30s, deeply closeted and in life he was deeply stuck. He had no plan what to do, wanted to get married to a girl but didn't know how. He was living a double life. It was depressing. The only thing I learned from meeting him was that I knew what I didn't want- I didn't want to be that person. I was a guy who was getting things done. Frankly, I don't have the time to be stuck. Seriously, I was deathly afraid that this 30-something year old guy was going to be my life. Living a lonely, peripheral, unimportant existence.

Subsequently, while I wasn't ready to come out yet, I started bringing out the issue of homosexuality and Prop 8 to people I knew. One person knew of an organization JQY- Jewish Queer Youth. Afraid to email them but eventually I did. Met a couple of them for coffee and for the first time in my life didn't feel isolated. Told my straight roommate I'm gay and he said, "No, you're not." And I said, "I am." He couldn't imagine me being gay and I couldn't imagine being gay. What happened to my friendship with my straight roommate? I'm his best friend. I'm the best man at his wedding- he's getting married in a week.

I think the final straw in my coming out to myself was looking at my older brother. He dated hundreds of girls and finally got married at 29. And he was so lonely when living on the Upper West Side and when he finally found his bashert I just saw that relationship and it was something that just clicked in me that the way they just know that they are into each other and have this amazing chemistry- the way they have this instinct inside me that my life would be complete with a man – that's how my brother had this instinct that his wife would complete his life. That's how you all know that a woman will complete your life. And so the next time I went home to LA I resolved that I was going to tell my parents. I expected my parents to not be okay with it. I mean my parents are community people. What does this mean for their reputation? But I reasoned that even if it took the m 5 years to be okay with it that hopefully by the time I get to my late 20s if I found a guy and want to build a life with him, hopefully my parents will accept him and celebrate smachot with him and go about the minutiae of life with him.

And so I told them. My mom went ballistic. That's an understatement. She asked me every day for a month if I was molested as a child. Because in my mother's mind that was the only way you could be gay. So I said, "No, Mom. I had this amazing childhood, etc." I think she screamed at me every day on the phone for 3 months. But she just couldn't get it. "You were always so smiley, always so happy, you've never been sad or depressed" and that's part of being closeted. You can't even show other people that you are sad or depressed. But eventually my mom had an instinct in her that she always wants the best for me and always wants me to feel good about myself and I would not be the person that I am today if it were not for my parents, love and moral support that they eventually showed me. They're amazing.

So I was officially out to my parents. But coming out to my parents and to my friends was a whole different story. So then I told one friend and he was cool with it, but he would say 'you can't tell so-and-so because he's too religious.' So I went for it, next person I told was him and he was even better about it. And he said, 'But you can't tell so-and-so' where it became this game. If only everybody even today knows how okay with it the next person was- truthfully it really surprised me. My friends are amazing.

So why come out to people? Because before you come out you think there's going to be nobody who is accepting but somehow everyone accepted me. This fake veil of homophobia is lifted. I was here two and a half years ago and I would never imagine an event like this taking place. The fact that people are here and coming here with their hearts- it's shocking. My friends know I'm the same Jonathan but they still ask me if I started using different words. Do I start saying, "Fabulous?" I can get away with it so I sometimes do. I'm still the same person that I was. Don't have to deny one part of who I am just so that I can embrace another.

I'd like to finish by talking to the young Jonathan who was closeted and afraid and isolated. I wish I could share with him all the support that my friends gave me when I came out to them. I wish I could make them feel the love that my father, mother and brothers ended up giving to me. And I finally wish I could show them all these friendly faces and this amazing turnout that I am looking at in the room right now because the old Jonathan could never have imagined this event taking place. I would tell him, it did take place, it is taking place, we're here proving this event could happen and speaking on behalf of the old Jonathan, thank you for all being here. This means everything. (Applause.)

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Rabbi Blau: Dr. Pelcovitz doesn't need an introduction and we are running late.

Dr. Pelcovitz: There were four very eloquent voices that we just heard and what I was struck by was how different each of the voices was and how different each of the stories was and how incredibly complex the journey was. And I just want to make a few brief points. The program is not really meant to hear from a psychologist and certainly is not meant to hear from anyone other than the four men you just heard from.

Point one is obvious. I think it's incredibly important for all of us here to understand that this was not an easy path for anybody who we just heard and to the extent that we have to understand 'al tadin es chavercha ad she taiga limkomo'- can't judge anyone till we've stood in his shoes. And I think that the important take-home message that we all have to understand is that this is not –there's often kind of this ignorance that somehow this is a hedonistic choice or a choice that comes with ease- it wasn't. And that's what's so important about the messages we all just heard.

The second point I wanted to make which was made by a number of the men is feeling isn't doing. It's not the same thing. Nobody has the right to judge a feeling. We're in an institution where there are very clear guidelines and halakhic guidelines which is not what tonight is about but I think a very important lesson in life is the lesson that there is a huge difference between validating and being empathic and being there for somebody and supporting them and necessarily agreeing. Validation and agreement are two different things. And the cry that I am hearing tonight is one asking for validation and understanding and I don't think we have to be concerned that that means that through doing that we are not being true to the internal values and halakhic principles with which we're living. And I think that's another important point.

And the final point which I think was made beautifully by Josh at the very beginning- and actually was made by all four- was how language brings control. One of my colleagues, ____ once showed me an FMRI of one of his patients who was a survivor of the World Trade Center and he showed me that as he was having a flashback to the worst moment of his life, that horrible day when he basically doesn't make it, the ____ was shut down, the language areas of the brain was shut down. Then he showed me subsequent FMRI's in the course of therapy as he named the monster and gave words to his pain, that's where healing came. Healing comes from lighting up Brokaw's area, from giving words. As we heard, as all four of the panelists said in different ways, as you talk about the pain and about the struggle and come to the process of belonging and rejoining the community although perhaps in a different key and in a different way, greater control comes and observance comes. It may not be observance in completely the way that we like to think about it, but as belonging comes and membership in the community comes, greater observance comes as well in other areas. I think that now I've said what I said, I'm sure that not everyone will agree with what I said, but let's go to the remainder of the program, which is to respond to the many questions and comments on the cards.

Rabbi Blau: I said that I would not take the questions to me but to the panel but the first question on this was to me and I'm not going to answer it but I will acknowledge it as I said before. Question is: How is a rabbi supportive of people coming out- I will clarify my position to anyone who wants to see me tomorrow morning or any other day or by phone or email.

Josh: We can speak just a little bit to only our personal experience of course, or really just to mine. So much feedback, sounds like spitting in your ear- can you hear? When I was first sharing my information with rabbis, which I hadn't done all around, though I suspect now this is like a genie that can't be put back in the bottle. I got a mixed review but never got a totally unsympathetic review. I'll be my friend but if you choose to live this lifestyle I won't be able to support you, he said- and that was something I understood but in the years since I've told him he's come back to me to ask for my input when he hears from guys in his yeshiva who ask him this same question. Our relationship has changed but not necessarily for the worst.

Mordechai: The answer is: depends! Depends which rabbi. Certainly there are rabbis who are more right-wing, more open-minded. You can be right-wing and open-minded. The best answer that I heard, not a halakhic answer, but early on when I was still bisexual and he said to me, very mired at the time in, just speaking at OU conference on Agunah at the time. Mordechai, there are huge questions that I have within Orthodoxy, places where I wish I can do more but I can't, places where I am confined by halakha- I can't give them (those women) a halakhic easy answer. You talk about it, speak to – Judaism is not an easy religion in all areas. People are constrained, want to do more but need to be intellectually honest to the halakha.

R' Blau: Why are there no female panelists?

Avi: I offered, I couldn't find any who would contact me. That's it.

Mordechai: This should be the beginning of many- look how many people are in, some who couldn't

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get in. We were contacted late by women who would like to be on this panel- we were contacted. There are bisexual, lesbian, transgendered women in this community and the important thing is to hear from them.

R' Blau: How did the response in NYC compare to responses in your hometown?

Jonathan: I'm from Los Angeles. I think people have reacted pretty similarly to the way they've reacted in NY- they're pretty similar. A lot of my friends from LA now live in NY and vice versa. You can say how have people reacted to my siblings who live in LA. My brother is on a softball team and there's a bunch of guys on the team and one of them, they're talking about something and said 'that's so gay, man' and then said 'oh.' And changed it to 'that's just interesting.' And that's pretty much it.

R' Blau: Thinking long term, do you think it's possible to live an Orthodox lifestyle while being gay?

Josh: This is a pretty hard question but I would say first of all it's difficult to think long term all the time but so far I'm going to answer in the affirmative. I think it is possible and this is why. 1. It's working for me so far. I'll admit now it's been a while since I've made it to Shacharis in the morning with a minyan but I still daven three times a day and consider myself to be a pretty frum dude. 2. I think the people up here and gay men and women in general don't have a monopoly on having issues with frumkeit. I suspect that there are other people out here who continue to daven, etc even though the whole system is not worked out for us or if it is, we still continue to live with questions. One of our Roshei Yeshiva at gush would say he doesn't have all the answers but still puts on Tefillin. It feels to me that all my friends have plenty of questions as well- don't feel like I'm the only one with issues.

R' Blau: A few people just wanted to express support for people for coming and making it here. So that's easy. Particular question for Mordechai. Do you know why the girl dated you for a year if she knew you were gay?

