

Rabbi Michael S. Beals  
Yom Kippur 5767

## HOMOSEXUALITY:

### AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT'S HALAKHIC PROCESS

I put before you two texts for your consideration.

The first, from Exodus 18, verse 22:

*V'et zechar lo tishkav mishk'vay isha, toayvah hoo.*

*"Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence.*

You will hear this verse, along with Jews all around the world, as part of the Torah reading read this afternoon at our Yom Kippur Minha service.

The second text:

*Ha neshama lakh v"hagoof pa-a-lakh hoosah al amalkh.*

*"The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. Have compassion on Your Handiwork."*

This verse, introduced by the Hazzan and choir last evening, will create the

segue for this morning's Yizkor service. The Hazzan felt it was a fitting text for the subject of today's Yom Kippur sermon.

So let me just ask the question I am sure you are asking yourselves: "Why on earth would the rabbi be foolish enough to want to tackle the question of Homosexuality and Conservative Judaism on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year?"

It is a valid question. And I have been juggling a variety of responses to that valid question.

I thought of telling you that as a rabbi, my primary job is to educate you on all sorts of subjects. Or that my responsibility is to place things on your radar screen which may have gone otherwise unnoticed. Or, the duty of a rabbi is to comfort the discomforted and discomfort the comfortable.

The truth of the matter is that in less than three months, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, CJLS, of the Rabbinical Assembly will meet and quite possibly make some very controversial decisions which will effect

ALL of us. By the way, The Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, Law Committee for short, is the central halakhic authority for our Conservative Movement. At that December meeting they have scheduled a vote on redefining the role of homosexuals in the Conservative movement.

For those of us who have children, siblings, friends, congregants or co-workers who are gay or lesbian, the discussion and the decision is going to be important. I, personally, have two rabbinical school classmates and a modern Orthodox friend who I know are paying special attention to what is decided. And whether you see yourself as a social conservative or liberal on the issue of homosexuality, I believe the ongoing discussion our rabbinic leaders are having can give you an entirely new vocabulary and set of reasons to support your view point, no matter where you stand on the subject. And why discuss this today, on the holiest day of the year? Because this subject is ALL about holiness: how the Conservative Movement defines holiness today and how the Conservative Movement might define holiness in the future. And THAT, my friends, is terribly relevant.

Today, I can tell you how our Conservative Movement officially defines holiness, vis-a-vis the subject of homosexuality, in four succinct points.

One: At the heart of the Torah is the concept of holiness, kedushah expressed in its command, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy." Flowing from this declaration are policies regulating the spiritual, ritual, social and sexual lives of Jews. Kiddushin, the sanctification of love in heterosexual marriage, is a centerpiece of Jewish life.

Two: For a variety of reasons, the Jewish ideal of heterosexual marriage is unrealistic for many Jews. We empathically recognize the human dignity (kevod habriot) of all such individuals, and invite them to participate within our religious communities.

Three: Recalling the Torah's command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord," we rededicate our movement to making its congregations and educational institutions inclusive and welcoming of all Jews, regardless of their marital status or sexual orientation.

Four: the parameters of sexual conduct for gay and lesbian Jews, their eligibility for admission to rabbinical and cantorial school, and commitment ceremonies remain the subject of lively debate within the ongoing deliberations of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

The CJLS last reviewed the issue in 1992, when it emphasized the

acceptance of gays and lesbians within congregational life yet upheld the biblical injunction against homosexual behavior. The University of Judaism and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, JTS, currently follow a "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding the sexual orientation of their rabbinical and cantorial students. In his "on the record" embrace of openly gay rabbinical and cantorial students, Dr. Arnold Eisen, the incoming chancellor of JTS has parted ways with the outgoing chancellor, Rabbi Ismar Schoresh, who passionately opposed the admission of openly gay students. The Board of Trustees of JTS was perfectly aware of Dr. Eisen's opinions on this subject when they appointed him chancellor. Dr. Eisen's appointment, in no small way, has shaped the current debate on the subject. The performance of Commitment ceremonies between a gay or lesbian couple is also currently forbidden to Conservative rabbis.

