

A Torah View on Homosexuality

by HaRav Aharon Feldman

Introduction

The history of the Jewish People is one of ongoing oppression and persecution by the nations of the world. No less, it is also a history of ideological battles with them. Abraham was called *Ivri* (Hebrew) because the entire world was on one side (*eyver*) of an ideological divide and he was on the other. From the child sacrifice cults of antiquity, to the attempted forced conversions of the Inquisition and the Crusades, to the militant atheistic philosophies of modern times, the Jew has always been the outsider, steadfastly rejecting philosophies antithetical to G-d and His Torah. Although many individual Jews, and even communities, were lost to these ideological onslaughts, the nation as a whole has survived them all.

During the past century, Judaism's main antagonists have been the materialism of communism, the determinism of academia, and the absolute belief in human autonomy. Currently, however, one of the greatest ideological challenges to believing Jews is contemporary society's acceptance of homosexuality as normal behavior.

Only two or three decades ago, homosexuality was universally recognized as a psychological aberration. Since then, however, the homosexual movement has been spectacularly successful in integrating homosexuality into the American

HaRav Aharon Feldman is the Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Israel and a member of the Rabbinic Board of *DIALOGUE*.

societal mainstream. It has done this by portraying this behavior as a normal, merely alternative, form of human sexuality and by appealing to the American public's sense of fairness and tolerance to accept it as such. This campaign has succeeded in rendering the homosexual lifestyle morally neutral and simply a matter of personal choice. In current times, the view that homosexuality is a deviancy is treated as bigotry on par with discrimination based on race or religion. The full flowering of the public acceptance of homosexuality is manifest in the legal recognition that a large number of States, in recent years, have granted to same gender marriage.

All of this, of course, runs directly counter to an explicit verse in the Torah that terms the homosexual act a *to'eyvah*, or abomination, and proscribes it as a capital crime. Religious Jews suddenly find themselves derided as homophobes and bigots. Is homosexuality a morally trivial matter, as today's common culture would have it, or is it morally debased, as all of society understood not so many years ago? An Orthodox Jew must locate Judaism's stance somewhere along the spectrum between these two diametrically opposed views.

Generally, considerations of modesty militate against discussion of sexual matters in a public forum such as this one. However, in a period when the media and advertising are suffused with the promotion of homosexuality and the surrounding culture has embraced it, these considerations must give way to the more urgent need for a compelling Torah response to these developments and a clear exposition of what it is that the Torah finds so deeply harmful about homosexuality.

Why Is Homosexuality a *To'eyvah*?

God gave First Man the name "Adam," a derivative of the Hebrew word for "earth," *adama*. He is called "earth" not because he was taken from earth—if that were the case, animals, which were likewise fashioned from earth should have been given the same name—but rather because he has a Self that is intended to be *like* earth.

According to the Sages, Man's being has three components: the soul/*neshama*,¹ the body/*nefesh*, and the Self/*ruach*. The soul/*neshama* is his spiritually oriented part, which seeks to cleave to God and to carry out His will into the world. The body/*nefesh* refers to man's drives, appetites and bodily activities—that part of him which he shares with animals. The Self/*ruach* is the essence of a person; it is his personality, comprised of his values, his emotions, and that part of him that makes judgments and decisions.

Man's Self was created to choose to carry out the yearnings of his soul/*neshama* into the activity of his body. This done by means of the mitzvos (Torah commandments), which are the vehicles by which man expresses God's will into the world. It is in this sense that the Self, which is man's essence, is like earth. Earth expresses the hidden potential of a seed planted within it. So, too, by choosing to express the yearnings of the soul into the real world of the body/*nefesh*, the Self serves as the "earth" by which the inner potential of the soul sprouts forth to fruition.

To bring out the potential of the seed, the earth must be protected from the ravages of nature which are antagonistic to it. Similarly, for man to carry out his inner potential, man must struggle against inclinations within him, known as the *yetzer hora*, which pervert his earth-like qualities. These are the various drives within him that cause him to become Self-centered. Self-centeredness is man's arch-enemy for it causes him to become oriented towards his bodily needs and desires rather than giving primacy to his soul and serving as the medium for its expression. The *yetzer hora* is man's antagonist, for where Self-centeredness reigns, man is not able to carry out his life's mission.

