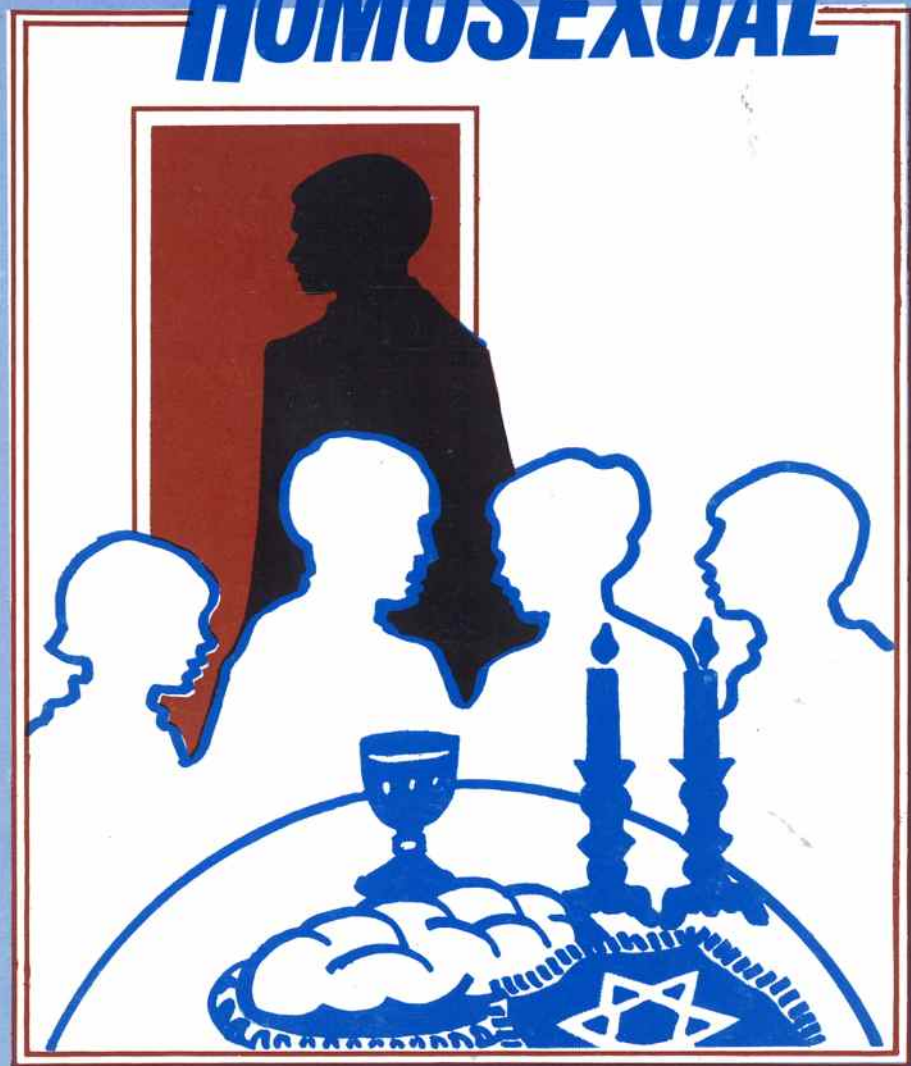


# **JEWISH** *and* **HOMOSEXUAL**



**DR WENDY GREENGROSS**

## INTRODUCTION

Jewish tradition prohibits homosexual relations. That is a basic statement which cannot be denied. The Torah prohibits sodomy and Talmudic law extends the prohibition to associated, including lesbian, acts. One may search the sources for more liberal tendencies. It is true that the halacha does not seem to recognise a category of 'homosexual' as such but the mainstream of Jewish tradition, as it is generally understood, is unequivocal in its view of homosexuality as an 'unacceptable perversion'.

Occasionally a rabbi encounters an issue on which both reason and conscience place him at odds with contemporary understanding of mainstream Jewish tradition. (Mamzerut, the law which stigmatises the child of certain unions, might well be another example.) It is very uncomfortable to find oneself at odds with one's tradition; fortunately it happens only rarely but, when it does happen, the conflict must be faced. Homosexuality is, for me, such an issue. The condemnation of the homosexual seems to me to belong to another world — a world which had more rigid ideas of what is 'natural', which insisted on marriage as necessary even for those for whom marriage was unsuitable, and which demanded procreation even of those who were undesirous of parenthood. Above all, it belongs to a world which dealt with its fear of that which is different by seeking to eradicate the object of the fear rather than by examining the nature of the fear itself.

Some time ago a group of interested rabbis and laymen met over a period of months to discuss the subject of homosexuality. Slowly I began to realise how I, as a heterosexual congregational rabbi, unconsciously exclude people from my congregation. As a happy family man, my community attracts similar families. And the more my synagogue becomes a place for happy families, the more many of those who do not fit into that mould must feel uncomfortable. Amongst them, undoubtedly, there will be homosexuals. Bachelors we try to "marry off". People who are afraid to reciprocate hospitality lest it be seen that their partner is of the same sex. Two women we might overlook, two men would be a shock and a communal talking point par excellence. But such people are Jews. Often they wish to live a Jewish life and participate in the Jewish community. Many would welcome the religious, educational and social facilities of the synagogue. But the very pattern of congregational life — let alone the jokes, the gossip and the cruel remarks, — push away and exclude. I came to realise that for a minority of homosexuals Jewish communal life is possible providing they keep their homosexuality a secret; for the majority the hostility, both real and imagined, is too much. In this manner Jews are cut off from the Jewish community and the community is cut off from their fellow Jews.