Before I proceed forward, I would like to, as briefly as possible, tell you who comprises the Committee on Jewish and Standards and how they go about their business. They don't just tackle homosexuality. Their opinions have affected us in so many ways: from the decision allowing driving to synagogue on Shabbat, to the inclusion of the matriarchs in our Amidah, to finding a way of unchaining *agunot*, wives who were legally trapped in

marriages where the husband had either disappeared or was unwilling to grant a divorce. Understanding the Law Committee is really one of the first steps to understanding the Conservative Movement as a whole, and what it means to be a Conservative Jew.

The CJLS is made up of 25 rabbis, who serve on a rotational basis for at least five years. There are non voting members from the United Synagogue and the Cantor's Assembly serving on the Law Committee. Now this is how the Law Committee works. A *halakhic sh'eilah*, that is a question regarding Jewish law, is posed by a member of the Rabbinical Assembly or one of the other arms of the Conservative Movement, say Men's Club or Women's League. It gets on the CJLS agenda. Then individual members will write a *teshuvah*, a Jewish legal response to the question.

This system of written legal questions and answers goes back almost 1,400 years. After the codification of the Talmud in the seventh century Jewish Diaspora communities used to write legal questions from as far

away as Spain to the rabbis sitting in the yeshivot, Jewish academies, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Babylonia. Over the years, these accumulated questions and answers created the body of Jewish law we call *responsa* literature. Copies of these questions and answers were housed in a repository, called a geniza, in Cairo. Solomon Schechter, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century creator of our Conservative Movement, made his largest mark on Jewish scholarship by studying and translating these halachic questions and answers.

From this ancient practice of developing Jewish law, our current Law Committee developed a system which currently requires six out of 25 votes on any given *teshuva* to have the force of law in the Conservative Movement. Certain decisions by this Law Committee have had dramatic repercussions in our Movement. For example, when the Law Committee approved the ordination of women as rabbis in the mid-80's, more traditional rabbis left the Jewish Theological Seminary, took right-leaning Conservative synagogues with them, and established the Union of Traditional Judaism. I need to tell you that if the Law Committee passes a more liberal stance on homosexual behavior which upends the status quo, there are several more-traditional synagogues in Canada which have

threatened to break off from the Conservative Movement. These threats echo the threats which have been heard in Episcopalian churches in the United States over the same type of issues, including the elevation of Gene Robinson as the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire.

And like the Episcopalians, the Conservative Movement leadership has not been without its own set of backroom drama. I won't bore you with details, but protectors of the status quo have done everything from trying to raise the number of votes needed to getting a teshuva accepted to getting members off the Law Committee who were suspected of wanting to vote to change the current law regarding gays and lesbians in our Movement. In truth, it hasn't been very pretty. But what motivates some of the traditionalists, is their fear that this issue could rip our movement apart, and for that reason they want to maintain the status quo.

If a radical change is made regarding the Conservative Movement's stance on homosexuality, it would be absolutely irresponsible on my part for you to first read about in December's News Journal, without my providing some guidance and background in advance of this historic vote. I just don't think the media will pick up on the nuances of the decision. And why should they? There may not be anything sensational about an indepth study of the

halakhic process. But is that what this is.....or is it more?!

The twin themes of this High Holy Days were: "It's about time" and "It's our home." One of our congregants said to me, when he heard the subject of today's sermon: "it's about time the Conservative Movement joined the 21<sup>st</sup> century!" Fortunately or unfortunately, the Conservative Movement just doesn't work that way. For our Movement, there is a deliberate and reflective halakhic process which rabbis invoke when determining Jewish law. Modern concerns do play a role. It is these concerns which generate the *she'alot*, the legal questions, which drive halakhic inquiry. But modern sensibility, doing what is politically or socially correct, does not determine the outcome of halakhic inquiry. Afterall, we all know values change. What was forbidden in our parents' time, is acceptable in our time. Torah, and the halakhic process which interprets the Torah, needs to be more enduring than the values of the moment. Discussing with you the halakhic issues surrounding the Conservative Movement's stance on homosexuality, I hope will not only give you a better handle on the issue when it comes up for a vote in December, but more importantly, give you an insider's look into the halakhic process itself, and understand better what it means to be a Conservative Jew.

Into this discussion, I have invited the authors of two very different papers on the subject: Rabbi Joel Roth and Rabbi Elliot Dorff. I will place their opinions side-by-side for you to review and understand, as you begin to shape your own opinions on the subject.