Mordechai: (starts laughing) I'll tell you. I mean, it took her a year to muster up the courage to actually say it. It took me 21 years to muster up the courage to say it. She had very strong feelings for me and different feelings but feelings nonetheless and we were exploring together. I give her a lot of credit- saying the word, like I said, sometimes just formulating the word itself is an accomplishment and it helped and I thank her. We should all be more comfortable using the word 'gay' -it's not a dirty word, it's not something embarrassing. You don't have to say, "I think he might be- you know." That's actually doing more harm than good because it's making the word seem like something that shouldn't be said- it's our lives. Not proud of being gay. I'm not proud of being right-handed either. Proud of the very courageous hard decisions, hard choices that we made and had to make in terms of not living closet. At least we chose that way. Coming out to parents, dealing with these hard issues. It's that that we're proud of. Gay pride- why do you have to go and parade it? We're not parading being gay. None of us talked about anything we do in the bedroom. That's private. And I don't talk about anybody with that except the person- whatever. The point is that what we celebrate is our triumphs that we talk about. And that's what not only we mean but what the community of gay people mean. Why do they need to march? Why do they need to celebrate? Do YOU think that what we did was courageous? (Applause.) So that should answer your question.

R' Blau: Why did you choose to go to YU? There are other environments that would be easier for you in secular universities.

Jonathan: In high school I did really well. I'm not trying to boast; I'm just saying I got a 1400 on my SATs, 4.0 GPA, but I only applied Harvard, Warton and YU. Because I knew the first two were reaches and I remember asked why not apply to NYU? I just deep down knew in 11th and 12th grade that if I went to NYU I would be gay by sophomore year. So I thought if I stay in the yeshiva environment somehow I would keep to my goals and aspirations of marrying a woman.

Avi: I just want to say the question is why do you choose YU? We're all Jewish from Modern Orthodox community, being gay is not the only deciding factor in why or how we choose- we want to come for the amazing things at Yeshiva University.

Josh: I was looking for a place with morning seder and night seder.

R' Blau: Have you noticed a difference in reaction between your parents' generation and your peers?

Mordechai: My parents' generation- when they were my age there was the 60s. The idea of nostalgia and things were different then is something I don't really buy into. I think that younger people in general are exposed to a lot more things and others are very conservative- so it depends.

R' Blau: What do you think the Orthodox community can do to make gay Jews feel accepted? Are there any steps or actions you feel would help create an environment of warmth, inclusion, etc?

Mordechai: THIS. This, this, more of this. This should not be an exception. There's obviously a huge interest in this subject. There's more to talk about, more to discuss. Hopefully whomever is taking over the Tolerance Club should always have a forum where people who are gay, lesbian, transgendered have a voice. This should be a tradition- this is a great start.

R' Blau: I'd like to ask Dr. Gelman to say a few words.

Dr. Gelman: My apologies for being late. Actually with everybody in this room I can't understand why there were more cars on the George Washington Bridge but there was an accident on the cross Bronx and nothing was moving- trailer got stuck under a bridge. This is an opportunity to show what a real university is all about. (Applause.) It's inquiry, discussion, it's not about who can yell louder or who can make the more outrageous claim. The Wurzweiler School of Social Work for now probably the past three years has had a regular visit from Mordechai and a number of other individuals as part of our educational process on understanding diversity and having a sense of what people's emotional needs may well be. And all of us have learned over those three years with JQY sending representatives to our regular program and summer bloc program. We've also discussed a variety of other sensitive issues and not just the issue of gayness in the Orthodox community. I think the last time I have ever seen this many people in this room is when Jesse Jackson was here and that also proved to be a very interesting discussion. There are things that I think my Presidential Fellow, Nava Billet, who I rehearsed on my speakerphone in my car so she got everything down right, there are subjects and topics that we shy away from as a community and I know- Nava ,did you tell them about nineteen years ago? The reality was that 19 years ago you could not discuss abuse in the orthodox community. And in a room in the 9th floor 24 specially invited people worked out an arrangement with the ultra-Orthodox community and city's administration on how there could be sensitive responses to abuse in the community and overcome the notion of lasha hara. Whether it is abused individuals, children, spouses, agunot- these are all issues and you should be proud as members of this community that there are opportunities to grow, to learn, to communicate and not really to yell and scream and I'm delighted with not only the turnout but also the support that these four individuals have received this evening. So thank you.

One last item. JQ Youth will be with us in the spring. Also, the question was raised about who is on the panel- you might be interested to know that a Stern graduate who was also a Wurzweiler graduate has a new book coming out and it might be a very interesting experience from part of the other side of the equation.

R' Blau: I said we'll end at 10 and I intend to keep to schedule. One last question: What do you think is the next step for the Orthodox community?

Avi: So I think after hearing our experiences, I guess the one thing that we've been avoiding, that we clearly didn't talk about is the logical next step maybe just- how to make it- I was talking to Dean Schwartz and brought up – halakhic damage control.

R' Blau: Can you explain what you mean by it?

Mordechai: No, no. It's true. The next step is what you do when you leave here. That's what the next step is. Because most of us do know people who either they tell you that they're gay or you think that they may be gay and it's up to you – will you be silent, will you avoid the issue? Are you going to make this something that you're not going to talk about? When you don't bring up the issue with someone who yo u think may be gay, are you not bringing it up out of compassion with him or because you're not comfortable with the subject? If it changes in your mind – if you understand that these are just stories- that gay people aren't evil people, people rebelling against God or the Torah, are people struggling and who need you- and if you will be there for them then that is the greatest next step that we can ask for. Certainly giving them resources like JQ Youth so they can meet other people who are going through something they are going through. Talk to YOUR rabbis about this. Talk! Open the dialogue where you can. If you think this is something that your shul is secretly dealing with but not publicly dealing with, tell and maybe this is something that you can bring to your community. Every community is dealing with this and very few communities are bringing people to talk about it. What are they afraid of? We need to stop responding to a fear that doesn't exist. Go back to your communities, your community centers, to your leaders, to your shuls and say maybe we should hear from the gay people in our community because we know that there are. And if those gay people are not ready to talk then all of us are ready and willing to talk and there are many people in the crowd who are ready and willing to talk. So there's no excuse. I'm begging you for me and my relationship to this religion and this community- you can help. So please do.

R' Blau: This ends the formal program. Anyone who wants to speak privately with any of the panelists is certainly welcome to do so.

Addendum: My point of view on this event, namely, '[To Deserve and To Sacrifice.](#)'

Posted by [Chana](#) at [Tuesday, December 22, 2009](#) 

[Recommend this on Google](#)

Labels: [Being Gay in the Orthodox World](#), [Gay](#), [Gay Frum](#), [Homosexual](#), [Homosexuality](#), [Orthodox Community](#)

120 comments:

 **Abbey N said...**

I was also there tonight. It was actually more like 800 people there, just for accuracy sake.

[December 22, 2009 11:04 PM](#)

 **Toviah said...**

This comment has been removed by the author.

[December 22, 2009 11:06 PM](#)

Anonymous said...

Thanks so much for posting this!!! Its really enlightening!

[December 22, 2009 11:36 PM](#)

 **zehava said...**

Obvs this can't be proven one way or the other, but I think its highly doubtful that that someone did not pull the fire alarm.... Totally irrelevant, but just saying....

[December 22, 2009 11:49 PM](#)



inkstainedhands said...

Thank you SO much for putting this up, Chana! I wish I could have been there to hear this.

[December 23, 2009 12:02 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

Great job on the transcription. And to correct some typos, it's:

Camp Munk
fMRI
Broca's area

[December 23, 2009 12:28 AM](#)

Anonymous said...

"I would ask you not to take pictures of them and not to record to respect privacy. Recordings have an unfortunate tendency to enable someone to take out a snippet and then use it for various and sundry purposes."

[December 23, 2009 12:47 AM](#)

 **Shmuel said...**

ישר כח Chana, you're amazing. Thanks a ton.

[December 23, 2009 12:55 AM](#)



Shades of Grey said...

Thank you so much for posting this, I'll be linking to it on my own post about how I was turned away twice from getting into the building (including one attempt to sneak in).

I think that Anonymous 12:47 might have a point, though - are you really allowed to post this? I wouldn't want you or anyone else to get in trouble...

[December 23, 2009 1:49 AM](#)



הצעיר שלמה בן רפאל לבית שריקי ס"ט said...

Ugh, I was in YU tonight but didn't attend (...not that I would, but a Chana sighting would have been nice).

[December 23, 2009 4:09 AM](#)

Reena said...

Thank you so much for posting this!

December 23, 2009 9:08 AM

steve said...

I am so sad that I was left outside. This has been a very sensitive area for me and for lots of others left standing out in the cold. (my life story). I hope this is just the beginning.

PS JQY is a great organization, but lets not forget the group that started it all... GLYDSA (Gay and Lesbian Yeshiva Day School Alumni). We still meet (anonymously) the 4th thursday of every month a the GLBT center on 13th street at 8PM

December 23, 2009 9:29 AM

Anonymous said...

Disgusting....toeva.

December 23, 2009 10:15 AM

Anonymous said...

Thanks for posting transcript of the YU event. I'm so impressed how complete you were able to make it. It's fantastic.

December 23, 2009 10:20 AM

Chana said...

I'm not sure why people cannot read. DO NOT correct my post, add people's names or otherwise interfere. If I changed a name, it was deliberate. Thank you.

December 23, 2009 10:23 AM

Steve said...

As the other steve, I also was left outside for just being 10 minutes late. This was such an important topic to me that, as a struggling gay Orthodox Jew, I didn't want to miss. Thanks so much for the transcript!

December 23, 2009 10:24 AM

Jewish Atheist said...

Thanks for the transcript.

December 23, 2009 10:37 AM

NoPeanutz said...

Be realistic Abbey
800 is ridiculous.
And it is certainly against the fire code.
Keep it in perspective, do not misrepresent it.
I was told that there were 350 chairs set. This seems like a lot, but still plausible.

How many people could have been standing in the periphery? Maybe 150. That leaves 500. 500 is a very generous, but realistic estimate.

Then I heard that there was a crowd that could not get in and was turned away. It is dishonest to count these people in the attendance.

There might have been 100 people turned away, enough to constitute a considerable crowd, but I did not see since I was inside.