This book, therefore, seems to me to be of the utmost importance. Its views will be shared by a considerable number of people, although not by all

Reform rabbis or lay leaders. Indeed the length of time it has taken to reach publication is a graphic indication of the anxiety the subject raises. It is perhaps the first public statement within Anglo-Jewry, questioning the exclusion of homosexuals from the community. It underlines the fact that homosexuals may lead long and caring relationships like heterosexuals. It explains that homosexuality is not a perverse choice, an option which the homosexual need not take. It stresses that homosexuals are no more likely to be paedophiliacs than heterosexuals. It is an assertion of the need for the heterosexual community to accept homosexuals into their midst. The argument is not that, since the Jewish community includes many sinners, the homosexual should not be singled out for special disapproval. Rather that we now regard homosexuality as no more necessarily sinful than heterosexuality and therefore no more of a disqualification from either participation or leadership. It is true that homosexuals may not be able to fulfil all of the traditional obligations of a Jew but there is a profound distinction between those who refuse to fulfil their obligations and those who are unable to do so.

It is easy for a liberal tradition to be liberal with itself — to permit itself to do those things it wants to do. The real test of a liberal tradition, the reason why the issue of homosexuality is such a significant test for Reform Judaism, is whether it can permit other people to do what they want and be what they are, even if the majority does not — cannot — follow the same path. Jewish legal tradition, as currently interpreted, opposed homosexuality. However, Jewish experience has led us to recognise a special obligation to embattled and oppressed minority groups. Furthermore, an enormous new body of learning in this particular area has come to us in the post-Freudian period and our legal tradition does recognise the need for change in response to new knowledge or circumstances. It is uncomfortable to fly in the face of long held prejudices but on this particular issue it seems to me to be imperative that we trust experience, new knowledge and the dictates of reason and conscience and say: Judaism may have condemned homosexuals in the past but we can no longer continue to do so. It is time to welcome our fellow Jews into the community of which they have as much right as we to be a part.

RABBI TONY BAYFIELD

In 1976 a group of Reform rabbis and other interested people came together to look at the problems and difficulties in the community which were apparently associated with homosexuality. The following year, after many meetings and discussions, it was decided that there was a need for the problems to be aired, because it was felt that no solutions would be found until those concerned had had an opportunity to look at their involvement, and for decisions then to be made which would try to meet the needs of everybody concerned. It was felt that the time had come to make some preliminary statement in public of the Jewish position in this difficult area, which has for centuries been refused open discussion within established Jewish circles.

It has taken me nearly three years to produce this short booklet and I have tried to make it as honest a statement of the position as I can. I realise that in writing it, I am going against the teachings of the ages and some may find the discussion distasteful and unnecessary, but I have no wish to shock or offend or purposely to encourage destructive anti-social behaviour. My attitudes have been formed by my own personal experiences of speaking with fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, children and friends, who find themselves in distress because one of their number apparently refuses to conform to established sexual codes and practices, and have no-one to turn to for help.

Although many people are not as strictly observant as they were in the past, there is still a deep cultural heritage which holds Jews together and makes them value very highly the joys and rewards of good family life. As rules become looser, so individual behaviour becomes freer; and as a result, many families have to cope with behaviour which a generation or two ago would have been totally proscribed and totally unacceptable. Nowadays there often seem to be conflicting standards which leave family and friends confused and anxious about the best way of solving problems.

I have written this booklet so that there shall be a freer and more open discussion of the subject of homosexuality among the Jewish community. Many will disagree with my assumptions and my arguments and will think that it is better to refuse discussion, so that those people who are disobeying codes of established procedure, will once again get into line and behave properly.

I believe that this is unlikely to happen, and my concern is to help those who are anxious and uncertain because of the seemingly 'wrong' behaviour of someone that they love and respect. They require help, and I believe that this help can only come about, if they themselves are allowed to look at the problem, understand what is happening and begin to make appropriate choices for themselves.

I therefore write this booklet, hoping that it will be of aid to the many people who find themselves in the dilemma of discovering that an ordinary member of their family is, or might be, a homosexual.

I wish to thank the other members of the working party for their help and support; Jack Babuscio, for allowing me to quote agencies and help organisations listed in his book "We Speak for Ourselves" and Archie Kamlisch for his many helpful suggestions; and my family for their patience during the many hours of rewriting.

It is important that we as Jews do not try to sweep problems under the carpet and pretend that they do not exist.

If there are problems within the community, we need to understand the nature of the problems and the reasons why they have arisen, as well as the effect that they are having on the individual and on the community as a whole.

The problems associated with homosexuality are only just beginning to surface, but we can no longer ignore them.

Parents are often confused and anxious when they find that a child is homosexual. Families do not know how to respond, and the wider community seems to reflect these feelings, and is equally uncertain as to the best way of coping with an individual who is apparently flouting long-established laws and traditions.

Parents, families and friends need help at these times, but unfortunately, many do not have the help and support that previous generations received from an extended family, and they are left to cope alone with their fears, their anxieties and their uncertainties.

No-one should have to cope with problems by themselves. No-one should be put in a position of being afraid to ask for help because of the shame of their own circumstances.

The problem of homosexuality is only just beginning to be aired and accepted as a challenge. Creating an atmosphere in which it is safe to acknowledge our weaknesses instead of always having to pretend to be strong and self-reliant and successful, may help us to a healthier way of life. Accepting each other for what we are, rather than what we try to be, will ultimately increase our sense of responsibility to each other, and lead us to a more comfortable ethos and a more honest community.

## CHAPTERS

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## CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY

Family life has been a central concept of traditional Judaism for many generations, and because of this, it has been generally assumed that it is the ambition of every Jewish daughter to be a Jewish wife and mother, and the wish of every Jewish son to be a Jewish husband and father.