Rabbi Roth is a Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Twelve years ago he authored a very long paper on the subject of homosexuality which was approved by a greater number of votes than any other paper submitted to the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards at that time on this subject. The title of his current paper is "We can't Legitimate Homosexuality Halakhically," which succinctly summarizes his view on the subject better than I could manage. He was, by the way, my dean when I began my first year of studies in rabbinical school.

Rabbi Elliot Dorff is rector, which is kind of a spiritual head, of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. His expertise is bio-medical and ethical issues, as well as studies of the halakhic process. He views himself as a centrist in our Movement. That said, he is currently challenging the status quo with his paper titled: "Medical and Moral Reasons to Change the Law." He also served as one of my deans for rabbinical school, and helped

me make the choice to pursue rabbinical studies. Sixteen years ago, he was the rabbi who told me that I had passed the demanding selection process and was to be admitted into rabbinical school. In addition he provided pre-marital counseling to Elissa and me, performed our wedding ceremony 12 years ago, sponsored me for my induction into the Rabbinical Assembly in 1997, and installed me as the fifth and penultimate rabbi of B'nai Tikvah Congregation of Los Angeles in that same year.

I will endeavor to fairly present both rabbi's views on this subject, but I would be intellectually dishonest if I did not tell you in advance, that I have spent far more time learning with, counseled by, and praying along side Rabbi Dorff and thus it should come as no surprise that I would share so many of his views on this controversial subject.

We must begin the discussion of homosexuality and Conservative Judaism with the verse you heard at the beginning of this sermon and which is featured in this afternoon's Torah reading:

*V'et zechar lo tishkav mishk'vay isha, toayvah hoo."*

*"Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence."*

Rabbi Roth writes that in both Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 homosexuality is dealt with in a very clear, concise, unambiguous manner. There is no wiggle room. No room for interpretation. The two verses in Leviticus absolutely forbid homosexual intercourse between men. Almost two thousand years ago, the Rabbis extended this prohibition to lesbianism. The Torah prohibits all homosexual actions, regardless of whether they are framed within consensual, monogamous relationships or just casual affairs. According to Rabbi Roth, it is all the same thing in the eyes' of the Torah. Perfectly clear. Simply forbidden.

Rabbi Dorff, by contrast, asserts that the verses in Leviticus are, in fact, UNCLEAR. The prohibition reads: "A man shall not have sex with a man as a man has sex with a woman." Rabbi Dorff asks: "How does a man have sex with a woman?" The esteemed rabbi goes into sexual details which I do not feel appropriate to detail on Yom Kippur. Let me just summarize by saying that technically, if you think about it for a moment, a man simply cannot have sex with a man in the same way he has sex with a woman. If you need any more details come see me during kiddush following Musaph this afternoon. So, according to Rabbi Dorff, it is absolutely UNCLEAR what the Torah is forbidding here. It is more like the Torah is just stating

the obvious. Rabbi Dorff also holds that if you look at the entire Yom Kippur afternoon Torah reading, you would see the prohibition against homosexual behavior falls within a much larger prohibition against all pagan sexual rites and other dreadful idolatrous behavior. Everything from child sacrifice to bestiality is forbidden under the general prohibition against worship of the Semitic pagan god Molech. This section of Leviticus, known as the Holiness Codes, also prohibits any type of promiscuous or oppressive sexual behavior. Rabbi Dorff writes that all these sexual acts would rightly be called a "toayvah."

The key word in the biblical prohibition of homosexual behavior is the aforementioned word "toayvah", abomination. The biblical text says male homosexual intercourse is an abomination. Rabbi Dorff writes: "It is an abomination" sounds absolutely horrendous in English, as if it is by far the worst possible violation of the Torah that one can imagine. Rabbi Dorff continues: "I need to tell you, though, the Torah uses the same exact word for people who eat non-kosher meat. It uses the same word, also, for people who do not use honest weights and measures in business. So this particular prohibition is not singled out as being the only thing that merits that term."

In a way, Rabbi Roth is saying the same thing as Rabbi Dorff regarding the word "abomination." Rabbi Roth observes that our Conservative movement is full of Jews who regularly violate halachah in all sorts of ways. See if you recognize yourself in any of these categories, think of it as an alternative *Al Heit*. The vast majority of our members do not observe Shabbat in accordance with the most liberal rulings of the Law Committee. The vast majority do not come close to observing the laws of kashrut. Few perceive daily prayers as a legal requirement that compels them. Many probably engage in business practices in ways that halachah might well frown upon. Rabbi Roth says in all of these cases neither he, nor anyone else, would ever say these Jews are wicked or evil. Rabbi Roth goes on to say that gay Jews who behave in certain ways also violate halakhah but they are no more wicked or evil than are Sabbath desecrators, and he does not perceive them any differently in that regard than he perceives Sabbath desecrators.

