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*Review Essay*  
**RELATING TO ORTHODOX  
HOMOSEXUALS:  
THE CASE FOR COMPASSION**

*Judaism and Homosexuality:  
An Authentic Orthodox View*

by CHAIM RAPOPORT

(London and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004)

Though there is a small but growing number of articles and responsa about Orthodox homosexuals,<sup>1</sup> many in the Orthodox community would prefer to ignore the issue. R. Ronen Lubitch identifies three common misconceptions behind this wish: (1) homosexuality (or at least homosexual behavior) is *assur* and homosexuals are all anti-Torah; (2) the very topic is unpalatable and un-*tsanua*; (3) there are hardly any Orthodox homosexuals anyway.<sup>2</sup> A reluctance to get involved with such a controversial subject exists among some writers and publishers.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, it took courage for R. Chaim Rapoport to devote his time to writing an entire book on how to relate to Orthodox homosexuals, *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View*. Its introductions and *haskamot*—some of the most effusive ones I’ve ever seen—agree on three different points. They praise R. Rapoport for his courage in publishing this urgently needed book. They are impressed by his “unusual knowledge of Jewish law” and “impeccable scholarship.” But they especially pour out their enthusiasm and awe for his “sound psychological insight,” “great emotional depth,” and “above all a great amount of compassion.” All five writers are struck by his compassion.<sup>4</sup> Why does compassion make such a difference in relating to Orthodox homosexuals?

## I. THE HUMAN RACE

Some of us may admire, or even aspire to be, *malakhim* of pure *din* or Vulcans of pure logic. Invariably, however, every human being's judgment is affected by personal factors. We are more likely to give people the benefit of the doubt if we have a good impression of them. We are less likely to demonize a group, setting up a stark contrast between the normal Us and the deviant Them, if we are personal friends with one of Them and They have a face. We are more likely to be passionate about a cause if it directly affects us or one of our close relatives or friends.

Having a personal interest can be a force for good, if it pushes us to work harder on what is important to us. For example, the RCA's prenuptial agreement has proved itself effective in preventing *agunah* problems.<sup>5</sup> In formulating the prenuptial agreement, R. Mordechai Willig, Segan Av Beth Din of the Beth Din of America (and my *rebbe*), succeeded in overcoming the sea of troubles which had scuttled all previous attempts. And yet, R. Willig freely admits that his extraordinary efforts were inspired by a single *agunah* case:

Until ten years ago I was a passive observer, thinking maybe the rabbis should be doing more about it. Then a couple in my community, whose marriage couldn't be saved, came to me. The husband threatened to use the A word [*agunah*], and I said to myself, "Not in my shul! I will not remain silent." In the end the husband gave her the *get*, but it took a few years, and I realized something must be done.<sup>6</sup>

It was when the *agunah* problem became personal that R. Willig switched from being a passive observer to an active force. Not that there's anything wrong with such a "human" approach to *pesak*. On the contrary, R. Aharon Lichtenstein decries as "mere caricature" the belief that "the ideal *posek* is a faceless and heartless supercomputer into whom all of the relevant data is fed and who then produces the right answer." He continues, "As anyone who has been privileged to observe *gedolim* at close hand can readily attest, they approach *pesak* doubly animated by responsibility to halakha and sensitivity to human concerns."<sup>7</sup>

The halakhic bottom line might very well remain the same. Nevertheless, there is a world of difference between a "no" that is sympathetic and compassionate, and a "no" that is demonizing and traumatizing. This point can hardly be overemphasized; the entire Torah is a commentary on it.

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### II. THE POLITICAL, THE HALAKHIC, AND THE PERSONAL

It is for this reason that, as we shall see, attitudes toward Orthodox homosexuals are gradually becoming more tolerant on the personal level. However, this must be distinguished from the political and halakhic levels. By way of illustration, let us look at the public statements of R. Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb. Currently executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, R. Weinreb is also a psychotherapist who serves as rabbinic liaison for NEFESH: The North American Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals. In the spring of 2004, he discussed homosexual issues in an article for the *New York Jewish Week* and an interview for the *Baltimore Jewish Times*.

Regarding halakhic behavior, R. Weinreb is uncompromising, as indeed anyone defending Orthodoxy needs to be:

The position of traditional Judaism on homosexual behavior is clear and unambiguous, terse and absolute. Homosexual behavior between males or between females is absolutely forbidden by Jewish law, beginning with the biblical imperative, alluded to numerous times in the Talmud and codified in the *Shulhan Arukh*.<sup>8</sup>

Moving on to same-sex marriage, he is equally adamant:

To argue that same-sex marriage is consistent with the traditions of Judaism is intellectually dishonest at best and blasphemous at worst. . . . We cannot be silent upon occasions where Judaism is fraudulently depicted as condoning something that its Torah clearly and irreversibly condemns. . . . [T]here is a great difference between tolerance for an individual and recognition of a movement which wishes to turn something clearly wrong by Jewish standards into something not only tolerated but normative.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, however, R. Weinreb shifts gears when it comes to the personal level, adopting the distinction:

already implicit in numerous rabbinical texts, between the sin and the sinner; that is, between the person and his or her behavior. Given the nature of our times, it is impossible to formally condemn people who violate Jewish norms. . . . The tolerance rightly shown to these individuals by no means condones their behavior, but accepts them as people who may be misled or uninformed.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, in the interview, he goes further and speaks of tolerance for gay couples as well:

Even in the Orthodox community it will be more accepted, because in truth we have same-sex couples also. There was a time they were shunned, but now they are tolerated to various degrees by shuls. You won't find any Orthodox rabbi performing a same-sex marriage, but you will find a degree of tolerance on the level of the practice because it's a reality. Torah is clear, but you have to adopt a bi-level approach to life.<sup>11</sup>

The difference between performing a same-sex marriage and tolerating a same-sex couple is, in R. Weinreb's words, that "the person is sitting in front of you and you see them as a human being."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the tolerance and sympathy are simply an *ahavat Yisrael* response to coming in contact with Orthodox homosexuals.<sup>13</sup>

### III. TREMBLING BEFORE G-D

One of the ways in which Orthodox Jews have come in personal, albeit virtual, contact with Orthodox homosexuals is by seeing them in the controversial 2001 documentary, *Trembling Before G-d*. The film is problematic, and Orthodox critics have faulted it for the following flaws. It misrepresents Orthodoxy as merely a path of spiritual expression through rituals.<sup>14</sup> It makes the entire Orthodox community appear to be narrow and bigoted.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the film's advertising campaign uses the phrase "religious fundamentalism." While several Orthodox rabbis were interviewed at length by the director, Sandi Simcha DuBowski, only short excerpts are included in the film.<sup>16</sup> There are no stories of homosexuals who seek to overcome their same-sex attractions through reparative therapy (see below).<sup>17</sup> *Trembling* spotlights the opinions of Steve Greenberg, who received Orthodox *semikha* and calls himself "the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi," but whose views on homosexuality are not consonant with Orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> In short, under the guise of a balanced documentary, it presents propaganda, advocating for the acceptance of homosexuality.

Despite these serious shortcomings, *Trembling Before G-d* is still important as a profoundly sad testament to the suffering of Jews struggling to remain within the Torah-observant community. As one Torah educator puts it, "The film genuinely evokes pathos for Orthodox Jews struggling with the most important religious and personal issues."<sup>19</sup>

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After viewing *Trembling*, R. Haskel Lookstein commented:

I learned so much from this film. I can't change Jewish law, but the way one thinks about it has to change. There is something very sensitizing about hearing from Jews who are *shomrei mitsvot* in just about every way, except for conformity to the halakha of sexual behavior, and are struggling with that tension. I wasn't aware of the depth of the struggle before.<sup>20</sup>

### IV. HALAKHA AND THE HOMOSEXUAL

Even before the movie came out, R. Chaim Rapoport was calling attention to the issue. A congregational rabbi in London as well as a member of the Chief Rabbi's Cabinet,<sup>21</sup> he published an article in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London entitled "Judaism and Homosexuality." In the span of just a dozen paragraphs, he outlined a Torah approach to homosexuals which balanced emphatic defense of halakha with empathetic encouragement of homosexuals to "participate in every aspect of Jewish life that they feel able to."<sup>22</sup> Apparently many British Jews had never heard such an approach from an Orthodox rabbi. The response was electric, generating "much correspondence, both written and oral. Parents of homosexual children, rabbis of communities, and many gay and lesbian people contacted me for clarification, discussion and—in some cases—advice" (p. 101). It wasn't long before the article had expanded into a book, *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View*.

Approximately half the book deals with halakhic issues. R. Rapoport is a careful scholar, and one can see he is in his element when citing sources. The first chapter begins abruptly with "The Book of Leviticus" and focuses on the technical prohibitions of homosexual sex: a biblical, capital crime for men, and either a biblical or rabbinic prohibition for women (pp. 1-4). He poses the question whether these are divine decrees (*hukim*) or logical imperatives (*mishpatim*), and surveys rabbinic literature for a range of reasons: homosexual practices may be the antithesis of procreation (*Lekah Tov*), destructive for marriage (*Tosafot* and *Rosh*), intrinsically repulsive (R. Moshe Feinstein), or unnatural (*Torah Temimah*). Intellectual honesty leads R. Rapoport to admit it is possible that "even all the reasons, when taken together, do not provide sufficient premise for objection to homosexual conduct in *all* circum-

stances” (p. 15). Homosexuality may very well be perceived as a *mishpat* in some cases and a *hok* in others. Nevertheless, we do not determine halakha based on our understanding of *ta’amei ha-mitsvot*. Accordingly, the chapter concludes that while an Orthodox homosexual might not agree with any of the suggested reasons, he should still affirm, “I accept that God has forbidden homosexual practices and—without seeking to second-guess His wisdom—I accept I have to subordinate myself to the Will of my Creator and do my best to overcome the temptations I confront” (p. 17).

