

*Chair Jewish Council for Public Affairs
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Teens Included

In his story "JOFA Readies New Agunah Push," (Feb. 9), Jonathan Mark states that the high school students attending the JOFA Conference will be "excused from the agunot sessions..." This was not so. In fact, the teens actively participated in an agunah session titled, "When Push Comes to Shove, It's No Longer Love: Building Healthy Relationships."

The session opened with a film produced by Jewish Women International that addresses abuse and violence among teens. Though it deals with extreme forms of such behavior, it served as an effective trigger for discussion.

Miriam Schacter, a psychoanalyst and the session's facilitator, suggested that we close this session to all but the teens, in the hope that among their peers they would feel comfortable to speak freely of the complex issues and feelings the film arouses. And open up they did, as both the male and female participants engaged in a thoughtful and lively dialogue.

Robin Bodner

*Executive Director Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA)
Manhattan*

(02/23/2007)

Changing The Rules

Rabbi Barry Leff's response to Rabbi Paul Plotkin's laudable attempt to promote traditional halacha in the Conservative movement is an example of the attitudes that led me to leave the Conservative movement. ("Don't Eat That Pizza," Feb. 9)

The recent Conservative decision regarding homosexuality demonstrated once again that a large segment of Conservative Judaism values subjective judgments of morality over traditional halachic analysis. While I respect this approach, and I believe compassion is an essential element of Judaism, I believe that respect for the divinity of Torah and Jewish law requires that God's law be determined by classical halachic analysis.

Rabbi Leff says, "Every once in a while we have to bring halacha into line with what people are doing or we lose respect for the system." Rabbi Plotkin's response is on point: "If tomorrow everyone is eating pig, do you change the rules? Where does that end?"

I believe we must respects all Jews, regardless of their beliefs and practices, but that we must also seeks to draw all Jews closer to proper observance of Torah and mitzvot. "Bringing halacha into line with what people are doing" does nothing to promote respect for, much less commitment to, halachic Judaism.

Rabbi Noah Gradofsky

Long Beach, N.Y.

(02/23/2007)

Would Policy Hold?

In "Don't Eat That Pizza" (Feb. 9), much debate is cited as to whether or not the Conservative movement should adopt a new position that would "restrict what Conservative Jews may or may not eat in non-kosher restaurants." Although briefly alluded to towards the end of the article, what the article does not sufficiently discuss is what practical change (if any), the adoption of such a policy would bring. Are the rabbis cited in the article so confident that their voice will carry the weight necessary among their followers to bring about the change in practice such a policy hopes to create?

In a movement where the rabbis themselves hold as a core value that halacha itself can change with the times, I for one would be curious to see how quick Conservative Jews would be to follow the edict of their spiritual leaders on this one.

David Flamholz