That being said, I think that 500 is a realistic estimate of the attendance. Frankly, I don't understand the secrecy surrounding the event, but if we ever see the photos, it maybe be possible to count.

If there were 800 people, you would KNOW it. And security never would have allowed it.

December 23, 2009 11:03 AM

NoPeanutz said...

And 500 is still a huge crowd for any setting, and it is an incredible crowd for undergraduates at any University.

I think that this is the brightest spot of all. Congratulations to the YU undergrad community for showing a real intellectual interest in their own academic society and probing the frontiers of their own religious values and communities.

As an alumnus, it made me very proud to see undergraduates radiate such intellectual enthusiasm and energy on campus about a non-political issue.

December 23, 2009 11:07 AM

mrwritesf said...

Was forwarded this by a YU alum who attended the event.

Thanks for the transcript and please pass on my wholehearted applause to YU and the Tolerance Club for hosting this event.

And MAJOR kudos to the panelists for their bravery and honesty!!!

December 23, 2009 11:46 AM

Eitan Kastner said...

Chana, great job as always

December 23, 2009 12:00 PM

Anonymous said...

Thank you for transcribing this. Much food for thought.

December 23, 2009 12:48 PM

Anonymous said...

I think it is wrong to post this transcript as they specifically asked for it to not be recorded, photographed, or be written down. As a responsible person who claims to be doing this for those who couldn't be there shame on you as this will only lead to more discussions and arguments due to comments being taken out of context.

December 23, 2009 1:00 PM

TPW said...

To Anonymous 1:00--they did not say for it not to be written down. You are free to interpret the verb "record" as you please, but do not misrepresent what was actually said.

As a side note, I wonder where the request not to record/photograph originated (i.e. with the students, rabbis, admin, etc.).

Chana, I forwarded this to a friend of mine who was unable to attend. Thanks!

December 23, 2009 1:19 PM

SusQHB said...

Thank you! This is quite a service to those who could not get into the room and listen to these stories.

December 23, 2009 1:42 PM

Anonymous said...

Anon Dec 23 2009, 1 :00 pm said:

I think it is wrong to post this transcript as they specifically asked for it to not be recorded, photographed, or be written down. As a responsible person who claims to be doing this for those who couldn't be there shame on you as this will only lead to more discussions and arguments due to comments being taken out of context."

Anon, what right do you have to be shaming Chana for the transcript? Air out your unresolved issues elsewhere.

December 23, 2009 2:33 PM

Avital said...

Awesome.. I have a ton of friends who couldn't make it, so i'm thrilled i can have something to pass along now, thanks a bunch!

December 23, 2009 2:42 PM

NoPeanutz said...

BTW.

They asked people not to "record" it.

re·cord Pronunciation (r-kôrd)

v. re·cord·ed, re·cord·ing, re·cords

v.tr.

1. To set down for preservation in writing or other permanent form.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

It's the first definition.

I do not know the reason that you defied the request of the panel organizers by transcribing and posting this transcript.

But please don't play games and semantics (in which you are wrong), and own up to the fact that you blew them off and posted it for the reasons of yourself and your readership, and not because you were playing within the rules.

December 23, 2009 3:42 PM

ilanica said...

There is definitely a difference between recording and transcribing, and Chana very elegantly preserved the spirit of this request in her provisions at the top, while allowing those who did not attend to be able to hear what it was that was said.

Thank you, Chana. This is important and perfectly done.

December 23, 2009 4:00 PM

ilanadavita said...

Thanks for this transcription.

December 23, 2009 4:05 PM

NoPeanutz said...

Maybe it was right. Maybe it was wrong.

But everybody who wanted to know about it could have read about it in the Commentator or whatever publication was authorized to report on it.

If we were playing by the rules.

But this transcript happens to be against the rules and unofficial.

It is against the letter of the law and the spirit of the law.

December 23, 2009 4:24 PM

Anonymous said...

Panelists who did not provide their permission to have this posted were not included.

View of the Audience: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2tqChO1Me0>

Introductory Remarks: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqHTHJCIZdM>

Rabbi Blau's Intro:

1st Panelist:

2nd Panelist: Avi Kopstic: <http://www.vimeo.com/8356731>

3rd Panelist, Mordechai Levovitz: <http://www.vimeo.com/8356037>

4th Panelist:

Closing Remarks, Dr. Pelcovitz: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctTYz-D-06U>

Q&A:

View of crowd at the end: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hbMbGjPw_8

December 23, 2009 4:27 PM

Uri said...

No Peanutz said:

".....I do not know the reason that you defied the request of the panel organizers by transcribing and posting this transcript.

But please don't play games and semantics (in which you are wrong), and own up to the fact that you blew them off and posted it for the reasons of yourself and your readership, and not because you were playing within the rules."

December 23, 2009 3:42 PM

Your comment made me laugh. Where were you when Chana wrote similar articles in The Observer as its Editor-in-Chief? Chana does what she does in order to enlighten and educate people. She doesn't do it "for the reasons of yourself and your readership" as you claim. I read Chana's blog and her articles in NY newspapers for a few years now and can say without a doubt that the content is of import and very thought-provoking. You are barking up the wrong tree here.

December 23, 2009 4:34 PM

NoPeanutz said...

@Uri

Rules is rules.

I did not hear Rabbi Blau say "This rule applies to everyone except for CuriousJew Blog." If she was authorized to record the event, she should have been up in front with the other journalists.

Instead, this transcript remains unauthorized.

December 23, 2009 4:42 PM

Chana said...

Dear All,

Yes, I chose not to accede to Rabbi Blau's request. I did that purposely. You desire to know why. I will explain why.

The benefit of having this transcript posted online where people can see it far outweighs the potential negative benefit that Rabbi Blau envisioned. This is especially the case because I have explicitly forbidden any official news outlet to quote from my notes. As someone who knows many members across the Orthodox community, I stand behind my decision of believing that it is more important for this transcription to be available to the public.

The distinction between a written transcription and a recording is as follows. Most people will simply read a news article, read a quote and won't bother to listen to a full lecture to find the source. A written transcription, however, is easier to read and see. The very fact that this exists challenges anyone to try to take a snippet 'out of context'- the full context is available right here.

This is aside from the fact that numerous students who wished to attend were unable to simply because of space and it would be unfair to deny them an opportunity to learn what was said when it was not even their fault that they could not enter.

Also, my use of student names or requisite changes of names was done with full permission by the panelists.

Why did I not let others find out their news through 'The Observer' or 'The Commentator'? Very simple. No matter how well they cover the event, they can't offer a full 16-page transcription of it and I can.

NoPeanutz, I have no problem with your disagreeing with my actions but I think you have exhausted this discussion and should allow people to make comments about the content of the speech rather than continuing to list my various offenses.

As all know, my personal belief has always been that '[To Understand is Not To Condone](#)' and that is what motivates my actions.

December 23, 2009 4:50 PM

Anonymous said...

Hey Peanutz, what's your response to Anon Dec 23, 2009 4:27? Chana followed the rules just fine. You owe her an apology.

December 23, 2009 4:52 PM

NoPeanutz said...

@anonymous 4:52

1. It would be easier to keep track of all the anonymouses if you had handles.

2. As per CJs transcript:

(R' Blau) "I would ask you not to take pictures of them and not to record to respect privacy. Recordings have an unfortunate tendency to enable someone to take out a snippet and then use it for various and sundry purposes."

It sounds like authorization did not lie with the panelists alone. That is probably the authority of Rabbi Blau and all the event organizers (of whom I know the panelists were included), and this transcript is probably the legal property of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work and Yeshiva University.

December 23, 2009 4:58 PM

NoPeanutz said...

I never asked why you posted this CJ. In fact, I hold the belief that the call for closed doors was nonsensical (since it was an event open to the public) and counter productive. I'm only saying that it is wrong to pretend that you followed the rules.

@1pm there was a poster who expressed a very real and valid sentiment about the fact that you posted this transcript that I was dismayed was laughed off by this messageboard.

That being said: It was a great transcript, albeit illicit, and I appreciate the hard work that went in to it. And against my better judgement, I will continue to refer to it as the most reliable text of the event that yet exists.

December 23, 2009 5:03 PM

Shades of Grey said...

I am unclear on the exact numbers, but Furst 501 (where the event was originally going to be held) can fit 400-ish people legally, so Weissberg must hold more than that. I was turned away the first time with about 200 other people after waiting 20+ minutes in the cold. After attempting to sneak in, there were probably another 100 people waiting in life (falsely, since the security pretended they might get in, but eventually told them no way) and a few dozen more were actively walking toward Belfer as I was leaving with my friends at around 8:25-30.

December 23, 2009 5:08 PM

Anonymous said...

OK, so now that we know that chana decided not to accede to R' Blau's request (her choice and HKB's will decide), how about the content? Was the goal "What we WILL be doing is addressing the pain and the conflict that is caused by someone being gay in the Orthodox world." met? The pain was certainly stated, was it addressed?

What are the benefits and drawbacks of this open approach?....

KT

Joel Rich

December 23, 2009 5:57 PM

Anonymous said...

Chana, I don't believe that this transcript is illicit. It's accurate. I do believe that you as both a YU graduate student and a student-leader have every right to spread the word. I also agree that neither Commie nor Observer would cover the event as well or as thoroughly as you did. Kudos!

-YU Semicha student

December 23, 2009 6:03 PM

TPW said...

I thought one of the saddest anecdotes was of Mordechai getting kicked out of the camp he was so excited to go to when he innocently admitted to his counselor that he like some of the other boys.

December 23, 2009 6:44 PM

Anonymous said...