More than in any other way, man becomes Self-centered if he becomes preoccupied with the pleasures of his body. This preoccupation is so consuming that it causes him to neglect focusing on serving as "earth" for his soul. It is therefore vital that Man overcome these inclinations to gratify his body.

One of the most powerful determinants of whether man becomes either Self-centered or Other-centered is his reproductive drive. This drive involves man so completely—mentally, emotionally and physically—that the way it is used has a profound influence upon what type of person he becomes.

1. Used in this article to refer to that particular part of man's spirit which yearns to relate to G-d (see below, "Three Basic Mitzvos") as opposed to the general use of the word soul/*neshama* which refers to man's entire spiritual being.

Man can use this drive either as a vehicle for Other-centeredness or for Self-centeredness. Although the reproductive act has an element of lust in it, it need not have the effect of making Man Self-centered; for if it is used within marriage, it has the capacity of becoming an Other-centered act. This is true for two reasons. Primarily, it is an act of procreation, and giving life to another is in its essence an Other-directed act. More important, the act creates a bond between its participants deeper than any other human bond. Two individuals who become bonded are, by definition, Other-directed.

Man and woman become "one flesh"² through marriage, which is why, in the Torah, a wife is referred to as *she'era*³ (one's flesh). As Ramban puts it:

Animals do not cleave to their females. The male copulates with any female he finds and they have offspring. But, says Scripture, since Adam's female was "bone from his bone and flesh from his flesh" (*Bereyshit* 2:23) . . . and he wanted her to always be with him. . . . It [therefore] became the nature of his descendants to leave their fathers and mothers [for their wives] and to see their wives as if together they formed one body . . .⁴

For the same reason when death severs the bond, the Sages say there is no mourning greater than that of a husband over his departed wife and vice versa.⁵ These are the emotions of mourning over having lost a part of one's being.

There are other bonds in human life: the bond of brotherhood, the bond of friendship, the bond of mutual admiration. Yet, only the bond of marriage creates a bond of "one flesh." Why is this so?

The reason is that only in marriage are the partners bonded not only intellectually and emotionally but also physically—like "one flesh." Their bodies are exquisitely designed to enable them to engage in the most meaningful physical activity conceivable, that of creating another life. The bond engendered by this meaningful partnership has no equal; it ties them together spiritually, emotionally and physically. Only through this unique act can two discrete individuals become "one flesh."

This bond results even if the act does not actually result, or, indeed, cannot

2. *Bereyshit* 2:24.

3. *Vayikra* 21:2.

4. Commentary of Ramban to *Bereyshit* *ib.*

5. *Sanhedrin* 22b.

result, in the conception of life, such as when one or both spouses are infertile or beyond the child-bearing years. The act is inherently a procreative one, and it bonds its participants because they have engaged in a creative act.

Because the act is so overwhelmingly Other-directed, both because of its reproductive aspect and because of its bonding effect, this mitigates the Self-centeredness to which its inherent element of lust might otherwise give rise. This is why the reproductive act within marriage does not conflict with man's "earth"-like goals.

However, if the reproductive drive is used outside of marriage for mere lust-fulfillment, this exacerbates man's Self-centered tendencies and orients him away from his true goals. For this reason, the eschewal of sexual excess and the promotion of modesty has always been a hallmark of Judaism. As the teaching of the Sages has it, "The God of the Jews hates sexual immorality."⁶

This, in fact, is why the Jewish People are commanded to place the mark of God's covenant specifically on the reproductive organ. A covenant must, by definition, be entered into by two parties. On God's behalf, the covenant serves as His commitment to maintain the Jewish People as a nation throughout history. The Jewish People, for their part, commit to devoting themselves throughout history to carrying out God's will, and the mark on their bodies represents the Jew's loyalty to that commitment. By pledging themselves to avoid the use of the sexual organ for lust fulfillment, Jews undertake to remain steadfast in their mission to be the "earth" which will carry out God's will into the world.