How should halakha view a practicing homosexual, someone who does not succeed in overcoming those temptations? In chapter four, R. Rapoport presents the case for applying the halakhic status of “hedonistic renegade” (*mumar le-te’avon*). On the one hand, the hypothesis of duress (*ones*) is unsatisfactory. Even if a person cannot change his orientation (see below), he is not compelled to act on his natural desires. The suggestion that homosexuals cannot refrain from sexual intercourse is simply incorrect—not to mention condescending (pp. 64-65). On the other hand, R. Rapoport also rejects the application to a practicing homosexual of the term “defiant rebel” (*mumar le-hakh’is*). When otherwise observant homosexuals transgress, it is simply because “they have no other legitimate outlet for their sexual and emotional desires. Consequently, the status of the vast majority of knowledgeable Jewish practicing homosexuals is—at worst—the Talmudic equivalent of the ‘hedonistic renegade’” (p. 50).

If the designation of *mumar le-te’avon* is “at worst,” what then is “at best”? R. Rapoport devotes chapter six to the category of *tinok she-nishbah le-vein ha-akum* (a child captured and reared by non-Jews), who is not blamed for his lack of observance. Maimonides (*Mamrim* 3:3) extended the concept to the second-generation Karaites of his time, arguing that we should relate to them with *kiruv*, and it has become standard across the spectrum of Orthodoxy to apply the same status to today’s non-Orthodox Jews (pp. 79, 185-186). So too, argues R. Rapoport, since secular society is increasingly accepting of homosexuality, it makes sense to consider a *tinok she-nishbah* someone who has been so influenced by the outside world that he has difficulty accepting traditional Jewish views of homosexuality. Accordingly, “A careful appraisal of the ‘conditioning’ of an individual sexually active homosexual may well lead to the conclusion that the person in question ought to be granted the status of a *tinok she-nishbah*,” with the accompanying obligation of *kiruv* (pp. 80-81).

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These halakhic discussions are thought-provoking and engaging, especially when R. Rapoport cites the writings of other Orthodox rabbis and disagrees with them.<sup>23</sup> But it is the rest of the book which is truly groundbreaking.

### V. AWARENESS OF THE STRUGGLE

While *Judaism and Homosexuality* does not relate to *Trembling Before G-d*, arguably it accomplishes the same sensitization, albeit from a mainstream Orthodox rabbinic perspective. In his foreword, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks elaborates on this theme:

Compassion, sympathy, empathy, understanding—these are essential elements of Judaism. They are what homosexual Jews who care about Judaism need from us today. That is what lies behind R. Rapoport's book. It is a sensitive, thoughtful work on a subject too often either ignored or treated superficially. Although it contains an impressive array of halakhic sources, its subject is less halakha than pastoral psychology; not what is permitted and what forbidden, but how shall an individual cope with profound dissonance between what he feels himself to be and what Judaism calls on us to be. No one should underestimate the depth of that conflict (p. ix).

R. Rapoport focuses on that conflict in chapter three, whose title is “The Formidable Challenge.” He praises R. Aharon Feldman and R. J. David Bleich for acknowledging the difficult struggle of Orthodox homosexuals,<sup>24</sup> but suggests that the exact nature of this onerous challenge has not received the emphasis it needs to evoke compassion (p. 45). R. Rapoport takes the reader through the slew of hardships that the Torah demands of Orthodox homosexuals. Not only must they commit themselves to lives of loneliness, celibacy and childlessness (see below), but in Orthodox same-sex environments they cannot even escape the constant temptation of exposure to the gender to whom they are attracted (pp. 39, 46). Later, in discussing the balance between understanding and judgmentalism (chapter five), R. Rapoport adds:

[T]he heterosexual Jew ought to ask himself questions such as: “If I were to find myself in a situation whereby I would constantly be yearning to be in a loving relationship—of a type that includes physical intimacy—and the only sexual relationships I could reasonably have would be with a member of the same gender, would I live up to the Torah's

demands?”, or “If I knew that there is never likely to be any way of experiencing sexual fulfillment in a halakhically permissible manner, and at the same time, I would be almost constantly exposed to sexual temptation, would I have the fortitude to remain alone and celibate?” I venture to say that many a heterosexual person who confronts himself honestly with such questions would indeed be humbled (p. 71).

At the very least, awareness of Orthodox homosexuals’ struggle should lead people to be “less prone to express the type of knee-jerk, if not flippant, dismissals of the very real issues confronted by homosexuals that are sometimes heard even in religious society” (p. 47).