This may have been true in the past, but we are now living in a rapidly changing world, in which far reaching adaptations in social roles and attitudes are taking place.

There used to be a very clear split between the home-making role of women and the bread-winning role of men, but the boundaries are now much less clearly defined. Smaller families, labour-saving devices, and equal education and job opportunities for women, have encouraged the questioning of many of the basic assumptions of gender role. Stereotypes are gradually being discarded and men and women allowed to explore their real needs, instead of being cast into pre-ordained patterns of behaviour. Many enjoy slotting into the established community, but others feel uncomfortable in trying to conform to traditional expectations.

We know from literature, that many men and women in the past felt constrained by the social patterns forced upon them. Some men hated their jobs, many good Jewish mothers felt exploited and under-valued in the role that they had to accept. Social change has begun to give us a freedom to look for self-fulfilment, and a chance to adopt new and more appropriate roles in society.

Some women still opt for the role of wife and mother; some wish for a career. Many combine the two. Men, in the same way, find that changing social patterns, no longer force them into traditional male jobs. They, too, are being allowed to make choices, and to help with child rearing, and enter the caring professions, and take their share in home-making, if they want to.

Improved communication and travel have forced us to live within wider communities and encouraged us to try and make appropriate choices about our own way of life. The rights and needs of individuals are proclaimed to be paramount, and we increasingly believe that we each have the right to seek our own personal fulfilment in work and in personal relationships, as long as these are not damaging to other people.

## SEXUAL ROLES

This is also true of sexuality. In the past, an assumption was made that everyone wanted to be married to and loved by someone of the opposite sex. Those who felt uncomfortable in their sexual role were forced to obey the sexual rules, as others were forced to conform to equally inappropriate social roles. Nowadays, as we learn more about sexuality, and have more understanding of sexual needs, sexual incompatibility is no longer tolerated uncomplainingly, and wives, as well as husbands, expect sexual fulfilment in marriage.

We are learning that sexuality and the expression of sexual love are not clear cut, and we are beginning to realise that most men and women have the capacity to love members of their own sex, as well as those of the opposite sex, and only comparatively few can love only one or the other.

Previous generations held onto the myth that all men were brave and strong, and that only women could be gentle and vulnerable. We now accept that many men possess, and are proud of, characteristics that used to be called feminine. Women need no longer be ashamed of having masculine traits.

Sexuality, similarly, no longer fits into water-tight, easily defined compartments. We all have a mixture of heterosexual and homosexual feelings, although these usually remain sub-conscious and unexpressed.

Sexuality is a biological part of our make-up, and sexual feelings are part of our nature. Sex is a means of expressing love and tenderness and caring, as well as a vehicle for self-exploration, self-learning, and the understanding of deep psychological needs.

Feelings for and about other people are natural and normal, although most of us only give expression to these feelings within a marriage relationship. The conscious awareness of these feelings and of sexual needs, do not appear at any particular stage of life. Most feel the first awakening of sexual passion about the age of puberty or adolescence. Others seem to have less urgent sexual needs, and may not experience these feelings until later in life; others can clearly remember strong sexual arousal when they were quite young.

Some adults say that they knew at a very early age that their desires were for those of the same sex as themselves, and that their orientation could not and would not change. Some arrive very gradually at the realisation that it will never be possible for them to enjoy sexual experience with someone of the opposite sex. Others find that homosexual feelings and needs present after years of heterosexual marriage, or after marriage break up.

It is, of course, normal for all children to pass through a homosexual

phase of development, when they prefer the company of friends of their own sex, and when children and young adolescents were educated in single-sex schools, the love, the 'pash', the 'crush' that was felt for someone of the same sex was thought to be a natural and normal part of development.

Most boys and girls pass from this stage into one of heterosexual feelings, which gradually move through calf love into a more mature inter-personal relationship, which may or may not include sexual expression. Homosexuals, however, continue to direct their loving feelings to someone of the same sex and will experience a similar maturing of feelings if they are given the opportunity to explore a range of inter-personal relationships which, like heterosexuals, may or may not include overt physical experience.

In spite of all the talk of the "permissive society", and although there has been an overall change in sexual attitudes during the past two or three decades, there are still many people who feel that sexuality is something that is intensely private, and should not be openly discussed.

Safer contraception and the removal of the fear of unwanted pregnancy, has given many couples an opportunity to explore the physical and the emotional pleasures of sex more fully, but even in these so called "enlightened days", there are still some people who experience anxiety and embarrassment about sexual exploration, even within marriage.

Many still frown on any experience of sexuality outside marriage, so it is not surprising to find that there may be strong negative feelings of disgust and fear about the love that a man or woman may have for someone of their own sex, even though homosexual acts between consenting adults in private are no longer illegal in England and Wales.

An increasing number of homosexual men and women nowadays wish to "come out" and explain their sexual orientation to family and friends, but are afraid of the shock to those they love, and are fearful of permanent and complete rejection. These fears are unfortunately often fully justified.

Because homosexuality seems to undermine the foundations of family life and because Judaism appears to proscribe any expression of homosexual feeling, Jewish families often have particular difficulty in coming to terms with the problem. In spite of this, there are many homosexuals who are Jewish, and are members of Jewish families, and they and their families need help to cope and to understand the feelings.

The expression of sexuality is gradually beginning to be accepted as a good and necessary part of human personality. Some people think that sex should take place only within marriage, and try to impose their standards and beliefs on others; but many believe that, although the institution of marriage

should be upheld, it is the quality of the relationship that is important and not its legal status.