The Torah has varying degrees of proscription of lust-fulfilling sexual acts. They all share the underlying rationale of preventing their transgressors from developing into lust-fulfilling, and therefore Self-centered, individuals. But their relative degrees of severity depend on the extent of harm they inflict on the Self. The most serious of these are the class of laws called *arayos*, which include incest, adultery and male homosexuality, which are so severe that the Torah teaches that they are punishable by death and that it is obligatory for a Jew give up his life rather than transgress them.

Yet, although all *arayos* are severely proscribed, none of them are termed *to'eyvah*, or abomination, except for homosexuality. This is because even these forbidden unions possess a minimally redeeming aspect that spares those who

6. *Sanhedrin* 106a.

engage in them from descent to a nadir of depravity. They are heterosexual acts, and as such, the procreative capacity that inheres within them can create a bond, however wrongful, of mutual devotion between those engaged in such acts. These acts, though severely forbidden and gravely injurious to the soul, are nonetheless minimally Other-directed.

Homosexuals can undoubtedly be tied to each other by the aforementioned bonds of brotherhood, friendship, or mutual admiration. But, unlike heterosexuals, their bond is not a product of their sexual activity. A homosexual act cannot create the sensation of two bodies joining in a life-producing act, which is the basis, as explained above, of heterosexual bonding.⁷ Their bodies cannot bind them together into "one flesh." Thus the homosexual act lacks even a bare modicum of Other-directedness. The reproductive act which was meant to bring forth life has been perverted by it into one of total lust-fulfillment.

Engaged in an act that is entirely Self-directed, the homosexual is, in effect, having relations with his own image. He has taken an act that God intended to be one that is creative and engenders bonding, and has, instead, created a parodic mirror image of it that is maximally selfish and lust-fulfilling. Thus, this act's effect on the homosexual's inner self is more devastating than that of other forbidden unions. Homosexuality has the effects of vitiating the Self's desire to direct itself towards its life's goals and, instead, making indulgence in, and involvement with, the Self its exclusive goal.

This explains the Torah's singular description of homosexual relations as a *to'evah*, or abomination. An abominable food is one that the digestive system regards as foreign, one it cannot abide and, instead, expels with an instinctive, repulsive reaction. Homosexuality is foreign to the Self and subversive of its essence, which is to facilitate expression of the soul into the world. This is why it is deemed *to'evah*.

7. This is why study after study has indicated that homosexual couples tend to engage in extra-marital activity hundreds, if not thousands, of times more than heterosexuals, and generally do not even consider this unworthy behavior (*Journal of Human Sexuality* 1:81ff.). This is not surprising, since their bond is maximally one of friendship but not the bond of bodies which have become "one flesh." A bond of mere friendship is not violated by physical indulgence with another partner.

Three Basic Mitzvos

This view of homosexuality clarifies a mystifying passage in the Talmud. The Sages teach that although the Nations of the World were commanded in thirty mitzvos,⁸ they stopped keeping them all except for three.⁹ These are: a) giving honor to the Torah; b) abstention from selling human flesh in a butcher shop; and c) even when homosexual coupling takes place, refraining from formalizing the relationship with a dowry document (*kesubah*).¹⁰ Why, of all the thirty mitzvos, did Gentiles continue to adhere to these three?

We can understand this if we take as our starting point the above premise that man is created to live as a spiritual being, expressing his soul and doing battle with the selfish behaviors which drive him to assume the behavior of a soul-less animal. The above-enumerated three mitzvos enable man to protect his basic humanity and keep him from descent into unrestrained animalism.

As stated above, the human being's spiritual essence is comprised of three levels: the soul/*neeshama*, the Self/*ruach*, and the body/*nefesh*.¹¹ The nations understood, or at least sensed on some deeper level, that these three Mitzvos represent the bare minimum of human behavior in relation to each of the three aspects of his being. Their observance is all that stands between civilized man and a descent into an irredeemable sub-humanity.