Rabbi Roth writes: "I suspect that there are many who must believe that I could not possibly have even a working relationship with gay Jews, let alone a friendship and warm feelings. They are wrong, and absolutely so. I

find it no more difficult to have a strong and warm relationship with a gay Jew than I do to have a similar relationship with a Jew who does not keep kosher or does not fulfill the laws of prayer.”

That may sound very liberal on Rabbi Roth’s part but I must add two points of my own. Point one: People who desecrate the Sabbath, who do not keep kosher or who do not fulfill the laws of regular prayer are NOT allowed to enter rabbinical nor cantorial school. The same is true for gay and lesbian Jews. Point two: Rabbi Roth talks about theoretical working relationships and warm friendships he could have with gay Jews. But some of the people offering papers advocating change in the current law actually have real, flesh-and -blood siblings and children who are gay. I myself was personally tutored in Talmud by a brilliant classmate, who just after ordination, came out with her sexual orientation.

The story of Rabbi Bene Lappe, as reported in [The Jewish Forward](#) is infuriating. As a student, Bene Lappe was one of the most brilliant and hard-working members of my rabbinical class. Our program required that she change residences three times: Los Angeles, then Jerusalem and New

York City, and rack up enormous debt in the process. She, like the rest of us, had to place her life on hold for six long years to finally arrive at ordination day. The day before ordination, in May 1997, the dean of the rabbinical school, who I admire very much, called Bene into his office and said he heard rumors that she was, in fact, a lesbian. He asked if these rumors were true, and he warned her, that if she admitted to him that she were a lesbian, then he would not be able to allow her to be ordained as a rabbi the next day. Now let me remind you, lest you have forgotten, at that time the Jewish Theological Seminary had adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Nothing Bene had done or said publically until this moment would have in any way indicated her sexual orientation. Bene was forced to lie to this man who we all respected. It was a horrible moment. She was so angry at the injustice of it all that she came out with the story soon after ordination. I am still profoundly disturbed when I think of this story.

Perhaps my beloved dean was forced to take this action by someone higher up in the Seminary hierarchy. Today, Rabbi Lappe has created a co-ed yeshiva for gays and lesbians who, because of their sexual orientation, have been denied the study of Talmud in other yeshivot. She feels her students’ sexual orientation and experiences of being ostracized

give them unique insights into the study of sacred text. Whenever I think about the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbinical students in the Conservative movement, I always think of Bene.

I imagine many of you in the congregation have openly gay friends and relatives. Certainly you cannot be immune from this subject. How your Conservative movement treats gays and lesbians will impact your views of Judaism, and its relevance in your life.

So the real big question is what has changed in the last twelve years that the Law Committee feels compelled to review the Conservative Movement's stance on homosexuality at this time? It is not good enough to say, "it's about time" that our movement join the 21<sup>st</sup> century." It isn't even good enough to say "the new JTS chancellor has come out on paper with his support to ordain openly gay rabbis." So the big question is, has anything in the science changed which could effect the Law Committee's ruling on homosexuality?

Rabbi Roth holds in general, the halakhic process may take new knowledge into account in the decision-making process. In his 1991 paper he anticipated that scientific theories regarding sexual orientation might

change. At that time he asked if any theories regarding the foundation for homosexual orientation could be persuasive enough to warrant, let alone demand, that the uncontested, long-standing halakhic precedent concerning homosexuality be overturned? In his 1991 teshuva, after reviewing the relevant theories, Rabbi Roth concluded: “ that not only is each theory insufficiently proved to warrant overturning biblical and rabbinic precedent on its account, but that even if it were absolutely proved, the overturning of precedent would not be warranted, and” (listen to this last part carefully) “a moral God could reasonably be understood to have imposed the prohibition justly” (let me repeat his conclusion) “a moral God would reasonably be understood to have imposed the prohibition justly.”