Sex and marriage often go together, but they are unfortunately not an indissoluble partnership. Sex and sexual feelings are a healthy and normal part of human personality, and some people need to give expression to this side of their nature, irrespective of their marital status, if they are to be able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives. This does not mean that indiscriminate sexual experience or promiscuity is to be encouraged, for it is usually safer for sexuality to be part of a caring relationship, even if the relationship itself is comparatively ephemeral. The full and complete expression of sexual love occasions extreme vulnerability, and if there is no caring, those involved can be exploited or hurt.

Some people cannot give themselves freely, fully and confidently to their partner, until they are married, or engaged or permanently committed. Others may have more urgent sexual needs, and find that unreleased sexual tensions mar and diminish the overall quality of relationships and life itself. Sexuality is not only a physical need, and many find that sexual expression helps them to love their partner more completely, as well as providing insight and understanding of their own needs and feelings.

This is as true for homosexuals as it is for heterosexuals.

Some men and women who cannot find suitable partners are able to live celibate lives. Others find celibacy impossible, and society is increasingly allowing adults to make personal decisions about their own way of life.

This personal freedom to make appropriate choices can only work if it goes hand in hand with a sense of responsibility, and decisions need to be made with an understanding of the implications of the choice for all who are involved, and a willingness to accept the consequences and results of the decision, and must apply to both heterosexuals and homosexuals alike.

A society in which one individual is allowed to exploit another, or to use another as an object for the achievement of their own satisfaction, whether this be in business or in communal affairs or in sexuality, is unhealthy and will eventually destroy itself.

A healthy society encourages interdependence and mutuality, and discourages any activity whereby one person can unilaterally meet his or her own needs at the expense of another, and this applies to homosexuals and heterosexuals alike.

## WHAT "MAKES" A HOMOSEXUAL

No-one knows the exact incidence of homosexuality. Approximate guesses are made that probably between five and ten per cent of adults are entirely or mainly homosexual. There is no reason to believe that it is not equally common among men and among women.

One of the reasons why the numbers are so unclear, is that the term covers a variety of people, from those who are committed to a full, permanent relationship, to those who sometimes feel themselves attracted to someone of the same sex, but do not do anything about it.

A homosexual is a man or woman who experiences sexual feelings for a person of the same sex. Some can only form relationships with members of their own sex, others can fall in love or have sexual feelings for those of the opposite sex as well. These people are usually called bi-sexual. Homosexuals often refer to themselves as 'gay' and to heterosexuals as 'straight'.

Many bisexual or homosexual people try to deny their basic homosexual feelings, and marry and have children in an attempt to conform to the pattern of the community. This is sometimes successful; occasionally, it results in miserable failure, as they come to realise that they cannot respond to the loving feelings and gestures of their partners.

The cause of homosexuality is not known. It may be due to the way that a child is brought up. It may be due to genes that were handed on from grandparents and great grandparents. It may be due to the influences of society. It may be a combination of some of these factors, but it may be due to none.

There seem to be as many theories as there are theorists, and although some of the theories fit some people, it is obvious from their diversity that the real cause is still unknown. The truth that we may eventually be forced to accept, is that homosexuality is as natural and normal for some people as heterosexuality is for others.

Mothers, particularly Jewish mothers, have been held responsible for most things, good and bad, in their time, so it is not surprising that some theories blame mothers, although in this age of liberation when men and women should have equal opportunities, fathers also get their fair share of the blame.

A boy who has a weak mother and an aggressive father may, it is said, identify with his mother and become homosexual, because he is afraid of becoming like his father. If he has a strong mother and a weak father, he

may become afraid of women and therefore unable as an adult to make a sexual relationship with someone whom he may identify as frightening. Girls may be frightened by strong, aggressive fathers and be unwilling to relate to men when they are adult, because they are afraid of a repetition of the violence or exploitation that they have experienced when young, and the daughter of a strong mother and weak father may so identify with her mother that she despises men and can only relate to other women. Boys may be too feminine if they are brought up by women, and girls not feminine enough if they see only men. A boy may be unwilling to compete against his successful father, and a girl against a powerful and successful mother. Children may have homosexual attentions pressed on them when young—or be seduced by someone of the same sex. There are numerous other reasons put forward.

We probably all know of gay people who fit into one of these categories, but we probably also know of many who lived through these and other strange circumstances and are heterosexual. We all know families in which only one child turns out to be gay, whilst brothers and sisters are straight.

Sometimes boys or girls feel that they are unable to live up to the sexual expectations of society. They may find it difficult or threatening to make deep friendships with those of the opposite sex; or they may find that they are unable to perform sexually, and live up to the physical expectations of their partners. Because of this, some of these young men and women quite wrongly think of themselves as gay. Others know with a deep and firm conviction that they can only be physically attracted to and by someone of the same sex.

Some homosexual men are easily identifiable because of their mannerisms and feminine behaviour; some lesbians stand out because they are butch or simulate men; but the largest number of homosexuals are exactly like other people and are no more identifiable than other minorities, such as vegetarians, or those who enjoy music, or those who play bridge.

## **SOCIAL ATTITUDES**

Unfortunately, most social attitudes towards homosexuality are illogical and arbitrary.

Many would like to believe that sexuality is like traffic control and that everyone could get into the right lane, if only they would make the effort, and that those who do move outside the lines laid down by society, need to be punished and shown the errors of their ways.

Although sexual behaviour can be controlled, sexual feelings are part of our essential, biological nature, and we can no more be in control of our

feelings about sexual attraction, than we can be in control of our feelings about food, or about animals, or about air travel.

The use of the word 'Queer' which is as offensive as 'Yid' or 'Jewboy', epitomises the attitude of many people, and the assumption is often made that it is normal to be heterosexual, and abnormal to be homosexual, with all the emotional overtones that abnormality implies.

Unfortunately, there is still great ignorance about homosexuality, and myth and rumour abound. Many people imagine that anyone who is homosexual is also a child molester, which is as illogical as imagining that every heterosexual man is intent on raping little girls.