Even where man no longer responds to the call of his soul, he maintains a minimal connection with it by according respect to others who are drawn to God. He gives honor to the Torah; else, his last tie to the soul is severed.

On the *Self/ruach* level, that part of him which forms his values and attitudes, to be human means respecting the dignity of one's fellow man. This is the basis of all decent interpersonal relationships and, indeed, of civilization itself. But even where man has lost his sense of human dignity to the extent, for example, that he stoops to murder his fellow man, the barest sense of that dignity will still prevent him from doing something as degraded as selling his

8. The commentaries explain that these are various details that fill out the basic Seven Noachide Commandments.

9. *Chulin* 92a-b.

10. For purposes of the elucidation, the three mitzvos are presented here in inverse order to that in the Talmud.

11. See Vilna Gaon, *Berak Hashachar, Kobeles* that these are נשמה רוח ונפש.

fellow's flesh in a butcher shop. The Self of such a person has not yet sunk to the lowest depths of animalistic depravity.

Finally, homosexuality is the ultimate violation of man's body/*nefesh* element, for it represents, as explained, untrammelled indulgence in appetite fulfillment for its own sake. Yet, even where man has designated a homosexual partner for himself—that is, where he has not simply succumbed to fleeting temptation but has made indulgence part of his life's fabric—his body retains its humanity if he at least refuses to publicly institutionalize his way of life with dowry document. This is because of the salutary effect of shame on human nature.

Shame is an emotion that serves to indicate one's true values and, thus, if employed properly, plays an important role in the human being's moral development. The Torah teaches that First Man began wearing clothing after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, an act that made lust an innate part of him. Lust is an animal-like passion, and man feared that his lust had caused him to forfeit his claim to human dignity, which might result in his descent into a entirely animal-like existence. He therefore felt compelled to maintain and nurture his dignity by obscuring from public view those parts of his body that suggested that he had a lustful nature. This is the source of mankind's instinctive need to wear clothing: the shame he feels over his lust and the resultant impulse to nonetheless preserve his human dignity. For this reason, the Sages refer to clothing as man's "dignifiers."¹²

Heterosexual marriage is no cause for shame. Although it necessarily involves an element of lust, marriage does not impugn man's dignity. To the contrary, its reproductive and bond-creating aspects make it the basis of the family, and thus the bedrock of all of human life. Marriage comports well with human dignity. The institution of marriage predated the sin of the Tree of Knowledge; unlike clothing, it was not a mere concession to that sin's unfortunate consequences. The lustful aspect of marriage, however, is not in keeping with human dignity, and so, is not a matter of public reference in civilized society.

However, a homosexual relationship is *sui generis*. As a thoroughgoing act of lust, it wants for any aspect in which human dignity might inhere. It is bereft of the saving grace of serving as the bedrock of human life in the way that ordinary marriage does. For the homosexual who has designated another male

12. *Shabbos* 113a, explicated in Feldman, *The Juggler and the King*, Feldheim Publishers, p. 168 ff.

for sexual consort, there is only one way to salvage some semblance of human dignity: if his sense of shame impels him to keep his behavior private. Just as wearing clothing preserves man's dignity, so does the refusal to flaunt one's lust-seeking in public. However, once he publicly gives his partner a dowry document, he has surrendered all claim to fundamental human dignity. His body/*nefesh* has become indistinguishable from that of the animal.

This, then, is the travesty of homosexual marriage. By legitimizing it, even celebrating it, society has arrived at the tragic point of beginning to "give a dowry document to a male." It is, to be blunt, an assault on human dignity no less direct than were society to legalize promenading naked in the streets, a development that, given the current state of entertainment and advertising, might itself not be far off. By violating one of the three basic mitzvos to which, in Talmudic times at least, mankind still clung, contemporary society has entered onto a treacherously slippery slope of reducing man to sub-human proportions.

The Jewish Response

If homosexuality stands in diametric opposition to Judaism's essence and violates the basic human dignity on which society is founded, it ought not to be difficult to divine what the proper Jewish response should be. The Torah enjoins each of us to act with an abundance of compassion and concern toward any individual afflicted by homosexual tendencies; this is something to which anyone suffering a personal difficulty is entitled.