For those of you shaming the author for posting this, GET OVER IT. This was something that was open to all and it is conversation that was much needed. Let there be educated discussion, why discourage it? I myself who couldn't be present appreciate knowing that an event like this was held, and that alone makes me feel proud. Why do people shun this discussion? Afraid people will form their own educated opinions?

This is greatly needed/appreciated.

Thank you!

December 23, 2009 6:59 PM

NoPeanutz said...

JR-

I think that soem of the pain was addressed.

Seeing everyone who came out to hear about the event, and now we're talking about the crowds who could not get in as well, showed gay YU students that they could be open about who they are, on campus at least.

I think the panelists were relieved at the enthusiastic show of interest (and support?).

And some of the gay (and closeted) students sitting in the crowd saw that you could be gay at YU, and it might not be as bad as they might have feared. Also, they learned about avenues of support that they could lean on, including family, friends, faculty, the JQY group and alumni who might listen to them without judging them.

December 23, 2009 7:02 PM

Shadesof said...

1) Attached is a link to a poster regarding an appropriate attitude of relating to homosexual activity and feelings.

The Rabbonim on the poster seems to be concerned with "legitimizing" or flaunting a homosexual orientation, and therefore emphasize discreetness regarding empathy, as well as the need to communicate the "abomination" aspect in "any forum or any occasion".

<http://dovbear.blogspot.com/2009/12/whats-wrong-with-gay-sex.html>

I basically agree with the thoughts on the poster, not that it is in need of my haskamah!

However, my comment is regarding "basic truths regarding homosexual feelings" and "publicizing or seeking legitimaztion even for homosexual orientation one feels".

Where does the Torah discuss basic truths for the innate feeling, and what does it mean to "legitimize" a feeling? Does the latter refer to one's innate, subconscious makeup, or to engaging in such feelings consciously and lengthily ?

Be that as it may, when speaking of "legitimacy" of homosexual feelings, perhaps one should note that, unrelated to those with a homosexual orientation, being in a single-gender environment may cause such feelings(see quotes below). Thus, one may argue that weak, faint, homosexual feelings are normal at times, even if only to the extent of admiring a handsome or beautiful person of the same gender!

So if one assumes that it is not uncommon for people to experience such faint feelings, the question becomes how one relates to this.

Relevant, perhaps is the Rambam in Shemonah Perkaim, linked below, who distinguishes between "siciyos" and "shmiyos" (see Ohr Yisrael of R. Yisrael Salanter who discusses the Rambam as well). The Midrash quoted by Tiferes Yisrael regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's innate desires comes to mind as well.

December 23, 2009 7:12 PM

Shadesof said...

(cont.)

2) Some sources, which I think are relevant:

A) See link to "Daas Torah" blog- post on Rambam in Shemonah Perakim and Shelah regarding Yalta, and a comment by "Lazar A"(I don't know enough to agree with the latter's comment, but it's a thoughtful comment):

<http://daattorah.blogspot.com/2009/05/prohibitions-need-to-desire-yet-avoid.html>

"In the case of homosexuality, we would need to first determine if this prohibition is sichli or shimii. (In our society, and in some ancient societies as well, this is not self-evident.) If the prohibition against homosexuality is sichli, then the urge is itself a problem and the person must strive to eliminate it. So, in that sense, one who has homosexual desires would indeed be considered an imperfect being just as one who desires to speak lashon hara is imperfect. Of course, Hashem creates us with these imperfections for a reason. As such, we are created exactly and perfectly as we are supposed to be at that point. These "imperfections" (which we are tasked to rectify) are, in many ways, our very reason for existence."

B) Comment # 52, linked below, on Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz's blog from "Moshe"(article of "L'maan Hashem - What Will It Take"?)

http://www.rabbihorowitz.com/PYes/ArticleDetails.cfm?Book_ID=1041&ThisGroup_ID=262&Type=Article#Com_6345

"We need to recognize that while paedophilia is undoubtedly a source problem at some degree, we cannot afford to ignore a couple of situations, where it is highly plausible that our culture plays a grand role here. A) Yeshive boys (and girls), perfectly normal human beings, are going through their teens without any exposure to members of the opposite sex. Failure to recognise the impact of urgent hormonal instincts, without heaping brick-loads of guilt on our teenagers, means that teens will invariably look at what is available, in urgent quest for gratification. In Yeshiva, I clearly recall a number of boys that went practically crazy about boys or Bar Mitzvah aged. I am sure that with passage of time this wanes. But how many are pushed into developing urges in that direction simply because the thought of girls is so out of bounds? "

C) Hella Winston, in an article in Lilit magazine(Winter 06-07), write the following(I am uncomfortable with the balance and tone of parts of the article and did not link it here, but I quote an observation):

" While this man stressed that the abusive behavior he described is by no means a universal feature of yeshiva life, his overall assessment of the environment, and its potential impact on students, was echoed by other people I have spoken to at length...These observations were confirmed by a sex therapist working with ultra-Orthodox clients, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity because of her sensitive therapeutic role. She likened the situation in all-male yeshivas to that of prisons, or the military. "It's the same thing. People are sexual and it gets acted out."

D)The Skulener Rebbe zt'l has a pamphlet where he discusses the situation insofar as yeshivos

<http://daattorah.blogspot.com/2009/09/skulener-rebbe-need-for-sex-education.html>

December 23, 2009 7:19 PM

Shades of said...

(cont.)

E) Dr. Ben Zion Sorotzkin also has articles on his website on these topics:

http://drsorotzkin.com/pdf/same_gender_attraction.pdf

http://drsorotzkin.com/pdf/light_on_gay_issue.pdf

=====

In summary, I emphasize:

(1) I am not disagreeing with the concerns mentioned by the Rabbonim in the above

poster, or commenting on the particular gathering in question.

Rather, I'm noting that when saying that the Torah has an attitude of "basic truths regarding homosexual feelings", one should not dismiss that lesser, fainter, or weaker forms of homosexual feelings—even admiring someone of the same sex-- may be more common than one thinks.

(2) The quote from Hella Winston, above, should not take away from the truth that problems notwithstanding, there is much beauty(not only of the physical kind !) and spiritual success in yeshivos.

December 23, 2009 7:26 PM

REMOVE THE TRANSCRIPT said...

There is no argument. The Rabbi clearly asked that nobody record the event. That request should be adhered to. Especially given the tremendous bravery of the Rabbi to host the event, the least amount of hakarat hatov you can give to him is submit to his one request. If you think your reasons are justifiable for posting the transcript, then by all means, go to the Rabbi and state your case. Otherwise, it is a tremendous slap in the face to the Rabbi who did an incredible thing by associating himself with this event and it is totally ungrateful.

December 23, 2009 7:58 PM

steve said...

This must have been tape recorded in order to transcribe it... in this sense it was in violation of the expressed request of the Rav. Nevertheless, those of us who braved the trains, highways and byways to get there on time and yet were not allowed in deserve a chance to hear first hand what was shared. I am glad for the opportunity. If necessary to appease you all maybe Chana should write to R. Blau to let him know that the transcript was shared. I am quite certain that with the names redacted, as they were, he should have no argument. If he is not happy then Chana should apologize respectfully to him. The intent was not to undermine. It was to enlighten. I question the motives of those who criticize her decision.

December 23, 2009 8:23 PM

Anonymous said...

This must have been tape recorded in order to transcribe it I question the motives of those who criticize her decision.

=====

IIRC Chana has demonstrated her speed typing acumen many times in the past. Why do you question the motives of those who criticize?

KT

Joel Rich

December 23, 2009 9:03 PM

Anonymous said...

Steve , REMOVE THE TRANSCRIPT and the rest,
PLEASE stop assuming things. You clearly don't know Chana as a writer. She never tape records any of her YU events. She types it all up as it happens. Surprised? You should be . Chana also has a good working relationship with Rabbi Blau. I suggest very strongly that we readers don't get ourselves involved in all of this and simply comment on the content. Great job Chana! Really.

Stern student

December 23, 2009 9:04 PM

Anonymous said...

does anyone know the validity to the rumor that several roshei yeshiva "assured" going to the event last night, i would like to know if its true or verifiable

December 23, 2009 9:22 PM

Alexander said...

Does anybody know what the sign that the Roshei Yeshiva posted said?

December 23, 2009 9:49 PM

Shadesof said...

The sign is posted here:

<http://dovbear.blogspot.com/2009/12/whats-wrong-with-gay-sex.html>

December 23, 2009 10:07 PM

Anonymous said...

yes, the sign stated events glorifying homosexuality should be banned.

December 23, 2009 10:09 PM

inkstainedhands said...

Except that this event wasn't 'glorifying' homosexuality. The purpose was to understand the struggles these people are facing when they are a part of the Jewish community. It's not about approving; it's about being supportive.

December 23, 2009 10:13 PM

Anonymous said...

The more comfortable a Homosexualized person is, the more likely he will sin. Besides the endorsing of a support group, which we all know is nothing more than a way for a frum to get some. There was too, the wink wink, nod nod, to actual homosexual behavior.

December 23, 2009 10:30 PM

Sarah Siegel said...

This was a terrific service to the Jewish and Queer communities globally, let alone our current and future allies. Thank you for your thoughtful transcription.

I will check out your blog further as a result of this entry.

P.S. I attended a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school from 1st through 8th grades and a number of the guys' comments really resonated with me. I am not frum, but would love to be in the audience for an all-female version of the panel in the future. Wish I had some contacts, but I haven't.

December 23, 2009 10:38 PM

Alexander said...

Thanks for the letter

December 23, 2009 10:42 PM

Anonymous said...

Sarah you look exactly like the lesbian chef Ashley Merriman from Top Chef season 6.

<http://www.bravotv.com/top-chef/bio/ashley-merriman>

December 23, 2009 10:42 PM

Anonymous said...

Heres the First panelist, with permission: <http://www.vimeo.com/8362853>

December 23, 2009 11:19 PM

Commenter Abbi said...