## VI. REPARATIVE VS. AFFIRMATIVE

It may be easier for us to be sympathetic if we believe that it is impossible to change one’s sexual orientation.<sup>25</sup> After all, as R. Rapoport acknowledges, “It is clear that, from the perspective of Jewish teachings, if sexual orientation can be changed, then homosexuals ought to re-orientate themselves and ‘become’ heterosexuals” (p. 22). This brings us to an area of contention among therapists. The approach of reparative therapy, also known as conversion or change therapy, is that homosexuality is a psychological disorder and the goal should be sexual reorientation to heterosexuality.<sup>26</sup> The main American organization associated with this approach is NARTH, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. There are two Jewish organizations for reparative therapy: the one in America is JONAH, Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality, and the one in Israel is the Atzat Nefesh Crisis Center and Hotline.<sup>27</sup> Several Orthodox rabbis follow the reparative approach in their writings and responsa on homosexuality.<sup>28</sup> Some Orthodox therapists defend this approach in print as well.<sup>29</sup>

Some may be surprised to discover that the reparative approach is a minority opinion which today is considered discredited by the vast majority of mental health professionals. A joint statement issued in 1999 reads in part:

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Social Workers, together representing more



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than 477,000 health and mental health professionals, have all taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a “cure.”<sup>30</sup>

Consistent with his careful approach, in chapter two R. Rapoport respectfully presents the reparative approach as a legitimate minority opinion. Nevertheless, he points out, it is of limited use:

[E]ven proponents of conversion and reparative therapy acknowledge that in many cases such therapy can, at the very most, help the individual in his pursuit of celibacy, but would not enable him to embark upon a potentially viable marital union. Furthermore, even one of the greatest optimists about the success of sexual reorientation therapies, (Orthodox) Dr. Joseph Berger, acknowledges that “*even under the best of circumstances, with highly motivated, suitable patients, the success rate is between 30 and 50 percent*” (emphasis added). Consequently, we may conclude that it is almost universally recognized that people of exclusive and apparently unalterable orientation do exist in a significant number (p. 24).<sup>31</sup>

As R. Sacks points out, homosexuality is actually a spectrum of conditions, requiring case-by-case counseling (p. ix). But as a general rule, R. Rapoport argues, it is perfectly appropriate to describe as “homosexual” those people who are exclusively attracted to members of the same sex (pp. 32-33). There is no contradiction of Torah values to say that this is part of their nature. In the words of R. Aharon Feldman, *rosh yeshiva* of Ner Yisrael:

I believe that the course you have taken is correct: you must refuse to deny your nature as a homosexual while at the same time refuse to deny your Jewishness. There is no contradiction between the two if they are viewed in their proper perspective. Judaism looks negatively at homosexual activity, but not at the homosexual nature. Whatever the source of this nature, whether it is genetic or acquired (the Torah does not express any view on the matter), is immaterial. . . . Accordingly, a Jewish homosexual has to make a commitment to embark on a course where he will ultimately rid himself of homosexual activity. It is not necessary that he change his sexual orientation (if this is at all possible), but that he cease this activity. It is obvious that for many people this [cessation of homosexual activity] will be difficult, and will have to be accomplished over a period of time. But it must be done and it can be done.<sup>32</sup>

Therapy based on the assumption that it is impossible to change

one's sexual orientation is sometimes called affirmative therapy. Among the Orthodox rabbis who follow the affirmative approach in their writings are R. Feldman, R. Rapoport, and R. Yuval Cherlow (see below). Some Orthodox therapists have gone on record defending the affirmative approach as well.<sup>33</sup>

## VII. PROCREATION AND MARRIAGE

In addition to his acceptance of affirmative theory, R. Rapoport stakes out another position which is bound to spark controversy. In chapter seven, he argues that confirmed homosexuals are exempt from the biblical obligation to procreate (*peru u-revu*), and in fact should not get married.

While the notion may seem startling at first, R. Rapoport presents a compelling case. There is halakhic precedent to say that the *mitsva* of *peru u-revu* does not require greater efforts than any other *mitsvat ase*. In this case, someone with an exclusive homosexual disposition (and R. Rapoport limits his ruling to such a person) would not be required to suffer for *peru u-revu* the trauma and emotional agony of a marriage where attraction and intimacy were impossible (p. 95). Furthermore, even if a homosexual man could convince a heterosexual woman to enter a marriage knowing there would be no intimacy—and without that knowledge the marriage would certainly be *kiddushei ta'ut*<sup>34</sup>—she would have the right to change her mind at a later stage (pp. 96, 198). For these and other reasons, “marriage for the confirmed homosexual would almost certainly entail a violation of (at least some of) the halakhic and ethical principles enshrined in Torah Law” (p. 97). Rather, the principle of *ones rahmana patreib* (God exempts the one who is unable) unfortunately applies (p. 100).<sup>35</sup>

According to this, the challenge of observant homosexuals includes yet another dimension—dealing with singlehood and infertility. Especially in the Orthodox community with its emphasis on family life, this can be extremely painful. Those who struggle with singlehood and infertility not only need sensitivity from others, but their own coping strategies as well.<sup>36</sup> R. Feldman serves as an excellent example of such encouragement. In the course of consoling a homosexual *ba'al teshuva*, he asserts:

Can a homosexual be expected to live as a celibate? I believe a Jewish homosexual can accomplish this if he decides that the Jewish people are his “wife and children.” It is possible to do this if he throws his every spare moment into devotion to the welfare of his people. There are

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many areas where he can do this. Because he does not have a family, a homosexual can make serious contributions to Judaism which others cannot. For example, bringing Judaism to smaller communities where there are no facilities for raising a Jewish family. . . . I know of a homosexual who helped establish several important institutions through his fundraising and is grateful for the sexual orientation which freed him to make this contribution. Even within one's community, devotion to public causes can be more easily done by someone who has no family obligations. Several individuals whom I know became respected, active members of their communities during their lifetimes even though it was well-known that they had no interest in marriage.<sup>37</sup>

While R. Rapoport is unsure as to how open the Orthodox community would be to trusting a celibate homosexual, he praises R. Feldman's "new avenues and opportunities for the homosexual to find his or her rightful place within the Torah community" (p. 100).

### VIII. ADVICE FOR THE ANGUISHED

After all this theory, R. Rapoport culminates the book with "Questions and Responses." The longest chapter, it puts all the principles into practice in order to address the real-life *she'elot* of homosexuals who desperately want to be observant and remain part of the Orthodox community, but cannot understand how that is possible. R. Rapoport grapples with each question wisely and humbly.<sup>38</sup> This chapter, in the words of Dr. Abba E. Borowich, "makes for emotionally wrenching but, ultimately, uplifting reading" (p. xxii). The book is well worth buying for this alone.

Embarrassingly, until a couple of years ago there was practically no Orthodox literature that gave advice to an individual struggling with homosexuality.<sup>39</sup> R. Rapoport's letters, as well as the one by R. Feldman, are important contributions to this nascent field. But the anonymity of the internet has encouraged a virtual explosion of responsa, especially on Hebrew sites such as Moreshet, Kipa and Moriya. Young people who are already engaged in a blizzard of emailing, texting, or instant-messaging are happy to apply the same technologies to fire off *she'elot* to "webbe rebbes." More importantly, the anonymity of web forms leads to many *she'elot* which would never be dared in a face-to-face situation.

The rabbi who has web-published the most *teshuvot* on homosexuality is R. Yuval Cherlow, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivat ha-Hesder Petah Tikva. He started in 2001 as the rabbi in charge of questions of person-

al status and family topics at *She'elot u-Teshuvot OnLine*, which is hosted by the religious-nationalist web portal Moreshet. In the first year he web-published a dozen *teshuvot* just on homosexuality, and he added that in fact, the majority of his *teshuvot* on the subject were not archived on the site but emailed privately.<sup>40</sup> Since then, the number has grown into the hundreds.

Interestingly, while Rabbis Rapoport and Cherlow write independently of each other (and in general, writers on this subject seem to ignore material that was not published in their language), nevertheless there are several striking parallels in their approaches. They both express the following opinions: We should not deny the existence of Orthodox homosexuals, for whom homosexuality is part of their identity. Reparative therapy may be ineffective. The challenges faced by Orthodox homosexuals are more difficult than people realize. They definitely should not conceal their homosexuality in order to get married. While homosexual sex is always prohibited, we must avoid judging those who succumb. The Orthodox community needs to “Let the left hand push away and the right hand bring close” (*Sota* 47a), which is always a difficult task.

It is unfortunate that R. Rapoport seems to have finished his research in 2001 (before *Trembling* was released), and the book does not include any material from the internet. True, much of that material came after 2001. But in a book that is so thoroughly documented—there are over sixty pages of small-font footnotes<sup>41</sup>—I expected to see the contemporary writings which are so easy to access online.

Nevertheless, this is a minor point, and does not take away from the impressiveness of R. Rapoport’s book. He deals with a difficult topic that is associated with fear and trembling, and he sheds both light and warmth on it. R. Weinreb gives *Judaism and Homosexuality* an “enthusiastic endorsement” and recommends it “to all serious students of our tradition” (pp. xxiii-xxiv). Presumably the same applies to all serious readers of our *Tradition*. As we come in contact with Orthodox homosexuals, and get to know them personally, this book is becoming increasingly vital. The issue is no longer theoretical. This time, it’s personal.