At the very same time, there can be no public recognition that might indicate that such behavior is in any way acceptable. The prohibition of *chilul Hashem* forbids even individuals, and a Jewish community all the more so, from condoning transgressions of Torah law. In practical terms, this would dictate, for example, that an Orthodox Shul should not permit someone who publicly and proudly flaunts his homosexuality to receive any recognition or honors in its services. To do so translates in the public's mind into a condoning of the lifestyle that he himself seeks to intertwine into his public persona.

Many people ask: Why is this any different from a Shul bestowing privileges and honors on someone who desecrates the Shabbos, which is not uncommon in many synagogues? The answer is that this may be done, if at all, where the

violator's motives are *le-tej'avon*, i.e., his Shabbos desecration stems from the temptation of the monetary profits involved or simple ignorance. If, however, he deliberately rejects the entire concept of Shabbos as a precept based on the Creator's rest on the seventh day of Creation, such an individual may, indeed, not be granted any public recognition or honor.

Open, proudly flaunted homosexuality goes beyond the violation of an explicit Torah law; it is a public rejection of a concept that lies at the core of Judaism, namely, that lust-fulfillment is behavior that is shameful and unworthy of the human being. Supporting such behavior even in the most tacit fashion possible is a *chilul Hashem* that no Jewish community can possibly abide.

It is therefore surprising that an *ad hoc* Orthodox rabbinic group has taken a stance on this issue that is, simply put, Jewishly untenable. Its statement reads, in part:

We do not here address what synagogues should do about accepting members who are openly practicing homosexuals and/or living with a same-sex partner. Each synagogue together with its rabbi must establish its own standard with respect to open violators of halakha.¹³

This paragraph makes three statements: a) Open homosexuality may be condoned by a synagogue; b) such behavior is no different from violation of Halacha due to ignorance; c) the decision on whether such behavior should be condoned is a matter for the laity of the synagogue to determine in consultation with its rabbi.

Each of these conclusions is spurious from a Torah perspective. To condone a purposeful flaunting of a Torah prohibition by a public or by an individual is clearly forbidden as an unqualified *chilul Hashem*. To openly proclaim one's homosexual practice is such a violation. Moreover, the very same standard applies to all public flaunting of Halacha. The only excuse for condoning all such behaviors is where it is well-known that the individual in question acts on temptation or out of ignorance, rather than in deliberate rejection of Torah. Concern for *chilul Hashem* prohibits the bestowal of public honors upon deliberate sinners.

13. Statement of Principles NYA signed by 212 Orthodox Rabbis, found at <http://statementofprinciplesnya.blogspot.com/>.

Finally, the notion that synagogue members, even in consultation with their rabbi, can make halachic determinations, particularly in matters of such gravity, is a travesty of Halacha that has no place in Orthodox Judaism.

That over 200 Rabbis could have signed on such a statement is sad commentary on the state of Orthodox rabbinic leadership in our time.

Seeking Therapy

The homosexual act engenders a destructive self-centeredness in man, but this does not necessarily mean that someone is attracted to the same sex *because* of selfishness. That attraction may well have other sources, such as a loss of a male identity.¹⁴

There are those who are not naturally attracted to males but who deliberately engage in homosexuality because heterosexuality has become boring for them and they need to seek out new forms of sensations. However, it is an indisputable fact that most homosexuals are naturally attracted to males. The attraction they feel is not the result of a consciously willed decision, but rather the result of their psychological make-up. The mere fact that the Torah proscribes such behavior will not necessarily be sufficient for such individuals to fend off the attraction they feel and restrain their desire to act on such feelings. What, then, does the Torah require of a person with a homosexual orientation? Heterosexuals have an outlet for their sex drive; can a homosexual be expected to live without being able to express his particular drive?