With increasing knowledge, public opinion is slowly changing, although there are still many diehards who would rather cling to their prejudices than try to understand the true situation. Homosexuals are people, and it is just as unrealistic to talk about them en masse, as it is unrealistic to talk about 'men' or 'women' en masse. Homosexuals are individuals, and we are doing ourselves a disservice if we allow ourselves to be 'conned' into believing in the stereotypes.



THE CLOSED MIND SYNDROME

We all tend to make sweeping assumptions about a variety of topics and often pronounce most strongly on the things about which we know the least.

Most of us are fairly limited in our knowledge of sexuality, and have only our own personal experiences to go on, and as a result, we tend to assume that other people's sexual needs are similar to our own, and that they could or should behave as 'sensibly' as we do ourselves, if only they would try. Also, our upbringing has tended to stress the normality and rightness of love between man and woman, even if it frequently appears unsuccessful and the cause of great personal unhappiness.

From this vantage point it is difficult for anyone who is 'straight' to completely identify with the feelings of a homosexual and understand that it is not possible for them to be 'turned on' by someone of the opposite sex, or be able to accept that their loving sexual feelings are always towards someone of the same sex.

Sometimes this insensitivity is based on misunderstanding, but sometimes it is based on fear, and a denial and repression of our own instinctual feelings. This is in part due to the inherent bisexuality of most heterosexuals, and this in turn is often misunderstood.

We unfortunately use only one set of words, homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality, to describe two quite different sets of meanings. Sometimes the words denote overt sexual behaviour; at other times the words denote internal feelings which are never expressed; and occasionally the same words are used for any one of a whole range of behaviour or attitudes that come between action and feeling.

At the same time, it is necessary to stress again the difference between sexual feelings and sexual behaviour.

Most men, even those who are most happily married and who would not consider the possibility of infidelity, find that they are sometimes aroused by an attractive woman. Many women, similarly, "fancy" an attractive looking man, without there being any suggestion that they would under any circumstances consider or allow any sort of physical contact.

These feelings are normal and natural and almost universal and should not be confused, in any way, with sexual behaviour.

Similarly, most people occasionally find themselves attracted to someone of the same sex, without there being any suggestion that these people are homosexual, or that they are ever likely to indulge in homosexual behaviour.

However, unfortunately, because of the way that most of us have been brought up, we tend to be ashamed of these feelings we have for another of the same sex, almost as though we felt that in accepting our feelings, we might be tempted into behaviour we know to be wrong.

This is really as illogical as believing that an acknowledgement of another's attractiveness is the first unavoidable step to marital infidelity. It is, however, one explanation of why we do tend to deny and repress some of our own loving feelings, and how, as a result of being unable to accept these in ourselves, tend to fear them excessively in other people.

So it is sometimes true that those who are most vicious in their hatred of homosexuality and most vociferous in their loathing, are actually those who are unable to understand or accept their own normal loving feelings for members of their own sex.

Feelings are often based on gut reaction, which may be quite markedly at variance with our intellectual pretensions.

We know this to be the case in the matter of food. Most people dislike some food or another. It may be eggs that are undercooked, or it may be tapioca pudding, or it may be liver. We may intellectually know that these foods are good and healthy, but our gut reaction is 'ugh'. We may conversely find it difficult to stay away from the chocolate, the cream cakes or the cigarettes, however much we intellectually know these things to be bad for us.

Because we are forever talking about food and our attitudes towards it, most of us tend to accept these paradoxical feelings, but we are far less comfortable with our paradoxical feelings about sex, and are often uncertain as to whether our responses are 'right'. We may be particularly worried to find that our gut reactions are quite different to the way we want to think.

We live in a world which foists upon us, whether we like it or not, a great deal of explicit sexuality. Most of the time, most of us endeavour to cope intellectually as sensibly as possible, with a barrage of titillation and excitement, but if we are honest with ourselves, we realise that we are aroused by some things, and repulsed by others; violence, deformity and sexuality have a wide range of effects on different people, and it is necessary for each of us to be in touch with our own feelings, and be able to accept them, even if these conflict with responses that we would like to have. If we are unable to understand and accept our own feelings, we may be extremely disturbed and angry when we find them in other people.

Most people are stimulated to a certain extent by overt sexuality, whether this be a film or on stage, in books, magazines or pictures. Different groups of people find some situations much more exciting than others. Most heterosexuals find watching heterosexual sex titillating and will also often be 'turned on' by homosexuality portrayed by the opposite sex to themselves. They tend to be least aroused by the overt homosexual sexuality of their own sex.

Homosexuals, on the other hand, tend to be most aroused by the homosexual sexuality of their own sex, and least by the homosexual sexuality of the opposite sex. It is perhaps surprising that most homosexuals find watching heterosexual sex stimulating.

It would seem that these reactions are basic to people's nature, and need to be identified and accepted if the individual is to be free to make the appropriate choices. Unfortunately, some deny their own gut feelings, and try to operate entirely from an intellectual position. This may create conflicts which can become intolerable, because the denial is difficult to maintain; and the conflict between that which they want to believe, and that which they actually feel, increases tension and anxiety.

Others react quite differently and respond to their gut feelings, and rationalise and intellectualise them, believing that because they feel something, those feelings must be good instincts on which to build a way of life. These are the people who find homosexuality disturbing, offensive or distasteful, and who then go on to say, 'Because I feel that this conduct is unnatural or wrong or unpleasant, it is unnatural or wrong or unpleasant'. Jews have recent memories of groups responding blindly to gut feelings against them, and we, also, see examples of this rationalisation of gut feelings in demonstrations of racist behaviour.