I agree, I think it's a bit nonsensical to hold a public even for 5-800 people on a university campus and expect absolutely no one to write or "record" it in some way. Everyone who went to the even recorded it with their brains, will discuss it with their family, friends, roomates, chavrutot, whoever, report the comments that struck them, thereby "taking snippets out of context". If YU was smart, they would have posted an unedited transcript themselves.

YU can't have its cake and eat it too. Either they are willing to discuss the issue openly, charedi elements in YU be damned, or they're not. You can't hold a public event and then demand a gag order. Absurd.

December 24, 2009 12:32 AM

Anonymous said...

OMG, they are soooooo cute.

December 24, 2009 12:36 AM

Anonymous said...

Rav Hershel is far from Charedi.

December 24, 2009 12:37 AM

Anonymous said...

While it's all fine to turn a blind halachik eye to gay sex, because they are in an unfortunate situation. The truth of the matter, last night a blind eye was turned to all-extra-halachik sex, including nida, nigia, and sleeping with a married man/woman.

December 24, 2009 12:58 AM

Anonymous said...

It's a shame this didn't materialize, but I was under the impression R. Blau himself was going to come out of the closet.

December 24, 2009 1:02 AM

הצעיר שלמה בן רפאל לבית שריקי ס"ט said...

Anonymous 1:02: : D

December 24, 2009 1:28 AM

Anonymous said...

i dont know much about your blog or who you are, but you have obviously been to Max and Mina's lol. my point is this: preparing this posting is a step for all of gay Jewry. I dont know how many of the readers or attendees were gay but as a frum gay guy who comes from a community just like yours if not more right wing - this article is paramount! reading these words can save lives!

r' blau was doing his part and did not want media etc to take it out of proportion so he stated what he was obligated to mention. 3+ speeches are available online so even if you did record this and then type it, its okay.

we love you for it and you have saved us! made us think, help us decide. im in my early 20's and i see that i can live and be happy. i want to cry and thank you for sharing this with us. even if i dont have josh's courage/commitment to wear tefillin everyday i know i can and people will support my decision. Hashem didnt just give us this as a nisayon he gave it to us to live who we are and be who we are! Hashem I am sure will personally thank you avi, mordechai and josh along with r' blau and the YU administration for speaking up and help those who need support.

p.s. i have never been affiliated with YU so know this goes to show how much of an impact it has!

TAHNKS

December 24, 2009 1:53 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

First of all, I read your 'To Understand is not to condone ' article and wholeheartedly agree with every word. That being said, I don't see the point of this exercise. Perhaps I'm being myopic and missed the bigger picture, but what I saw when I read the transcript is a bad example. This is not because people learn about a lifestyle; I have no problem with this. Rather, the problem I have is that the hermeneutical theme seemed to be acceptance. Not acceptance of a person which I have no prblem with; a person should always be accepted and loved. Rather it is an acceptance of the sin that permeates the speeches. This is troublesome to me. The message of the speeches seems to be 'give up', as in when the one guy talks about how he didn't want to be like the guy in his 30's still struggling. Exactly ass backwards! The guy struggling is the right one; even if he struggles till the day he dies. The guy who 'accepted', this is not an example. He just gave up. Of course it's easier to give up. Why don't we all just throw away the commandments we don't like and 'accept' our natures. There is a difference between sinning which we are all guilty of, and the acceptance of sin as not wrong...continued below..

December 24, 2009 3:44 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

The difference is as follows. If a person sins and 'accepts' the sin as not being wrong then there is no hope of repentance, as in "they call the bad good and the good bad". The example the speakers set was that if a desire a really strong in you and it is part of your nature then just accept it and stay with judaism in a way that's convenient for you. Secondly, there is the point about coming out. This may or may not be good depending on the reason for doing so; if the reason for doing so is because you 'accept' this and want to give up and stop struggling, then this is not a virtue, rather it simply means that they stopped being ashamed of sinning (or got tired of it and thus stopped being ashamed) and so in their case coming out is a form of giving up. Again, perhaps understandable, one can empathize; but this is not an example nor a reason to put a person up on a stage. What the hell was the purpose? Again, perhaps I'm being myopic, because you're very smart so maybe you see something I don't; some redeeming quality or purpose to this. If so, please enlighten me because I'm baffled....continued below...

December 24, 2009 3:57 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

When the Torah discusses who goes to war, one of the categories of those who are exempt is a person who is fearful. Various comentators translate this as a sinful person since the person will be afraid in the war because he has sinned and thus fears (consciously ro unconsciously) that he deserves to be punished and so that God will not protect him. The question then arises why does the the Torah not say a sinful person. (btw, this is connected to the topic; it just takes a while to get there) This teaches us that we should all be sensitive to a person and not publicly humiliate them; thus it lumps in those that are naturally fearful (low testosterone or whatever reason) with the those who are fearful due to sins, so that people will not know that the person ins alot and thus he will not be embarrassed. The Torah understands that most times a person should not be publicly shamed for a sin , and thus that is is better for the sin to remain private lest the person give up and say 'everyone knows I'm a sinner, why bother anymore'. Yet there is another example in the torah regardingwhen a person goes to give a certain sin offering he confeses to the Kohen his sin. Thus, sometimes the only way for a person to return to God is to publicly confess (as in addiction or 12 step programs). The point is that shame is a motivator to repent, and a persons honor and self esteem and even ego t, to some extent can be important to repent and so the torah keeps the persons honor and does not out the sinner, rather throws him in with the fearful people. Yet in other cases it may get bad enough that the person may throw their honor to the side and say " I can't do this on my own, even if it costs me my honor, community help me" as in confession to the kohen on the alter. However, none of these speakers came out to say help me in my struggle. They came out to say "I give up" and even worse "it's okay to give up, that's the easiest route, don't be an idiot and struggle" - that is the hemaneutical jist of there speeches....continued below...

December 24, 2009 4:20 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

It just, the whole thing was annoting to me. What the hell is being glorified. And this has nothing to do with gay. I'm talking about glorifying giving up. All the tzadikim in the torah had struggles; it is precisely those struggles that elevated them as in Yaakov struggling with the ish and becoming Yisrael. David hamelechs whole life was struggle, read tehilim. On the other hand Esav (with the same red nature as David) did not struggle, he accepted and acted as his nature desired and he had an easy life. I'm sure if we all did what we feel like and stopped struggling we'd all have it easier. These speakers did not do the hard thing by coming out. If they would have come out for the purpose of help of a desire to do gods' will that would be beautiful and I would be humbled by them and in awe of their righteousness. Instead, they simply came out as a form of giving up, of 'accepting'. This is admirable? Let me ask a question. Are there not examples of people who had bisexual or homosexaul desires, but did continue struggling or were able to overcome it or had a happy marriage or weren't able but continued to not despair and never abandon God. Could such a panel not be found, in order to give the proper example to those youngsters who might be going through phases in the development of their brains or who might have innate proclivities or who might have been abused and thus have desires for freudian reasons; couldn't good examples be found for a proper panel?...continued below...

December 24, 2009 4:37 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

It just, the whole thing was annoying to me. What the hell is being glorified. And this has nothing to do with gay. I'm talking about glorifying giving up. All the tzadikim in the torah had struggles; it is precisely those struggles that elevated them as in Yaakov struggling with the ish and becoming Yisrael. David hamelechs whole life was struggle, read tehilim. On the other hand Esav (with the same red nature as David) did not struggle, he accepted and acted as his nature desired and he had an easy life. I'm sure if we all did what we feel like and stopped struggling we'd all have it easier. These speakers did not do the hard thing by coming out. If they would have come out for the purpose of help of a desire to do gods' will that would be beautiful and I would be humbled by them and in awe of their righteousness. Instead, they simply came out as a form of giving up, of 'accepting'. This is admirable? Let me ask a question. Are there not examples of people who had bisexual or homosexual desires, but did continue struggling or were able to overcome it or had a happy marriage or weren't able but continued to not despair and never abandon God. Could such a panel not be found, in order to give the proper example to those youngsters who might be going through phases in the development of their brains or who might have innate proclivities or who might have been abused and thus have desires for freudian reasons; couldn't good examples be found for a proper panel?...continued below...

December 24, 2009 4:37 AM

Anonymous 1:45 said...

Perhaps such a panel would have been far harder to put together as such people have probably not gone public. A few facts - studies of identical twins (same genetics) show that if one twin is gay then there is a higher percentage likelihood that the other twin will be gay, when compared with regular siblings - This proves a genetic component, however, the percentage is far from 100% (i don't remember the #'s; it's something like 40% for id-twins versus 20% for regular siblings). Whatever, I don't want to get off in a tangent here so I'll get back to the main point. So long as a person is aware that what they do is wrong, they have a chance to return to god, once they 'accept' the sin then there is no chance of repentance for , after all they are doing nothing wrong - or they are but hey it's like there right arm - it's just the way they are. Well then I think I'll do all the things that I have agenetic proclivity to do. Premarital sex- "why not - I didn't choose to have these desires", same for all sexually immoral acts - "why not - after all I should just accept it and come out to evryone that I will do these things just like I have a right arm. Not kosher - no problem "it's tasty - look I'll pray and go to shul but I want it why not eat it". Then, I think I shall get on stage and tell people of my acceptance and hermaneutically imply to their young minds that this is the right way. After all who are the idiots who struggle all there lives -oh, only Yakov avinu and every tzadik in the bible. Why didn't Rut return to Moav?, why didn't rivkah just go along and be like the rest of her family? After all wouldn't these things have been easier? They didn't know that their good struggles would have led to such good. I don't know, it's late and I'm tired so maybe I'm just rambaling. Matbe I'll look at this tommorow and see that what I wrote is wrong, but I don't think so. I think you're extremely bright and love hashem, so I don't see what you get, or what others are supposed to get from these speakers. If you could enlighten me as to what the point or redeeming quality or lesson is, that would be grand. Anyways, regarding this topic there is a nice article adressing self control - Go to kmsynagogue.org-click on the 'Rabbi' page link (top left blue letters) - scroll down and click on 'Parshat Vayigash 5769 "self Control and Religion". Anyways, I hope I didn't offend you in any way (and I hope I didn't offend the speakers nor those who have such desires - as my point was a hatred of acceptance of ones sins as good or as "just the way it is" -a hatred of giving up. People who give up or who don't even think they are doing wrong have it much easier- but so do animals fornicating in the jungle. We are not animals (btw, the article at kmsynagogue.org adresses this animal -sol dichotomy)we are people with a soul, we're here for only a few short years even if we live to 1,000 we will end up back to dust, and so we are not here to be animals we are here to struggle and to be happy in our struggles and it is in this that we elevate ouselves in Gods eyes in the eyes of eternity not in the eyes of ephemeral dust)...continued below...