The first course of action for a homosexual is to make every effort to change his orientation by seeking help from professionals who have been successful in this regard. He must do this because if he permits himself to indulge in homosexual activity, the performance of his mission as a Jew and his existence as a human being is at grave risk. Furthermore, the commandment of *peru u-revu* ("be fruitful and multiply")¹⁵ and the admonition to distance oneself from temptation embodied in the commandment of *velo sasuru acharey levavchem ve-acharey eyneychem* ("do not stray after your hearts etc."),¹⁶ apply to him as

14. See the accompanying article by Elan Karten, Ph.D.

15. *Bereyshit* 9:1.

16. *Bamidbar* 15:39.

much as to any other Jewish male. He is thus bidden to pursue all available means to make it possible for him to observe these tenets.

As long as there is the possibility of change, one is obligated to undergo therapy, which has produced successful results for large numbers of people. The faithful Jew will place his trust in the Almighty and offer constant prayers that he, too, will be successful, in keeping with the Sages' dictum of *Haba l'tabeir mesayin oso*—He who comes to purify himself will merit Divine assistance.¹⁷ As is the case with all therapeutic treatments, however, he has to be aware that in spite of his prayers and hopes, his attempts to change might not be successful.

The gay community claims vociferously that such therapy cannot be effective, one of their strongest proofs being that many people who undergo therapy backslide into their old orientation. Some go as far to argue that it can be harmful to undergo therapy. They claim that homosexuality is a normal, even genetically hardwired, variant of human sexuality, and, thus, attempting to change it is the equivalent of attempting to change a basic human drive, which often results in attendant psychological harm. As a result, many psychologists have declared it unethical for members of their profession to offer such help.

However, there is not a shred of evidence to support these claims. The fact that the effects of change therapy are short-lived for many homosexuals does not render the pursuit of such treatment futile or unethical; no one has been heard to declare drug rehabilitation centers unethical simply because a certain percentage of drug addicts fail to permanently break free of their habits.

The claim that homosexuality is inborn not only remains unsupported by the discovery of a supposed "homosexual gene" but is also controverted by the biological realities.

Every single entity in the vegetative and animal worlds has a built-in system for reproduction. The natural attraction that exists between the male and female of the species helps facilitate that reproductive process. It follows that since a homosexual has little or no such attraction, he has a deficient or non-existent reproductive drive. How could the lack of such a basic, ubiquitous drive found everywhere in life's organisms be considered normal? And how, as well, could the attempt to restore or repair this basic drive cause psychological harm?

But assuming, *arguendo*, that "gay" advocates are correct and that there exists a possibility of harm resulting from the attempt to change one's sexual

17. *Shabbos* 104a.

orientation, a homosexual faithful to Halacha must still seek such therapy. If a Jew is obligated to even give up his life rather than commit a homosexual act, doesn't it stand to reason that he should be willing to undergo the risk of harm to avoid it?

What If Therapy Doesn't Work?

What of the homosexual who has made a good faith effort to change his orientation but has been unsuccessful in doing so? There is only one path left for him: he has to be prepared to live a life of celibacy; the attraction he feels is not a license to violate a prohibition of the Torah. Various rationales and strategies have been propounded to legitimize homosexual behavior within the bounds of Halacha. They are, bar none, patently false, and their only effect is to tragically mislead the unlearned.

It cannot be gainsaid that a homosexual for whom therapy is unsuccessful will suffer the deprivation of his ability to fulfill a basic human desire, and that is deeply painful. But the Creator of man has told us through His Torah that the homosexual act has so devastating an effect on the inner self and causes such deep spiritual harm, that the alternative, destroying one's inner life as both a Jew and as a human, is worse.

Let us take an example, which is not uncommon, of an individual who has a powerful sexual drive which gives him no rest. He is attracted to neither females nor males—as long as they are adults. He has only one object of desire: male children under age eight. Obviously, if he wishes to avoid prison, the only paths open for him are either to undergo therapy to change his orientation, or, if this fails, to exercise self-control. Why is an active homosexual any different?

The most likely answer to this is a vehement protest: "The two are not the same! The active homosexual is not harming anyone, while the child molester is!" However, from the perspective of the Torah, this distinction, while appearing facially valid, is erroneous.