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### NOTES

1. My annotated bibliography of articles (most of which are online), "Bibliography of Contemporary Orthodox Responses to Homosexuality," is available at the ATID website: [www.atid.org/resources/homosexuality.asp](http://www.atid.org/resources/homosexuality.asp). In this review, I will limit the web references to those items which are not available in print. For the complete list of web references for items cited, see the ATID website.
2. This list appears in both his articles on the subject. The first, which was actually the first Hebrew article to survey the issue of Orthodoxy and homosexuality, is R. Ronen Lubitch, "Emdat ha-Yahadut Kelapei Yahasim Bein Bnei Min Ehad ve-Kavvim Manhim le-Yissumah be-Hinukh," *Mayyim mi-Dalyav (Shenaton Mikhlelet Lifshitz)*, 5756, pp. 233-251. The second article is R. Ronen Lubitch, "Selidah, Sovlanut o Matiranut: Yahas ha-Yahadut le-Homoseksualiyut," *De'ot* 11 (August 2001), pp. 9-15. (See note 1 for the online references.)
3. I once met a rabbi who has the reputation of having written many *teshuvot* to Orthodox homosexuals, and I asked if he would publish any of them. He responded, "No. The community isn't ready." Others are worried about their own reputations; the author of a 300-page book on the halakhic implications of transsexual surgery confesses in his introduction that he had written it three years earlier, but waited to publish so that it would not be his first published work, "for understandable reasons." See R. Idan Ben-Ephraim, *Dor Tahapukhot* (Jerusalem, 5764), p. 10. As for publishers, R. Lubitch writes in his 2001 article, "I tried to publish my first article on this subject ten years ago; the refusal that I met on the part of various editors was based on these [three] basic assumptions."
4. R. Dr. Jonathan Sacks, "Foreword," in R. Chaim Rapoport, *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View* (London and Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2004), pp. vii-x; Dayan Berel Berkovits, "Preface," in *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xiv; R. Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, R. Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo, and Dr. Abba E. Borowich, "Approbations," in *Ibid.*, pp. xxi-xxiv.
5. R. Yona Reiss, director of the Beth Din of America, stated in 2004 that, to his knowledge, "in every case of a couple that had previously signed a pre-nuptial agreement and later came to divorce, there was a *get*." See Rachel Levmore, "The Pre-Nuptial Agreement for the Prevention of *Get*-Refusal," *JOEA Journal* V:4 (Summer 2005/Tammuz 5765), p. 7, note 11.
6. R. Mordechai Willig, cited in Jodi Bodner DuBow, "Breaking the Chains," *The Jewish Week*, May 29, 1998, p. 18.
7. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Human and Social Factor in Halakha," in his *Leaves of Faith, vol. 1: The World of Jewish Learning* (Ktav, 2003), chapter 8.
8. R. Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, "Orthodox Response To Same-Sex Marriage," *The Jewish Week*, March 26, 2004.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*

11. R. Weinreb, interviewed in Ira Rifkin, "Same Sex, Divergent Views" (cover story), *The Baltimore Jewish Times*, April 23, 2004, p. 68.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Cf. R. Rapoport, p. 116: "It is easy to condemn the far-removed homosexual who can easily be stereotyped in a negative manner. It is, however, very difficult for a humane person to vilify a friend whom he knows to be a good person. . . ."
14. R. Benjamin Hecht, "*Trembling Before G-d: Analyzing Homosexuality & Orthodoxy; Part II: The Nature Of Orthodoxy—Beyond Ritual,*" May 2004. R. Hecht's critiques of the movie's portrayal of Orthodoxy span eight articles, available at [www.nishma.org/articles/commentary/commentaryindex.html](http://www.nishma.org/articles/commentary/commentaryindex.html)
15. R. Aharon Feldman (who was interviewed in *Trembling*), as cited in R. Avi Shafran, "Dissembling Before G-d," *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, February 22, 2002.
16. The film's DVD includes a 40-minute feature of longer excerpts, entitled "More With the Rabbis."
17. See Adam Shlomo-Zalman Jessel, "Half the Story on Homosexuality," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 7, 2001, p. B9: "DuBowski denigrates the possibility that people can change the nature of their sexual attractions. The therapies mentioned in the film range from the draconian to the ridiculous—electric shock treatments, libido-controlling drugs, snapping oneself with a rubber band, and eating figs. Ignored are all the conventional tools of psychotherapy." The film's DVD does include brief mentions of reparative therapy by Jessel and Arthur Goldberg, co-director of *JONAH* (see below). But DuBowski admits that he deliberately gave the therapy little airtime; see Sarah Bronson, "The Film That Brought People Out," *Hadasah Magazine*, May 2004.
18. See, e.g., R. Shafran, *op. cit.* For some specifics, see R. Asher Lopatin, "What Makes a Book Orthodox? *Wrestling With God and Men* by Steve Greenberg," *The Edah Journal* 4:2 (Kislev 5765).
19. R. Todd Berman, "trembling," email in *Lookjed Digest* VI:28 (May 6, 2004). Available at [www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=3975&t=3961](http://www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=3975&t=3961). He recommends that Jewish educators see *Trembling*, despite his critiques, for this reason and two others: "2. The rabbinic figures in the film and on the second DVD present important models of how this issue may be dealt with. 3. Due to the film's widespread popularity, Jewish educators who choose not to see the film appear to be purposely ignoring the pain faced by many members of the community."
20. R. Haskel Lookstein, cited in Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "The 'Trembling' Phenomenon," *The Jewish Week*, November 9, 2001. Cf. the quote from R. Avi Weiss in Peter Ephross, "Film about Gay Orthodox Jews Makes Waves As It Makes Rounds," *JTA*, November 21, 2001.
21. Born in 1963 in Manchester, R. Rapoport attended the Yeshivot of Manchester and Gateshead in England, Torat Emet in Jerusalem, and the Central Lubavitch Yeshiva in Brooklyn. He also earned an MA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies from London University. Now living in London, he is rabbi of the Ilford Synagogue, Dean of Machon Mayim Chaim, and advisor to the Chief