December 24, 2009 5:29 AM

Anonymous said...

I said-What are the benefits and drawbacks of this open approach?....

you said-Either they are willing to discuss the issue openly, charedi elements in YU be damned, or they're not.

=====

My point was will the sum total of avodat hashem (to use a convenient placeholder, you can use kiddush hashem etc.) in the world be increased or decreased by this open approach/discussion? how about for each individual and can an individual participate if

the answer for him is decrease but the total is increase, or vica versa etc.?

gut feelings are nice, but why did R' Blau seemingly disagree with other R"Y-what was everyone's analysis?

kt
joel rich

December 24, 2009 5:39 AM

Anonymous 1:45 said...

Sexual immoralities are termed abominations in the Torah because they detach one from God without the person even being aware of it. The person (and over time) becomes more and more in tune with the physical and less and less with the spiritual and with God and the ultimate reality. But even worse then the sexual immorality is if the person accepts the sexual immorality. This person has no chance for Teshuvah i.e. - 'Do I desire the (spiritual) death of the wicked? Rather that he should return' - but one who refuses to admit wrongdoing can never return even if he is good, until he admits that wrong is wrong. It was when Bnei Yisarel saw wrong as right and right as wrong that the two temples were destroyed and the people were exiled - Rabbi Akivah's students were convinced of their own righteousness. Why hold up speakers who refuse to admit wrong is wrong? Who give an example of giving up as the easy route to acceptance and contentment? Anyways, good night; all the best. Sorry if what I said offends. And again I bear no ill will towards anybody and wish only the best for every one of the speakers in life and in the eternity that is the true reality after this fleeting little moment that is simply the shadows on Platos' cave wall.

December 24, 2009 5:42 AM

skeptical about the story said...

If Levovitz didn't "out" himself until much after yeshiva in Israel maybe there was a different aspect of him which the yeshiva wasn't equipped to deal with.

December 24, 2009 6:15 AM

Anonymous said...

if we had information indicating rabbi carmey frequents women, would we excuse him on account of his being single? of course not! so why do we want to excuse gays? what is the difference between a man with heterosexual desires that go unfulfilled, and a man who was homosexual desires that go unfulfilled?

December 24, 2009 8:29 AM

steve said...

Anonymous asks a commonly asked question which he obviously knows the answer to. Of course there is a difference between a single man desiring a woman as compared to the situation of a homosexual. The man can know that it is in the realm of halachic and personal possibility to fulfill his desire for a woman ... and most do! But a gay man can NEVER have ANY hope of enjoying the experience of passion within the bounds of Halacha. Its not the lack of sex that kills us ... its the lack of hope!!! Why is this so hard to understand? A much better analogy for which I have much sympathy are the Agunot and the single aging male Cohanim unable to find a B'tulah. These are more analogous to the gay situation ... but even in these cases there are shreds of hope and possibility that are completely lacking for gays. These other categories of single Jews also are not publicly shamed as gays are. Before I came out .. I was dying from hopelessness, not celibacy. As for the celebration of sin that "anonymous" is so worried about, there was no mention that any of the panelist ever engaged in Mishkav Zachar. I havent!!! I have been in a partnership for years without it. We have other ways of loving without it.... since the Torah forbids it. So exactly where is the sin? Why would you assume things about others' private behaviours? I think this is the crx of what we seek -- Acceptance without preassumptions or judgments. Let Hashem judge us. Other Jews should just worry about their own behaviors

December 24, 2009 8:45 AM

Anonymous said...

single aging male Cohanim unable to find a B'tulah

I'm sure you meant a gerusha.

No, you are no different than an older single man, who gave up on finding the wife of his dreams, and in course frequents woman.

December 24, 2009 8:58 AM

Anonymous said...

I have been in a partnership for years without it. We have other ways of loving without it.....

I'm sure you don't waste any more seed by being partnered with a man, then living alone.

ps. I have this bridge for sale, it crosses from brooklyn to manhattan, and I'll charge you only \$5 per foot of roadway, I just need the money upfront.

December 24, 2009 9:00 AM

Anonymous said...

We have other ways of loving without it.....

PLEASE ELABORATE.

December 24, 2009 9:02 AM

Anonymous said...

I always knew that gays are better men. If I'd be living with a female partner I love, but couldn't marry, I wouldn't be able to last one month without doing avairos. You gays has such internal strength you can live for years without sinning, a true superhuman feat.

December 24, 2009 9:04 AM

steve said...

My Rabbonim allow us to engage in OS and MM when we feel the love is too strong and we are heading to sin. I will not elaborate any further.

December 24, 2009 9:07 AM

steve said...

"anonymous", you dont make logical arguments. You make unfounded assumptions. Your opinion is colored by your revulsion to the thought of same sex attraction. Laugh as you may about selling bridges etc. but again, you know nothing of my personal experience. If I share with you, you dont believe me anyway. So where does that leave us? That leaves us exactly where we were before the forum the other night. If I was freely haveing Miskav Zachar and other Toevot without regard for Halacha and my relationship with Hashem, do you really think I would be wasting my time on this forum arguing with you? Seriously, I am not going to flee from Hashem like Jonah just because the task is too hard, but I am also not going suffer unneeded loneliness if there was a way to have companionship within the bounds of Halacha. As for spilling seed... who the heck are you kidding? If that were the issue for you gay haters, then you would be focussing your attention elsewhere.

By the way... there are two Steves writing here. but I agree with the other one anyway :)

December 24, 2009 9:43 AM

alex said...

Anonymous, What is your fixation on single men looking for a girlfriend? Is this now considered a toevah too?

December 24, 2009 9:45 AM

Ben Lewis said...

In response to Anonymous1:45:

Re: Coming out is "giving up".

You compared the frum gay individuals choice to come out to the choice of Esav to submit to his earthly desires. On this point you clearly misunderstand the frum gay community. "Giving up" and only following physical desires would not have us come out as frum gays, rather it would have us come out, abandon orthodoxy and submit ourselves to the largely hedonistic society that is generally associated with homosexuality. Rather than giving in to our struggles and simply letting go, we have, in many ways, recognized the intensity of our struggles (thus in many ways making it an even more difficult one) and come out as a form of seeking support from those around us. You state that if these individuals had come out with a desire for help in fulfilling G-ds Will, then it would be

easier for you to accept...well, my friend, that is exactly why the speakers and others have come out. Gay frum Jews do not come out to throw some sort of alternative lifestyle in the face of the community. Rather, we come out so that we can have assistance and support to live a Halachic life and so that we can continue to learn Torah and fulfill as many Mizvot as possible. I hope you can one day come to love your fellow man and learn not to judge them so harshly, as is required by Torah law.

December 24, 2009 9:54 AM

Still Very Conflicted said...

CJ, thank you for posting this transcript. As an Orthodox person, and one who leans to the conservative right on many social issues, I thought that my mid was made up on this issue and there was no room for discussion. I have read the transcripts and I have watched some of the videos. I have also had long discussions over the last 2 hours with certain rabbonim in the Modern Orthodox community whose opinions I hold above anyone else's and I have come to the conclusion that the panel was a toeles and meant for someone like myself. Yesterday morning when I first learned of the panel discussion I was a bit put off, I looked at this whole matter with a very closed minded attitude of, they need to deal with it in private. However it is clear for the panelists and other things I have learned over the last day these people are suffering worse than any of us can imagine. This is something that they cannot help and are struggling as to how to live a halakhic torah life within the challenge that they have been given. It is not a choice of lifestyle but rather something that is part of them. The frum society is able to deal with every other social issue yet this one is left bottled up in the closet (pardon the pun). We are doing a disservice to members of our own community by not finding a way to accept them and find ways that they can live halakhic lives with this. I have a lot more to say on this however I have not yet completed formulating all of my thoughts on this. I do, however feel that one of the reasons these people are treated by our community as they are is because we have adopted the Christian way of defining someone by their sexual orientation. The discussion that is taking place has nothing to do with what is taking place in the bedroom, but rather feelings these people are having and how to reconcile them. I would have to say that this is one of the most difficult internal conflicts I have ever had in my entire life. YU is already being ripped to shreds on certain so called "frum websites" for their decision to hold this discussion, however if over the last 24 hours I could have gone through the changes in attitude that I did (and I like to think that I am not the only one), than clearly the panel did a huge service to our community.

December 24, 2009 10:30 AM

Anonymous said...

there is nothing wrong with looking for a girl friend, there is something wrong with having sex with a girl friend esp if shes a nidah. there is also something wrong with doing anything that can lead to sex.

all this has nothing to do with the extra adjective of toaivah that the torah affords gay sex.

December 24, 2009 10:35 AM

Anonymous1:45 said...