It is salutary to remember that homosexuals were also the object of persecution during the Holocaust, and 'queer bashing' often takes an unsavoury place in areas where fear is whipped up against innocent minorities.

What do homosexuals actually want? Do they want to change? Do they want to be different? Do they only experience sexual feelings for someone of their own sex? Do they love as others love? Can they ever have all their needs met by one partner?

We all have two basic needs: The need to be loved and the need to give love. Our ability to meet these depends partly on our own feelings as to whether we feel lovable, and partly on our feelings for and about other people. The love we feel for others is instinctual and composed of many different components, of which sexual love is but one.

We recognise and accept that most people "fall in love", in spite of themselves, and that some fall in love with quite unsuitable men or women.

We need to accept, similarly, that some people are attracted to and fall in love with another of the same sex as themselves quite involuntarily.

We also need to accept that homosexuality is just one aspect of a person's total make-up; and maturity and the way needs are met, depends on their total personality rather than sexual orientation.

Possibly the most difficult lesson that heterosexuals have to learn is that by far the largest proportion of gays are entirely satisfied with their sexual orientation, and have no wish to change. Homosexuality is not a problem for most homosexuals. A proportion do have problems, but these are in the main due to society's attitudes towards them. Their difficulties are similar to those of other minorities who have to live within an alien world.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHANGING LIFE STYLES OF SOCIETY

The attitude of society to homosexuality seems to be undergoing a change, but it is a slow process, because prohibitions and fear have been with us for so long.

Until very recently, governments and religions alike encouraged couples to 'be fruitful and multiply', and anything that mitigated against this such as homosexuality was an anathema.

We are, after all, only just beginning to fully accept contraception and the right of married couples to choose to be childless.

We have already noted that people go through a homosexual stage of development in childhood or early adolescence, and society as a whole tends to be worried that many heterosexuals could stick at this stage and not move onto heterosexuality, if they were given the impression that homosexuality was good and acceptable.

Because of such fears, positive information tends to be kept away from the young, and we find that although sex education is given in some schools, few schools include information about homosexuality, and very few schools invite homosexuals into the classroom, or make any positive effort to help further understanding. Homosexual teachers often find themselves forbidden to talk about the subject, although there is never a similar ban on heterosexuals who wish to talk about sex and marriage.

Because of these fears and this overall disinclination to allow homosexuality as a possible sexual option; and because the early stirrings of sexuality occasion doubts and anxieties in many young people's minds, many young gays identify themselves as being different and abnormal and many in the early stages of self-discovery, believe themselves to be unlovable.

The media still tend to present homosexuality in terms of its stereotypes as objects of ridicule, derision, pity and scorn, and rarely show homosexuals as ordinary human beings, or ordinary human beings as homosexuals, although there are a small but increasing number of plays and documentaries which attempt some realistic exploration of the problem.

### THE LEGAL SITUATION

The present legal position adds to the confusion for the situation is quite

different for men and women. All men and women over the age of sixteen, being of sound mind, are allowed to decide for themselves whether or not they have sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex. Examples can be cited of sixteen or seventeen year olds being exploited or seduced by a man or woman much older than themselves, but as long as they are of different sexes, the law is unconcerned. The situation is quite different for homosexual men. Since 1969, consenting adults over the age of twenty one have been allowed to have sexual experience in private, but young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty one are still considered legally too young to make up their minds for themselves, and they and their partners could be subject to prosecution if such a relationship came to light. Homosexual relationships between adult women are never illegal, as at the time that the original laws were formulated, they were thought not to exist.

So the sixteen year old girl can legally be seduced, or exploited by a man, or can have sex with a man or woman of any age if she wants to, or is persuaded to, but the twenty year old man can only have sexual relationships with a woman, and is not allowed to give expression to his homosexual needs and feelings, however real these may be.

### *JEWISH ATTITUDES*

Our parents and our grand-parents expected their children to marry. Some girls couldn't or didn't marry, because they were not pretty enough, or rich enough, or talented enough, or simply because there were not enough boys to go round. If daughters didn't get married, they lived at home with their parents. There was no 'nachus' or joy to be had from grandchildren, but the unmarried daughter was an insurance policy for old age.

Nowadays, there are more choices. The majority of young men and women live away from their parent's home. Many opt for careers, for sexual relationships outside marriage, for travel and for job opportunities, and they no longer conform to the patterns and expectations of earlier generations.

In this matrix, in which grandchildren become fewer, and 'nachus' and joy more likely to be obtained from activities other than marriage, the homosexual relationship should cause few problems. On the other hand, friends still enquire from parents as to whether sons and daughters are engaged, and whether there are grandchildren and how many.

Jewish grandparents talk ceaselessly about their grandchildren, until those without descendants feel they could scream, and unmarried young men and women are infuriated by the well meant "Please God by you" wishes bestowed upon them at family weddings and engagements.

### *EPHEMERAL RELATIONSHIPS*

These negative attitudes, plus the lack of formal legal commitment, and the need for secrecy and the lack of choice in the selection of partners, force many gays to 'make do' with a partner, and this in turn often contributes to the ephemeral nature of homosexual relationships.

They may find themselves forced into visiting homosexual bars, clubs and discos in order to find friends, and may find it extremely difficult to find a partner who is not expecting immediate physical gratification. (The same is true in the heterosexual world, and many girls complain of the difficulty of finding a boy friend who does not on a first date expect sexual intercourse).

Because many gays have to maintain an apparently heterosexual front, and because it is difficult for them to openly enjoy the delights of non sexual love, they are often able to satisfy only their physical needs, and this tends to encourage promiscuity and to spread venereal disease. Most VD clinics report that homosexuals are over-represented among their patients.