Here, and most dramatically, Rabbis Roth and Dorff part company. Rabbi Dorff’s first experience with the gay issue dates back to the 1970’s. At that time he met and counseled an observant Conservative Jew who had been rejected by his community. Of that experience Rabbi Dorff wrote: "I have to say that this was the first, and truthfully the only time, that I have been genuinely embarrassed by my tradition because it didn’t seem to me right that a good God, a moral God, would in some way or another create people who wanted to be traditional and, nevertheless, found themselves

to be homosexual.”

So in order to overturn the Law Committee’s current prohibition of homosexual behavior, Rabbi Dorff has been looking for scientific proof, especially since the 1991 ruling, to prove that homosexual behavior is hard-wired in an individual. Rabbi Dorff wanted to use science to prove that homosexuality is part of the Divine Plan. Last year, Rabbi Dorff got his wish.

In October of last year, a UCLA report was released. It stated: “Refuting 30 years of scientific theory that solely credits hormones for brain development, UCLA scientists have identified 54 genes that may explain the different organization of male and female brains...Published in the October edition of the journal *Molecular Brain Research*, the UCLA discovery suggests that sexual identity is hard-wired into the brain before birth and may offer physicians a tool for gender assignment of babies born with ambiguous genitalia...Sexual identity is rooted in every person’s biology before birth and springs from a variation in our individual genome.”

And now we can understand the title of Rabbi Dorff’s *teshuva*, “Medical and Moral Reasons to Change the Law.” How can you punish someone because they were created in a particular way? With science on his side,

Rabbi Dorff hopes to change the Law Committee's prohibition.

Rabbi Roth says the science does not matter. He writes: "Halakhically committed gay Jews are called upon by the halakhic system to make a sacrifice far more demanding, difficult, and onerous than what is almost ever demanded of other Jews. The halakhic system, to the best of my ability to understand it, demands of gay Jews to be celibate. The halakhic system does not and cannot command gay Jews not to have homosexual attractions, but it DOES insist that they not act on these attractions.

In stark contrast, Rabbi Dorff says: "A prohibition only makes sense if the person to whom it is addressed can do it. What we are finding out is that choice does not really exist. You can say to gays and lesbians, do not have sex ever, which is logically, at least, a choice — but I think that it is very cruel. It means that from the point of view of Jewish tradition, gays and lesbians could never in their lives have legitimate sex. I think that is both cruel and, in many ways, un-Jewish, because Jewish tradition did not tell us to completely suppress our sexual urges. Jewish tradition said that we are supposed to do is channel our sexual desires into legitimate modes of expression."

Why should we care what Rabbis Roth and Dorff say? What does it matter to us? So let them disagree and let us get on with the next part of our service, Yizkor, when we remember our dead of blessed memory. Alright. Let us remember our dead of blessed memory.

Every year 60,000 gay teens commit suicide. AIDS is still a lethal killer, despite the new medical cocktails, not to mention other sexually transmitted diseases which can also kill. It seems clear to me that there is a moral imperative for clergy to reach out to gays and lesbians in our communities and to get them into committed, monogamous relationships. For moral reasons, Rabbi Dorff ends his paper by calling upon a reversal of current Conservative Movement practice, allowing the sanctification of consensual, monogamous homosexual relationships with a commitment ceremony.

Rabbi's Dorff's teshuva is called "Medical and Moral Reasons to Change the Law." Having already turned to the medical reasons, Rabbi Dorff makes a moral plea for commitment ceremonies. He writes: "if we do not do the same sort of thing for gays and lesbians, then we heterosexuals are

being duplicitous, because what we are saying is, 'We will not give you the authorization to have a commitment ceremony, or whatever you call it; we will not give you that kind of public affirmation, and then we will look down our noses at you if you are promiscuous.'"

What is the practical ramification of the Law Committee's possible change of current policy on homosexuality for us? Well, Rabbi Roth holds that the Conservative Movement is a halakhic movement, recognizing the halakhic system as binding and authoritative upon us, individually and collectively." He writes that "if we are not that, we should close up shop and admit that our Movement has no claim to Jewish authenticity and, therefore, no good reason to exist."