Steve: I don't know, only God knows and in Gods eyes you may be 1,000 times better than me . However, regarding where the sin is - I believe that the sin is in the fact that when you came to this earth your soul was split and there is a women on this earth whom, whether your physical body is attracted to or not, is your soulmate. by, at least partially, giving up you are depriving her of her soulmate and depriving the world of thousands of generations of your future offspring, and all the good and light they will bring to the world. The human brain is maleable over time and if you strove for the right way then you would probably get some enjoyment as well as emotional satisfaction from a woman. So it wouldn't feel as great as with a man for you; so what? There are people in this world who go to sleep starving with children who will die with all kinds of troubles. Most of the people on the planet live very miserable lives by our standards. So when you go up to God after many years, God willing, and you look back on your life and all that could have been; do you think you'll be okay with withholding such beauty from the world and your offspring from the world, just because it wouldn't feel as right for your physical body and emotions as with a man. So you'll have a wife and children and a good life. So it won't be complete rapture and head over heels in love - many married couples don't have that - many have far worse than thaa. Don't let the perfect (or your pecieved perfect) be the enemy of the good. I am sure that God will bless you and help you onto the right path. Whatever way you choose, you are a holy person with a soul of God and I wish you all the best and only happiness and closeness to God in everything.

December 24, 2009 2:27 PM

steve said...

just to clarify, my rabbonim are conservative, as i couldn't find an orthodox rabbi who understood my needs

-steve 9:07

December 24, 2009 3:43 PM

Jonathan said...

"I would ask you not to take pictures of them and not to record to respect privacy. Recordings have an unfortunate tendency to enable someone to take out a snippet and then use it for various and sundry purposes." - Rabbi Blau, verbatim.

Taped, transcribed, or otherwise, sounds clear to me.

Though you may find R' Blau's (or the panelists) fears unfounded, you violated the rules of the panel and audience (even though you didn't formally consent in writing).

So can you go on record that R' Blau retracted his rule? That's the only question.

[Regardless of the above, you are jeopardizing the privacy of people who want to share their stories and/or YU's willingness to host such events in the future.]

December 24, 2009 5:38 PM

Avi Robinson said...

Chana, thank you for posting this. I am more proud to be a YU Alum than I have been in a long time. This event may prove to be a watershed moment in YU's social history, perhaps the biggest since the appointment in December 2002 of a non-rabbinic president. Incidentally, that event also came with a kol koreih from the Roshei Yeshiva.

Regarding the copyright infringement issues alluded to by some of the commenters: Copyright requires fixation in a tangible medium of expression and originality. Neither the speakers nor the school have copyright in the speeches, since they were not fixed. It is completely legal to transcribe and publish an oral speech. It is in the public domain. [It is illegal to make an unauthorized fixation of a musical performance, but not of a speech.] It is still unkind, since Rabbi Blau asked people not to record the speeches, but you have already justified that for yourself.

However, Chana's transcription is not "original," since it endeavors only to repeat faithfully the public domain expression of others. Therefore, Chana does not have copyright on the transcript either. Chana's stipulation not to quote from the transcript thus is as effective, legally, as Rabbi Blau's request not to record.

December 24, 2009 6:04 PM

Anonymous said...

Thank you for posting this! I find it's very important to speak up, express legitimate concerns, and feelings. All within good reason.

December 24, 2009 7:01 PM

Jonah Rank said...

Thanks so much for posting this! I have passed this along to people who are hopefully interested.

December 24, 2009 9:55 PM

Josh's Father said...

Chana,

You worked hard at publishing a transcript of YU's event..."Being Gay in an Orthodox World" but as Rabbi Blau mentioned and pleaded in his opening remarks asking for recordings and videos not to be taken (so we can infer he also meant transcripts, by default) for the simple reason that sound bites can be used out of context.

In this case, he was absolutely correct.

When the first panelist Josh, spoke about his parents and his father in particular, he relayed a story about a visit to New York and the fact that his father snickered when he saw a gay couple walking hand in hand.

You write "My parents have been really supportive. After I came out to people my father

sent me an email apologizing-all these years I've had to struggle without my parents."
What Josh says is "my parents have been really fantastic, really supportive people. After I came out to them, my father sent me an email apologizing, and his apology was that all of these years, I've had to struggle without parents who were there with me struggling and worrying along the way."

The way in which you transcribed and edited Josh's comments made it sound that the apology was a result of the "snicker".

In fact, you write 30 words..when in fact Josh spoke 50 words.

Rabbi Blau was correct in his plea. Chana if you are going to do the job, then do it right and leave out the editing.

Josh's Father

December 24, 2009 11:53 PM

Anonymous said...

Josh's Father:

Chana clearly stated the following in this post:"....Now more than ever I want it to be clear that this is as accurate a transcription as I could render but there definitely are parts that are missing. This is not verbatim. It is unofficial. It would be wrong to treat every word as divine. Any and all mistakes are mine. I would like to offer a forum for people to learn and to discuss, but not a forum for people to bash, malign or otherwise hurt others"

Simply an fyi.

December 25, 2009 12:30 AM

Josh's Father said...

Dear Anonymous,

I thank you and I am sure Chana thanks you for being her apologist.

If one publishes what is claimed to be a 'TRANSCRIPT' then it should be done properly.

If it is done as an edited transcript then it should be stated as such.

And finally, if it is edited and the meaning changes as a result, then it becomes an editorial.

I would respectfully ask you, anonymous, to reread what she wrote quoting Josh and watch what he actually said. Those additional 20 words totally changes the tone and meaning of his words.

Rabbi Blau specifically asked for this not to happen and it did.

When I first read the transcript I was upset to read what my son had spoken. When I watched the video later that night, I realized that what he said and how he said it were totally different from the way Chana "transcribed" it.

Josh's Father

December 25, 2009 8:10 AM

Anonymous said...

To Josh's father-

Don't take it out on Chana. Deal with it.

December 25, 2009 10:02 AM

Chana said...

Josh's Father,

I apologize for not getting down all the words and therefore changing the meaning. I have fixed this post to reflect the words that were really said, as you quoted them in your comment.

However, I certainly did not deliberately edit your son's words in order to cast you in a negative light. I am not sure why you would assume I would do that. It was an honest mistake and I am sorry about it.

I am always open to corrections and if anyone else feels that I have misrepresented them, I'd be happy to fix it.

December 25, 2009 2:50 PM

Josh's Father said...

Dear Chana,

Thank you for making the change.

I never thought that it was done intentionally. I just wanted to make sure that your transcription was as accurate as possible, and having it read by someone so intimately involved with the speaker and the subject made it all the more important.

We have to bear in mind that the message has to get out to as many people as possible and you did so in a very timely manner, even before the videos came online.

Yasher koach.

Josh's Father

December 25, 2009 4:55 PM

Abandoning Eden said...

all these comments about not transcribing the talk seems pretty ironic given the panelists' discussion of being silenced, and how much that has hurt them.

Great job, I love that at least one person on this blog has had their mind changed by this. Statistically people who know someone gay are much more likely to be accepting of homosexuality than someone who does not, and by posting this you are allowing many people to "know" people who are gay, insofar as they know part of their life story.

Also - someone above mentioned the identical twin/ genetic factor of being gay- according to the studies I have seen if there is a 60% chance that an identical twin will be gay if the other one is gay, and the theorized reason for why it is not 100% is that the twins may have been exposed to different hormones in utero, depending on their placement in the womb.

December 25, 2009 10:07 PM

De said...

I would just like to say thank you so much for posting this. So many people who didnt even know this event even happened benefited very much from it. I know that the community should deal with this more openly and compassionately. This is amazing and alot of chizuck to anyone involved!

December 26, 2009 7:39 PM

De said...

Oh and I also would like to say that only Hashem has the right to judge us. We should only think the best, especially of our fellow Jews and as my gay friend said so well- "when you see a girl and a boy holding hands do you assume their sleeping together? No you just say awe and think its adorable" ya, these are all souls that have been given challenges in life we would never be able to overcome, never be able to live with! May we dan everyone le'kaf zchut and love every fellow Jew no matter what!

December 26, 2009 7:45 PM

Anonymous said...

Dear all:

1) It does not matter how you attempt to justify the publication of this transcript, nothing changes the fact that IT IS WRONG. Plain and simple. C, you did/do (I've spoken to R' Blau) not have permission to write/post this; any reasons you have given for doing so are false and only masquerade your true intentions of increased readership and attention. For example, you site that neither the Commie or Observer have the space to allocate to a lengthy transcript, yet, I am fairly certain that both have a sufficiently accommodating online presence as well. Additionally, one of your ignorant readers seems to think that it is not our (peoples) place to notify you of your wrong but rather a job solely left for g-d. To this, I say: wrong. Again. We are the Jewish People, one nation and one unit. If we don't look out for each other, we will never see mashaich.

2) This event has turned YU into a mockery of the orthodox world; No more, will YU be respected as a Torah learning institution, but simply an institution that modifies and adapts its' religious approaches and beliefs based solely on the whims of the masses.

3) What would The Rav say!? I think he'd be appalled that this event even took place, let

alone in YU.

There are places to do things, and there are places not to do things. This was not the place.

4) The event was NOT as advertised; instead of being a forum and space for exposing a certain struggle (which I agree, should be pursued), it became a lengthy declaration of acceptance into a world in which there is NO room for homosexuality. If people are to question something so explicitly stated in the Torah, it is only a matter of time until the "whole wall comes crashing down."

5) I don't know what the solution is to the homosexual-Jewish conundrum, but what I do know is that is/was extremely irresponsible to hold an event which was completely one sided (essentially condoning Jewish homosexuality).

6) There is no turning back from this; YU's name IS tarnished in the eyes of the frum world.

- A Mourning Jew

December 26, 2009 11:14 PM

Happy Jew said...