The active homosexual may not be harming another on an emotional level, but he is harming himself, even more seriously, on a spiritual level. If the Torah orders him to give up his life rather than engage in such acts, then indulging in homosexuality is worse than losing his life. Thus, there is indeed no difference

between the active homosexual and the child molester. Both may not indulge their appetites, and both have no alternative than either seeking therapy or exercising self-control.

God does not place people into situations in which they are forced to violate a prohibition of the Torah. Man never loses his free choice; the mere existence of a temptation does not render one an *onus* (forced into transgressing). There are, without doubt, situations in which the temptation to sin is overwhelming, but never does man forfeit the free choice to control himself and, more so, to use his foresight to avoid such situations.

Accordingly, a homosexual must exercise care in avoiding the arousal of his attraction. Just as heterosexuals are enjoined to avoid situations which might arouse their sexual drive, such as seclusion with a woman, homosexuals, too, must avoid situations, including seclusion, that are fraught with temptation.¹⁸

It must be noted that everything we have written refers to the homosexual *act*, not the same-gender attraction that underlies it. It is the act which causes the spiritual devastation that the Torah describes with the term *to'eyvah*. Engaging in forbidden sexual relations ingrains deviancy into the inner self,¹⁹ and is so harmful that the Torah requires us to give up our lives rather than do so. One is not obligated, however, to give up one's life to avoid *thinking* about performing such an act. Although such deliberate thoughts are forbidden, the severe spiritual damage inflicted by any forbidden union stems from the sexual act, not from the forbidden thought.²⁰

It must furthermore be noted that there is nothing that can stand in the way of *teshuva*, or repentance. Thus, even someone who has committed a homosexual act, with all of its attendant damaging effects on the inner self, can uproot those effects by implementing the three components of *teshuva*: regretting the act, committing never to engage in it again, and confessing one's sin

18. The framers of the above cited *Statement of Principles* NYA seem to have overlooked an explicit verse in the Torah, *velo sasuru acharey levavchem veacharey eyneychem*, when they write that "the Torah does not prohibit homosexual thoughts." This lapse is also discussed in the accompanying article by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg.

19. Psychologists widely agree that personality tendencies can be easily changed until they are expressed into behavior.

20. Similarly, there is no requirement to give up one's life to avoid the intentional wasting of seed, although it is clearly forbidden by the Torah and is a totally lust-fulfilling act, since it does not have the same level of effect upon the inner self as does a forbidden sexual act.

before God. When sincerely performed, the *teshuva* process can restore the penitent's spiritual state to its original, unsullied condition.

A Vital Definition

There is an overarching, albeit inconvenient, truth that lies at the heart of this entire topic: The definition of life is not, as the current culture has it, the fulfillment of appetites. If this would be true, then the homosexual's life would be bereft of any redeeming purpose. But the Author of life has taught us that this definition is not true. Life is meant to be used to express one's soul/*neshama* into the world by living a spiritually fulfilled life and by rejecting the natural inducements to pursue the shallow decadence of a purely material existence.

From this perspective, the life of the homosexual is full of opportunities. A homosexual who is incapable of changing his lack of attraction to the opposite sex is free of the commandment to have a family. This enables him to make contributions to the community that the responsibilities of family life often render difficult, if not impossible. Travel on behalf of good causes and living in far-flung communities for the purpose of spreading Torah and drawing others near to Judaism are options available to him that others may not have. I know of someone in this circumstance who threw himself into fundraising with its attendant traveling obligations, and was able to build a fine Torah institution.

The greatest opportunity Man—every man and woman—can have is the challenge of wrestling with his *yetzer hora*. Due to our spiritual interconnectedness, when one individual overcomes his anti-spiritual inclinations he makes it easier for others to do the same. Overcoming these inclinations not only accomplishes his life's mission, but also brings sanctity to the individual and to the entire world. These are universal truths. Thus, every time the homosexual refrains from transgressing, either by self-control or by avoiding tempting situations, he is acting in the role that God granted Adam and all his descendants, accomplishing his mission to serve as "earth" for the expression of his soul/*neshama*.

And that is what life is all about.