So Rabbi Roth would hold that the homosexual issue is an existential issue for our Movement. One Orthodox colleague of mine agreed. He claimed that if the Conservative Movement's Law Committee offers a position stating homosexual behavior is legitimate, then in his mind, and in the mind of his colleagues, the Conservative Movement will be nothing more than a fraud when it comes to halakha. Now a statement like that used to really worry me. But the longer I have been a rabbi, the less I respect that opinion. Because in fact, no matter what we do, the Orthodox Movement

will never accept us. I know for a fact, that Conservative Movement rabbis follow halakha to the letter when it comes to the conversion of both Jewish men and women. But Orthodox rabbis, on principle, will not accept a Conservative rabbi's conversion. So I have learned long ago that there is no point in trying to appease Orthodoxy, as it is a no-win proposition, and it is no reason for making halakhic decisions.

As far as the ordination of openly gay and lesbian rabbis is concerned, even if the law is changed, allowing them to attend and be ordained at Conservative Movement seminaries, this won't affect us here at Congregation Beth Shalom, as I intend to be your rabbi forever. But remember my friend, Rabbi Bene Lape? If it was not for her, I literally would not be your rabbi today because I would have never passed my first year of Talmud without her help. On a grander scale, would we want our movement to be deprived of some real talent and leadership because of their sexual orientation? The Conservative Movement lost a decade of gifted women rabbis because these rabbis, including my own Hillel rabbi at The American University in Washington, DC , joined the Reform Movement -- now the largest movement in America -- because JTS was slow to ordain women as rabbis. This issue does impact us here in Wilmington because it

affects the future leaders of our movement.

The issue which could affect us sooner is Commitment Ceremonies.

Obviously we are not talking about gay marriages. Jews operate under the Talmudic dictate: "*dina malka dina*", "*the law of the land is the law.*" Since Delaware does not currently recognize gay marriages, I cannot perform one, not even if my conscious, or even my Movement would tell me otherwise. Commitment Ceremonies are an entirely different issue. If the December Law Committee comes out with a teshuva allowing rabbis to perform commitment ceremonies, I would, with the backing of our Board of Directors, be very open to performing such ceremonies for Jewish couples. I sincerely believe it is to the benefit of our society, and certainly our Jewish Wilmington community, to have sexually active adults of all orientations, in committed, loving, consensual, monogamous relationships. If Jewish culture and tradition can help cement those relationships, then it is in the universal best interest of all that I perform such ceremonies. Note, that I would never get out in front of the Movement nor my synagogue on this issue. I am not a Reform Jew where my individual conscious dictates my behavior. I am a Conservative Jew, who works within the community to make decisions.

I end with the words of *haneshamelach*. "The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. Have compassion on your handiwork." As applied to this conversation, we understand that God created humanity, *b'tselem elohim*, *in the image of the Divine*. Based on what we are learning about genetics, homosexual behavior is one of the faces of God. "The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation." God created it all. Who am I to question God's creation? In the end, Rabbi Roth and Rabbi Dorff both affirm the Law Committee's policy of opening the doors of our synagogue's wide to gay and lesbian Jews. One of our High Holy Day themes is: "this is our home." It is vital that our synagogue home be as welcoming as possible. The entire design plan for the rebuilding and renovation of the synagogue is to make the building as inclusive and accessible as possible, from the elimination of unnecessary stairs, to the addition of hearing aids when entering the chapel, an elevator, a cry and pray space, and handicap accessible bathrooms. If the synagogue is to be physically inclusive and welcoming, it is even more important to me that our synagogue's policies be inclusive and welcoming to anyone who walks through that door, and that certainly includes gay and lesbian Jews. This is, after all, the current policy of our Movement.

For additional materials on this subject, I refer you to Rabbi Roth's complete teshuva found in *Responsa 1991 - 2000: The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement*, available for sale through USCJ website; the book Wrestling with God and Men, by Steven Greenberg, the first openly-gay Orthodox rabbi, available through the Amazon website , and the eye-opening film, *Trembling Before God*, which is built around intimately told personal stories of Hasidic and Orthodox Jews who are gay and lesbian, available through the [tremblingbeforeg-d](http://tremblingbeforeg-d.com) website.

When the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards comes out with its vote on homosexuality in December, no matter what the outcome, I hope you will be able to both understand it for yourself and discuss it with your friends and family. And this afternoon, when we come to the words *V'et zechar lo tishkav mishk'vay isha, toayvah hoo, "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence*, I hope you will both understand these words with a new appreciation as well as with compassion.

*Gemar hatima tovah*, may you be inscribed for a good year.