Hey Mourning Jew,

You contradict yourself! On the one hand, you recognize Rabbi Blau's authority, and condemn Chana for making the transcript available against his instructions. But then on the other hand, you condemn YU for even holding the event.

So are you now condemning Rabbi Blau and his participation? Don't you recognize his authority to facilitate this event?

How can anyone take your words seriously when they have inner contradictions?

YU did the right thing by holding this event. And they did it the right way by having Rabbi Blau facilitate. And Chana did a tremendous service by publicizing it, so that everyone could see that homosexuality WAS NOT being condoned by YU. This event made homosexuality understood by a wider religious audience.

If the other yeshivos want to misunderstand what happened and laugh, then let them. If they prefer to put their heads in the sand and pretend the problem doesn't exist, let them. YU is about facing challenges and finding the right path. If some people misunderstand, it's not YU's problem.

December 26, 2009 11:36 PM

Anonymous said...

Happy Jew:

I don't think Mourning Jew contradicted him/her self at all.

"You contradict yourself! On the one hand, you recognize Rabbi Blau's authority, and condemn Chana for making the transcript available against his instructions. But then on the other hand, you condemn YU for even holding the event."

These two things are not mutually exclusive. He/she can recognize R' Blau's authority as a personal request by the rabbi to not have the event "recorded" while still condemning the institution for holding the event. I'm not saying I agree with Mourning Jew, but your logic/understanding of his quasi-valid points just doesn't make much sense.

Jessica

December 27, 2009 3:49 AM

elaygee said...

Denial, delusion and self deception are the key factors keeping any sane gay person in an Orthodox Jewish institution. It is close in concept to a Jews for Hitler group.

December 27, 2009 5:37 PM

Shira said...

I couldn't be there, but it is amazing to hear that such a topic has finally been discussed, especially from the points of view of 4 really amazing and enlightening voices. My heart goes out to them and their struggles, and every other frum guy or girl out there who has to go through the same such things.

December 28, 2009 7:29 PM

Concerned Parent said...

I am a parent and a grandparent who is not related to any of the participants or to any of those who have posted comments (to the best of my knowledge). I have never written a blog or even posted a comment on a blog (it's a generational thing), but I have been sufficiently moved by this Event @ YU and the ensuing discussion to be motivated to offer my humble comments.

The overall feeling I take away from the histories and comments of the participants is that these young people have suffered incredible emotional PAIN and anguish during pre-pubescence, adolescence and young adulthood. Because they felt "different" in a way they feared and could not understand, they kept their feelings totally private. Consequently, they were without the support of family, school or even their closest friends. Surrounded by all of our familiar societal structures, they were really totally alone and isolated because there was no avenue they could find to reveal their most personal and fearsome concerns to a non-judgmental, supportive, caring person who would keep those concerns private while providing guidance and help.

Maybe I am stating what is obvious to everyone, but it seems to me that the purpose of this event was to make us, as Orthodox Jews, aware of this suffering in our midst and to open a dialogue concerning how it can be addressed in the future.

To those of you who are more concerned about the "ethics" or "morality" of posting an unauthorized and somewhat inaccurate transcription of the Event (and debating, ad nauseum, your arguments pros and con[1]):

In my opinion, you are hijacking or, at least, diverting the discussion from the real problem, namely:—

How can we help and support young Orthodox Jews during high school and college or whenever they become concerned about their sexual proclivities/inclinations, so that they have professional advice from someone who cares and has the tools to counsel them? (This doesn't only have to include homosexuality; we all know kids are bothered about a variety of sexually-related concerns.)

I am not an expert in this area and I don't necessarily have a solution to this question. However, other childhood problems, such as abuse and molestation are presented in schools and students are told that if they experience these situations, they can and should discuss them confidentially with someone who can help. Similarly, students in our Jewish day schools could be told, in a supportive way, that if they had sexual feelings that bothered them, whether those feelings involved younger children, siblings or same-sex acquaintances, or anything else, there were designated counselors who are available to discuss their concerns in a confidential, non-judgmental encounter. If students were not betrayed by this system, hopefully sufficient confidence in the counseling could develop.

An example of what can be accomplished with a change in attitude is the approach educators have developed to learning impaired children. In the past, children with Down's syndrome and other greater and lesser impairments, were isolated and often institutionalized. Today, we try to integrate them, as much as possible, into the mainstream. Of course, these neurologically different children are not o'vair an issur d'oraita—but neither are the children who only think they might be attracted to individuals of the same gender. These students need acceptance, guidance and therapy, just like all others. This doesn't mean accepting homosexual behavior forbidden by the Torah, anymore than we would accept the behavior of a child who molests his younger sibling. It means helping the student accept himself, with the realization that he or she, too, is part of Hashem's creation, and, as it is for all of us, life is a struggle to cope with the nisyonot that Hashem provides for us.

...continued in the next posting

December 28, 2009 8:41 PM

Concerned Parent said...

Continued.....

The point is: No child should have to suffer the way our panelists suffered. Different solutions will be found by different individuals, both within and outside Orthodoxy—that's

the way it's been and that won't change. But, perhaps the isolation and emotional trauma could be reduced and more nefashot could be saved, if we started showing these students that we are "with them" during their more formative years.

Why don't we (and our educators) focus on that?

Footnote: (1) I do not wish to imply that your concerns are not serious, or deserving discussion; but, they are a side-issue here and should be debated separately in a sidebar to the main topic.

December 28, 2009 8:43 PM

Plea to the orthodox world said...

Dear "concerned parent"

I resonated strongly with your comments; they bring the discussion back to its intended purpose and address the issue from a kind and fair perspective.

I am a "gay YU student" and wish my parents would have the approach you suggested. I could not express my inner struggle with my family - the people who matter most to me in the world. It took two severe suicide attempts, one which very-nearly ended my life, to finally 'come out' to my family.(note: although the suicide attempt was very significantly due to my struggle with homosexual attractions-,it was also due to other problems I was faced with at the time) The absolute terror and shame i felt for having these attractions, whilst never acting on them, was too difficult for me to handle.

Having said that, i know that just because i went through such severe emotional stress that doesn't provide any justification for halachic (Jewish-legal) leniency, rather, I am fully conscious and accepting of the halachic proscription and have conceded to it because remaining an observant Orthodox Jew is of fundamental importance to me. What I needed, and WANT for future generations, is for public recognition of the existence of homosexuality in the orthodox community, and that there are representatives of the community (namely rabbis) who I can talk to and will be accepting of me, not my behaviors but me as young, vulnerable Jew. Maybe they won't be able to provide me with answers, but they can support me, in any way possible, without judgment. If I would have known that their are representatives of the community that are there for me- THAT would have made the difference. I might have been spared of all the ensuing grief, and near loss of my own life - if i were supported and made to realize that the community is not an entity that rejects me or isolates me.

We need to be aware that this issue affects the core of our community; it affects the present, the many torn individuals of our community, so many of whom are utterly depressed and scared, believing that if anyone found about their sexuality- they might be shunned. Even moreso it will continue to affect the future generations to come. I believe that this is actually an issue of Pikuach Nefesh (saving of human-life). Think of the children who consider taking their own lives, then reconsider the importance of the issue. I know my stance is dramatic, but its not unrealistic.

One more VERY important point: I am not saying that the pikuach Nefesh aspect is in ANY WAY a justification to break halacha or a reason to "revise halacha" to suit the needs of the community, rather, the importance lies in the absolute necessity to have this issue in the forefront of the orthodox community and the public acknowledgment to ensure that no Jew feels isolated or victimized for their feelings. Rabbi's: I needed you then, I need you now. We need you.

And to those who are torn and scared: DON'T GIVE UP! I thank G-d each and EVERY day that He spared my life. I now realize the inherent value of my life and the many goals and relationships that i have attained and will continue to have... trust me, from someone who knows what it is like to live on the edge of life, THERE IS SO MUCH more to live for, there really is!!

December 29, 2009 12:15 AM

alex said...

In defense of Chana's editing Mr Josh, she was strictly following R. Blau's request, hence the errors in transcription. (remarkably few, I might add). But if she had been allowed to tape record it for later transcription, or had there been an official transcript, instead of YU praying that nobody would ever quote from this meeting and "shame" their good name - it obviously would have been more accurate.

December 29, 2009 8:25 AM

NS said...

I wasn't able to attend the event, and I can't tell you how much it means to me to have a source like this transcript. This event, these people, and these speeches, have tremendous communal resonance, and are profoundly important to me on a personal level. YU could hardly have chosen a more important or a braver topic.

The people who object to the transcript do so, not because they are interested in protecting the privacy or intellectual rights of the panelists, but because of how important the topic is, and of how scared it makes them. They are think this record will spark an honest and transparent conversation about sexuality, which is at the center of their personhood, and is therefore terrifying. I hope all intelligent and compassionate readers will see their resistance, as it is, as an indication of the centrality and profundity of the topic at hand. Although we encounter barriers, we can not stop talking!

December 29, 2009 11:44 PM

Fake Transcript said...

Good Post...

January 06, 2010 6:48 AM

Menachem said...

Both the transcript itself and the forum for discussing some of the related issues are worthy of many thanks. Thank you Chana for both.

January 07, 2010 1:35 PM

Rabbi Lars Shalom said...

i'M gay!!!!!!1

May 08, 2010 9:41 AM

Event Lighting Services Los Angeles said...

Great post...thanks for the reminder to blog about the everyday things that people want to read. As a real estate agent, I too struggle with what to blog about. Thanks!

Event Lighting Services Los Angeles

September 17, 2011 12:22 AM

Anonymous said...

This is good site to spent time on. [allergy](#) Read a useful article about tramadol [tramadol](#)

January 12, 2012 7:04 AM

Anonymous said...

You wrote a very interesting article. And I agree with you. [hair loss](#) Read a useful article about tramadol [tramadol](#)

February 16, 2012 12:01 PM

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