- Rabbi on medical ethics. Though he sometimes gives *shiurim* in New York, R. Rapoport is not yet well-known in American Orthodox circles.
22. R. Chaim Rapoport, "Judaism and Homosexuality," *The Jewish Chronicle*, February 11, 2000, p. 27. (See note 1 for the online reference.) Reprinted in the book, pp. 101-104.
  23. Over the course of the book, R. Rapoport manages to raise points of contention with virtually every contemporary Orthodox rabbi who has written about homosexuality (as of 2001). But he does so respectfully, singling out individual sentences and explaining why he thinks they are incorrect.
  24. R. Aharon Feldman, "A Letter to a Homosexual Baal Teshuva," *The Jerusalem Letter*, March 24, 1998; R. J. David Bleich, "AIDS: A Jewish Perspective," in his *Bioethical Dilemmas: A Jewish Perspective* (Ktav, 1998), p. 136. (For the online references, see note 1.)
  25. I do not mean to imply any lack of sympathy on the part of reparative therapists. I am sure all qualified therapists feel sympathy for their clients. However, among the rabbis in Israel writing from a reparative perspective, there seems to be less sympathy for Orthodox homosexuals. Perhaps this stems from a lack of therapeutic training.
  26. JONAH's website states this clearly: "[O]ur point of view [is] that homosexuality is a same-sex attraction disorder which can be alleviated through a variety of change efforts." See "Online Library" at [www.jonahweb.org](http://www.jonahweb.org). In the "Our Stories & Letters" section of the site, the goal is described as "to attempt to recover your God-given innate heterosexuality in the current politically correct climate (which unfortunately promotes homosexuality as merely an alternative life style and an unchangeable characteristic of the human personality)." Unlike NARTH, whose approach is that every homosexual should have the right to reparative therapy, JONAH seems to believe that every homosexual can indeed be effectively transformed.
  27. JONAH offers many articles on its website (see previous note). The Atzat Nefesh website, [www.atzat-nefesh.org](http://www.atzat-nefesh.org), is primarily in Hebrew but includes some material in English as well.
  28. See, e.g., R. Barry Freundel, "Homosexuality and Judaism," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (RJJ)*, Volume XI (Spring 1986), pp. 78-80; R. Reuven P. Bulka, *One Man, One Woman, One Lifetime: An Argument for Moral Tradition* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House, 1995); R. Shlomo Aviner, "Ein Davar Kaze Homo Dati," *Ma'ariv*, December 12, 2004. The Moriya website features *teshuvot* on homosexuality by R. Moshe Amiel, R. Eyal Cream, and R. Shmuel Eliyahu. The Kipa website includes additional *teshuvot* from the latter as well. All of the above assume the reparative perspective. (For the online references, see note 1.)
  29. See, e.g., Dr. Joseph Berger, "The Truth About Homosexuality," *Jewish Action* 55:3 (Spring 5755/1995), pp. 48-51 (see also his letter to the editor, *Tradition* 34:4 (Winter 2000), pp. 106-107); Adam Jessel, "Unsung Heroes," *Jewish Action* 63:3 (Spring 5763/2003), pp. 40-47; Roni Schorr, "Anashim Yekholim le-Hishtanot," *Tsohar* #21 (Adar Bet, 5765), pp. 123-137; Dr. Martin B. Koretzky, "Judaism, Psychology, and Homosexuality," *The Baltimore Jewish Times*, March 2001. Dr. Weisbord and Dr. Koretzky founded a sexual reorientation therapy program called Torah Approaches to