These factors present serious difficulties for homosexuals, but there is hope as some sections of society become more understanding and more able to accept gay relationships.

Some people still frown on gay relationships, of men and women loving a member of their own sex and living with them, but often with a freer, more open society, gay relationships become accepted and acceptable. Individuals should be valued because of their nature, and by their ability to be kind and caring members of society, rather than by their role as husband or wife, father or mother.

Although homosexual relationships are sometimes more ephemeral than heterosexual ones, but with the increasing incidence of marriage breakdowns in the community, and with larger numbers of one-parent families, a loving, caring relationship, in which one individual respects and cherishes another, should be considered as a bonus for society.



## THE SHOCK PROBLEM FOR PARENTS

Because most parents are heterosexual, they make the assumption that their children will be heterosexual as well. Most parents want their children to fit into society and to be loved and valued by the community. They want their children to be a credit to them, and bring joy and happiness to them, and because family life is so important, parents also want their children to get married and have children themselves.

With these high and sometimes unrealistic expectations, it can be a terrible shock for parents to discover that a son or daughter is gay, and their original anguish may be made worse by anxiety as to how other members of the family or community might respond if they knew the whole, terrible truth. Will they be ostracised or blamed? Will they be pitied or cursed?

The stereotypes of Jewish family life seem to make homosexuality particularly difficult to accept. Jewish family life has historically been presented as being warm, loving and caring. Families consisted of parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren, aunts and uncles, cousins and nieces and nephews. The stories of the past spoke of arguments and quarrels; but there was also a great deal of love and respect, particularly for the older members of the family. Parents were hard working and self sacrificing, so that children could 'better themselves' through education, and the children having done so, married and had children themselves and nurtured and respected their elderly parents.

This model which invested parents with great power and responsibility for the outcome of their children's lives, is no longer appropriate, although the emotional content of the stereotype is still with us. Even though life has changed, parents sometimes imagine that they have the power and bear the responsibility for the outcome of a child's life. Many parents would like to take all the credit for a child's success; others blame themselves and feel guilty because a child apparently does not behave according to the rules. Another difficulty is that as families become smaller, there is a greater emotional investment in each child, and sometimes quite unrealistic demands for each child to fulfil traditional obligations.

The realisation that a child is gay, and will not marry or have children, conflicts with many of these expectations, and may make parents feel that they 'must have gone wrong somewhere', and that they are to blame and that they have failed.

The world in which most Jews live has changed, and parents no longer

have power to direct their children's lives, or the authority to pressurize their children to conform to parental expectations. Roles nowadays are less clearly defined, and because of this, much more difficult. Life was easier when the task of parents was to ensure that a son learnt a job or trade with which he could support a wife and family, and a daughter was capable of carrying out all the tasks and duties which are incumbent upon a Jewish wife and mother. The emphasis has changed, and parents nowadays have the responsibility of loving their children unreservedly, and providing a secure framework within which children can acquire some self understanding and self knowledge, so that they can eventually fulfil themselves as individuals.

Parents sometimes find it hard to realise that their task is to set a good example, and guide and encourage children to enable them to make their own way in the world, regardless of whether or not they follow traditional patterns.

This change of emphasis does not mean that children should be allowed to believe that they have the right to achieve their own personal fulfilment at the expense of other people; but it does require parents to be able to accept their children, and respect them and love them, so that children in their turn are able to respect and love others.

The truth is that because we are human, we are all a mixture of good and bad, right and wrong. We all have good intentions and wicked thoughts. We all have moments when we are on the side of the angels, and others when we behave like devils.

Adults need to be able to accept this mixture of good and bad in themselves, if they are to function with maturity; and this is facilitated by a parent being able to accept the conflicting personalities within their own child and not apportioning blame for undesirable traits.

Nevertheless, many parents do feel guilty and ashamed when they learn that a child is gay, and often feel that they were, in some way, to blame, and that they have failed as parents. Their first response is often "why should it happen to me" or "why did it happen to me".

They may feel angry or aggrieved or resentful that they will not have grandchildren, and deeply hurt that others in the family or in the community might hold them responsible.

Some parents try to blame their child's friends, or the permissive society, or the media, in an attempt to reduce their own burden of guilt.

Looking back on 'Where did I go wrong . . .' and 'How could I have avoided it?' is an unproductive exercise, but these are often the questions that parents

do ask. Not having grandchildren, being afraid of what the neighbours will say, even wondering whether homosexuality is 'right' or not, arouses strong feelings, which cannot always be controlled or subjugated by thinking 'right' thoughts.

Mother and Father may feel quite differently about it, and because one parent is apparently more sympathetic, this can sometimes create problems for their own marriage.

Many people find the homosexuality of the opposite sex less threatening than homosexuality in members of their own sex.

Men seem to be more frightened of homosexual men than women are; whilst women tend to be less tolerant of lesbians.

Because of this, parents often find it more difficult to accept the homosexuality of the child of the same sex. A mother may experience her daughter's homosexuality as a rejection of her own femininity, and a father similarly may feel his son's homosexuality to be a rejection of his masculinity.

This may undermine their own self valuation and create marital tensions and weakness at a time when parents need to summon their maximum strengths.

If they have no-one with whom they can talk and share their anxieties, and look at reality, communication tends to become increasingly difficult, and husband and wife, parent and child, retreat from each other and become more and more afraid to look for a solution together.

These gulfs that appear between parent and child, or between husband and wife, may widen so rapidly that all meaningful communication ceases. Each shouts messages at the other, and neither can hear, nor do they want to hear, what the other is saying. The gulf itself seems dangerous, and neither party can venture nearer the edge for fear of falling in and losing hold of their own values and standards. So they become more entrenched and cut off from those they love. And because they feel isolated and helpless, the hurt and the pain feel worse, and gradually paralyse all their normally available skills and magnify their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness and anger and frustration.

