

Communications

CURRENT JEWISH PERIODICALS

TO THE EDITOR:

Your otherwise admirable Summer 1991 issue was seriously marred by the inclusion of Rabbi Alan Yuter's review of "Current Jewish Periodicals" of Reform views justifying acceptance of gay and lesbian "Rabbis." These views were presented in a straightforward manner, without challenge or comment, as if they were worthy of consideration.

Why a scholarly journal that is devoted to the understanding and advancement of our tradition would give space to view points which are halachically repugnant is something which I fail to comprehend. In general, I cannot figure out what purpose is served by Rabbi Yuter's column, especially since he does not deal with material that is esoteric or difficult to locate but with popular publications that are readily available. I respectfully suggest that *Tradition* take a second look at the function of this column.

MARVIN SCHICK

Brooklyn, NY

ALAN J. YUTER RESPONDS:

The purpose of the Periodicals column is not to present esoteric material, but rather to take note of discussions being held in other Jewish periodicals, including those which have non-halakhic editorial policies but which nevertheless reach a wide Jewish audience. We may not like—let alone agree with—everything that others say or write, but we cannot pretend it is not being said. Certainly no one would seriously suggest that a report without challenge that Reform views homosexuals worthy of rabbinical ordination could in any way be taken as a statement that the position merits serious consideration within the halakhic community. Indeed, this is a position that calls for no serious comment.

TEFILLIN IN A BROWN PAPER BAG

TO THE EDITOR:

I heartily applaud the opinions expressed in the essay, "Tefillin in a Brown Paper Bag," (*Tradition*, 26:1, Fall 1991). I believe, however, that the problem of sloppy language in the Orthodox press is only one symptom of a more widespread and far-reaching ill in the Orthodox community, namely that of a complete neglect of *form* for the supposed benefit of *substance*. There exists an underlying contempt, perhaps tempered by suspicion, for the esthetic vis-a-vis the ethical, an age-old disdain for the beauty of Greece (Japeth) compared to the spirituality of Israel (Shem) and, as a result, there grew a tolerance of, if not even a cultivation of, the non-esthetic as long as there was spiritual substance.

In order to reach out, be it in the context of "*kiruv*" in the non-Orthodox Jewish world, or as a "light unto the nations," the form must be cultivated in addition to the substance. A diamond has no place in a garbage heap, and the ethics and contents of Orthodox Judaism should not be associated with the grundgy, the untidy and sloppy, or the illiterate. The form (esthetics, manners, dress, literacy) is hardly addressed in our yeshivot and Jewish schools. The familiar local epithet of "as rowdy (sloppy) as a Judenschule" is, unfortunately, not far from the mark. All too often,

the form is associated with the “*goyische welt*” and, therefore by definition, suspect. The thought that we could learn something in this respect from our surroundings (although espoused by thinkers like Rabbi S. R. Hirsch or Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchick) is immediately shunned, although curiously enough, the Talmudic principle of learning something from every *baal chai* is readily accepted.

Literacy is only one manifestation of form by which the substance is perceived and judged from the outside. Appearance, behavior, and style are others which have been sadly neglected and which, besides assisting us in our obligations to our surroundings as a *mamlehet kohanim*, would do much to improve our own self-respect.

(PROF.) G. S. MOSCHYTZ

Zurich, Switzerland

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman argues the necessity of yeshivot training their students to sharpen their abilities to write in English so that they can better communicate Torah ideas to the more general population. But his discussion begs the more important question of whether yeshivot actually feel the need for outreach to secularly-educated Jews. If, indeed, they feel no need to reach out, they would see no reason to communicate better in English or to hire faculty to teach these skills.

In general, I feel that there are many so-called secular subjects in addition to English language skills that should be studied to enhance what one learns in a traditional yeshiva setting. As important as reaching out might be, increasing one's understanding of God's world by study of various secular studies may be even more important. The study of secular studies was a practice of some of the greatest of our Torah giants in past years.

ABE ESRAL

Atlanta, GA

TO THE EDITOR:

“Tefillin in a Brown Paper Bag” dealt with an issue close to my heart. As a reviewer of Orthodox books for the local Aguda paper, *Perspectives*, I find that some of the books I read do not even warrant a review. On a personal level as well, I find this difficult since I want my children—avid readers—to read Torah-oriented material, yet the level, content, and prose is often just as you describe. Your essay confirms what I have felt for a very long time. Thank you for publishing it.

MRS. MORDECHAI LEVIN

Toronto

TO THE EDITOR:

I want to compliment you for the lucidity with which you put the case for the intelligent use of English among rabbis and other would-be spokesmen for Orthodoxy.

The truth of the matter is that while one will find the most troublesome offenders of the use of English in the ranks of the Orthodox, rest assured that there are

others who are as guilty with regard to the "slaughter" of English usage. Masters of obfuscation, circumlocution, and fuzzy logic are unencumbered by ideological boundaries; they bestow their "blessings" on Jews of all theological and religious persuasions, and even upon those who are not persuaded of anything theologically or religiously Jewish.

(RABBI) IRWIN E. WITTY

Ontario

RABBI YOSEF ZEV LIPOVITZ

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Goldberg's article on Rabbi Yosef Zev Lipovitz (*Tradition*, Summer 1986) represents an outstanding example of contemporary historical research. Rabbi Goldberg has succeeded in revealing the remarkable personality which lay behind the unassuming exterior. I knew R. Lipovitz personally during the 1950's and wish to comment on one or two factual points in the article.

Goldberg's statement (p. 55) that R. Lipovitz maintained his restaurant until the late 1950's needs slight modification. After his heart attack in the early 1950's, he gave up the restaurant and his wife took in paying guests. From 1954-8, my grandfather (who had emigrated to Israel after the death of my grandmother in 1952) and my uncle (who served as his companion) were looked after by Rebbitzin Lipovitz. I was then living in England, but I visited for 4-6 weeks every summer and got to know R. Lipovitz well. In 1959 he sent me a personally inscribed copy of his book on Megillat Rut.

The discussion in note 13 regarding the reason for Rav Dov Katz's failure to mention R. Lipovitz's stay in Berlin in his brief biographical notes suggests (following Rav Borodianski) that the omission was deliberate because of the negative influence it might have on potential readers. I knew R. Katz well and cannot think that this was really the reason. He was scrupulously honest, and never deliberately suppressed information which he considered important. This is clear from his introduction to *Pulmus Hamusar* where he mentions the advice of many friends not to publish the violent criticism by great Rabbanim of the Musar movement, and states his own view of the importance of historical truth.

I went to see R. Borodianski shortly before he passed away to discuss the matter with him. He rejected my suggestion that R. Katz might have been unaware of R. Lipovitz's stay in Berlin (this was substantiated by Rav Shimshon Epstein, son-in-law of R. Katz, who pointed out that R. Katz had himself passed through Berlin and was on terms of close friendship with R. Hayyim Heller). Instead, R. Borodianski put forward the thesis that R. Katz did not rate the Berlin influence very highly and did not consider it worth mentioning in a brief biography.

Regarding note 17, where reference is given to the book I edited, *Memories of Kopul Rosen*, one should mention that the relevant chapter which gives a graphic description of the Mir Yeshiva in the late 1930's was written by Rabbi Theodore Lewis.

I am grateful to Rabbi Goldberg (with whom I corresponded) for suggesting that I write this note "so that the record can be made straight."

(PROF.) CYRIL DOMB

Jerusalem