

December 6, 2006

Dear Friends,

The CJLS finished its deliberations on the questions regarding homosexuality and voted on the responsa before it and drafted a statement. The following statement (in bold) was drafted at the conclusion of the meeting:

**At the CJLS meetings, five specific teshuvot were extensively discussed in a spirit of collegiality and open-mindedness. Two teshuvot -- one authored by Rabbi Joel Roth and the other authored by Rabbis Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins and Avram Reisner -- obtained clear majority support. Rabbi Roth's responsum "Homosexuality Revisited" reaffirmed the prior position, which denied ordination as clergy to active homosexuals and also prohibited same sex commitment ceremonies or marriage. In contrast, Rabbis Dorff, Nevins and Reisner, while retaining the Torah's explicit prohibition, as understood by the rabbis banning male homosexual intercourse, argued in "Homosexuality, Human Dignity and Halakhah" for the full normalization of the status of gay and lesbian Jews. Under this ruling, gay and lesbian Jews may be ordained as clergy and their committed relationships may be recognized, although not as sanctified marriage.**

**A third teshuva accepted by the CJLS, written by Rabbi Leonard Levy, which upheld the traditional prohibitions, argued that homosexuality is not a unitary condition and urged the development of educational programs within the community to achieve understanding, compassion and dignity for gays and lesbians. There was also some support on the committee for a more comprehensive repeal of the prior ban against homosexual relationships. All authors of teshuvot shared a universal appreciation for the principle of *kvod habriot* and the welfare of gays and lesbians in our community.**

**During its deliberations the CJLS did not discuss – nor do any of the papers reflect – any determination regarding gay marriage.**

**The meeting of the past two days on the issue of homosexuality and halakhah reflects a wide diversity of ideas and opinions. These distinct and divergent opinions may be used by rabbis, synagogues, institutions and**

**individual members of the Conservative movement as a guide in welcoming gays and lesbians in our movement.**

**The *teshuvot* may also serve to determine the extent to which gays and lesbians may be admitted into our seminaries and guide the clergy of our movement on the question of whether to initiate commitment ceremonies for gays and lesbians.**

**The CJLS is united in its concern for the unity of the Conservative movement worldwide. The diversity of opinions issued today reflects an essential strength of the Conservative movement – namely, its very pluralism. Indeed, a multiplicity of approaches to halakhah has been a key feature of the Conservative movement since its inception.**

I will refrain from sharing my opinion on these responsa until I have thoroughly studied the final copies. The final revised versions will be made available to me shortly. I will say, however, that I am deeply disturbed that the Law Committee accepted Rabbi Levy's responsum (with six votes, the minimum number of required votes for a "minority opinion") that argues that gays and lesbians are best to seek "restorative therapy" to change their sexual orientation. It shocks me that such unsophisticated notions about human sexuality are even entertained by our rabbinic thinkers of our movement. Thankfully, its support was a minority voice on the committee. In the spirit of Jewish values, we always preserve minority legal opinions, even when we disagree with them.

In a practical sense, this means that the UJ, a Conservative Rabbinical School in LA, will immediately begin accepting gays and lesbians for ordination (based on the Dorff, Nevins, and Reisner responsum), and the Jewish Theological Seminary will make its decision through an upcoming faculty vote. Since the movement will hold both the Roth and Dorff, Reisner, and Nevins responsa as legitimate (they both received an equal number of votes), rabbis will have to make their own decisions about whether or not they will perform commitment ceremonies.

I am pleased to state that the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has formally stated that it will accept all applicants for positions of employment and leadership within its organizations, regardless of sexual orientation. Though it may be shocking that a discriminatory policy existed as of yesterday, I applaud the USCJ for overturning this policy immediately after the vote.

As I have recently promised, once the dust settles from this historic decision (and I am not sure that it has), I will hold a number of seminars to address the responsa presented and passed into legislation as well as share my personal opinion with you.

May we all be strengthened by the courage of our movement. It is a religious movement committed to preserving multiple interpretations of sacred texts and thus, an acceptance of pluralistic religious expressions.

B'chvod Rav (With great respect),

Rabbi David A. Schuck