- Healing and Change (TAHC). See Koretzky, *op. cit.*, and Deborah Walike and Joe Eskenazi, "Rabbis Condemn Proliferation of 'Ex-Gay' Programs," *The Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, April 20, 2001.
30. *Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel* (American Psychological Association, 1999). Available at: [www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html#2](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html#2). Of course, diagnostic categories are not always immune from political debate.
  31. Similarly, R. Bleich writes, "it is estimated that as many as a third of all homosexuals may ultimately be cured" ("Transsexual Surgery and Ambiguous Genitalia," in his *Judaism and Healing: Halakhic Perspectives* (Ktav, 1981), p. 72). Exaggerated claims that "everyone can change" appear in R. Aviner, *op. cit.*, and Schorr, *op. cit.* For a hashkafic rebuttal of such claims, see R. Azriel Ariel, "Kol ha-Anashim Yekholim le-Hishtanot?" *Tsohar* #21 (Adar Bet, 5765), pp. 139-141. True, if one accepts the existence of individuals with a deep-seated, if not innate, homosexual orientation and identity, he would need to deal with the social and theological implications of the Torah's demand for a life of celibacy. Indeed, R. Rapoport briefly discusses what he calls "the perceived unreasonableness" (pp. 21-22, 34). However, this is not my topic here.
  32. R. Feldman, *op. cit.*
  33. See, e.g., Dr. Baruch Kahana, "Al Dat, Chevra u-Netiyot Hafukhot," *Tsohar* #22 (Tammuz 5765), pp. 205-209. In a letter to the editor of the *Jerusalem Post* (available at [www.tremblingbeforeg-d.com/react/jerusalem\\_post2.html](http://www.tremblingbeforeg-d.com/react/jerusalem_post2.html)), Abba E. Borowich, M.D. and Naomi S. Mark, A.C.S.W reject Adam Jessel's criticism of *Trembling before G-d* for not including success stories of conversion therapy. They argue that this therapy is not a viable option (with arguments similar to those mentioned above), and conclude, "Perhaps change is possible, but it remains unclear that there is a technique that works repeatedly in a manner that can be reproduced. What is clear is that there are terrible consequences for people who are misled." See also the most-quoted article in the recent literature on Orthodoxy and homosexuality, Dr. Joel B. Wolowelsky and R. Dr. Bernard L. Weinstein, "Initial Religious Counseling for a Male Orthodox Adolescent Homosexual," *Tradition* 29:2 (Winter 1995), pp. 49-55: "Halakha's opposition to the pro-homosexuality campaign being waged in our secular society does not target the claim that homosexual impulses are normal. On the other hand, halakha's position is that the normalcy of an impulse is not its license. On the contrary, the ability to retreat from one's natural impulses is at times the hallmark of mental health and halakhically ethical conduct." More recently, at a conference of the Amiel Institute for Rabbinic Training, R. Dr. Weinstein gave a lecture on the medical aspects of homosexuality. He observed that while Orthodox attitudes to homosexuals are often based on the assumption that homosexuality is a tendency that can be changed, "Most therapists believe that this assumption is not correct." See Amiram Barkat, "Orthodox Rabbis Break Ground in Discussion on Homosexuality," *Haaretz*, January 2, 2004. (See note 1 for the online references.)
  34. In a long footnote (pp. 196-198), R. Rapoport analyzes the ruling of R. Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Mosheh, Even ha-Ezer*, IV, no. 113) that if a



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- woman discovers after marrying that her husband is a practicing homosexual, the marriage has not taken effect and there is no need for a *get*.
35. R. Feldman agrees with this *pesak* and attributes it to the Brisker Rav, R. Yitshak Ze'ev ha-Levi Soloveitchik. See R. Feldman's interview in "More With the Rabbis" on the DVD of *Trembling Before G-d*.
  36. See my article, "Childless or Childfree?," *Le'ela*, December 2001, pp. 43-50. Available at [www.nishmat.net/article.php?id=122](http://www.nishmat.net/article.php?id=122)
  37. R. Feldman, "A Letter to a Homosexual Baal Teshuva," *op. cit.*
  38. For example, "I hope it will not come across as patronizing, but I do empathize with your plight. It makes some of my own challenges appear insignificant and petty" (p. 115). The book's subtitle displays humility as well: not "The Authentic Orthodox View" but "An Authentic Orthodox View." In the concluding chapter, R. Rapoport begins by apologizing: "I am sorry if I have disappointed the keen reader. One may have set out to read this book with the intention of solving all the problems yet, having read it, will realize that none of them have been completely solved. Indeed, it was not my aim in writing this book to provide an answer for all the questions. Rather, in a sense, it was my aim to provide many thought-provoking questions for those who assumed that they had all the answers or, worse still, thought that there were no questions at all" (p. 134).
  39. The Wolowelsky-Weinstein article is a rare exception, but some of it is limited to counseling an adolescent.
  40. R. Yuval Cherlow, "Homoseksualiyut, Kappara, ve-Hakamat Mishpakha," *She'elot u-Teshuvot OnLine*, 5 Kislev 5762. (See note 1 for the online reference.)
  41. R. Rapoport's footnotes are well-documented and chock-full of references and related topics. Among the many issues he discusses are: whether *arayot* should be rationalized or not (pp. 159-160); the larger context of *onah*, a husband's obligation to satisfy his wife (pp. 195-196); the possibility according to some *poskim* of masturbation to avoid *arayot* (pp. 141-142); and the intriguing story of R. Feinstein's opposition to *Perushei ha-Torah le-Rabbi Yehuda be-Hassid* (pp. 154-156).