As the pain becomes increasingly unbearable, each develops a hard, protective covering, so that they cannot be hurt any more. The pain becomes less, but the hard shell is a barrier which both prevents them from reaching out to the ones they love, and from being touched by those they need most, and unless appropriate intervention is available, the problems may never be resolved.

Mothers and fathers usually want the best for their children. The lesson that they have to learn is that their children are not vehicles, through which they can get a second chance of living, and that sometimes a child's assessment of its own needs and its own place in the world, has more validity than the assessment made by a parent.

Part of the parent's task is to help each child reach its own full potential. If the child is homosexual, they have as much responsibility to give support, and to help that young adult find his or her own way in the world, as they have for a heterosexual child. They need to be aware that, because an enduring homosexual relationship may be difficult to establish, gay children may be much closer to their parents, than the child who has his or her own husband or wife or children to look to for comfort and support.

Some young men and women who identify themselves as gay, might find their way into a fulfilling heterosexual relationship, if they were given the opportunity of talking fully about their problems and about their feelings with a parent or a sympathetic adult. Many others will always be homosexual, but would possibly be more able to form deep and fulfilling relationships if they did not need to be guilty or ashamed and afraid of parents hearing the truth. Unfortunately, the reverse often happens. Parents become so paralysed with fear when they begin to suspect that their son or daughter may be gay, that they not only are unable to give the support and help that is needed, but often seem to withdraw their love as well. At times like this, they may need support, advice and counselling, to help them come to terms with the strong negative feelings that are aroused.

There are often two quite separate tasks that need to be tackled by parents. The first is their reaction to their child's apparently aberrant behaviour, and their attitude towards it. They may want time to examine the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of his or her sexual orientation, and look at whether they think he or she could change. They will need to look at, how they found out, whether they discovered it by accident, or whether they were specifically told, or whether hints had been dropped for some time, which they had been unwilling to pick up.

They should look at whether the discovery has actually changed their son or daughter, or whether the child is the same person that they previously loved and cherished.

They also need a great deal of time to look at their own feelings about themselves, their grief, their anger, their pain, and whether they should feel ashamed or reluctant to face other people.

Some gay organisations have counsellors who will help the parents of

homosexuals look at these feelings and understand their anxieties, and make valid choices about the future.

Other Agencies, such as the Raphael Centre, and the National Marriage Guidance Council, have counsellors who are prepared to spend time with anyone with relationship problems.

Rabbis and social workers are also available to give help.

Parents may initially be reluctant to share their grief, or trust anyone outside the family, but they are often greatly helped by counselling, or by meeting parents of other young homosexuals, and most eventually manage to accept the situation and learn to live with it.

## MARRIAGE

It can be a terrible shock for a husband or a wife to discover that their partner is gay, for homosexuality is still often identified as a perversion. There is a feeling that sexuality, even if it is not enjoyable, is good with someone of the opposite sex and bad with someone of the same sex; and this is often reinforced when homosexuality is 'discovered' in marriage.

As short a time as ten or fifteen years ago, many Jews tried to believe that marriage breakdown happened only to non Jews. There was a quite widely held ostrich-like belief that insisted that good Jews, who based their lives on the precepts of the Bible, didn't have marital problems. Many others knew then, and even more know now, even without statistics that marital breakdown is as common among Jews as among other sections of the community.

The reasons are legion. Immaturity, selfishness, lack of consideration for others, sexual infidelity, lack of commitment to marriage itself, may be factors in the eventual irretrievable breakdown which can legally lead to divorce.

Nearly all marriages go through periods of stress and problems. A couple may work through these if they have a strong enough commitment to each other, if they believe in marriage, and if they fervently wish to maintain a stable and secure background in which to rear children. Another couple may find the same stresses greater than they can cope with, and decide to separate and go their own ways. It is difficult to predict who can tolerate stress; which couple will split and which couple stay together; what factors are impossible to put up with and what miseries most adults can bear.

It is a private and individual matter, although the expectations of family and friends, and the overtly expressed standards of the community, can be deciding factors as to whether a marriage continues. If divorce is uncommon, couples will attempt to paper over the cracks, and try to stay together in order not to attract public disapprobation and disapproval.

Similarly, if homosexuality is rarely spoken about, and never publicised, there is apt to be denial, whatever pain that denial may provoke. This is one of the arguments brought to bear by the more rigid and less permissive sections of society, who rightly say, that if behaviour is unacceptable, people think twice or even three times, before breaking established moral codes.

This argument unfortunately does not seem to take into account the real



needs of individual human beings who may be extremely unhappy and uncomfortable at being squeezed into a mould, which they do not fit.

Until the 1968 Divorce Act, one single act of adultery was grounds for divorce. We now legally accept, what many knew emotionally before the Act, that it is rarely one single act of anything at all that leads to marriage breakdown, and that conduct that is intolerable within one marriage, might be acceptable, or tolerable, within another.

How any couple copes with homosexuality depends on a multiplicity of factors, for our responses to any inter-personal relationship depend on our own feelings and our own reactions to situations.

We tend to make the assumption that anyone in a similar situation would feel the same. Sometimes this is true, very often it isn't. How each of us feels and responds depends on our own character and our own nature, rather than the quality of the hurt that is inflicted upon us and how a husband or wife feels and reacts when they discover that their partner is gay depends more on his or her own emotional make-up than on the homosexuality itself. Put six individuals into six different unpleasant situations, each individual will experience the same unpleasant feeling each time, regardless of the nature of the hurt.

When things go wrong, we respond in a variety of ways, and these responses are usually based on feelings which we experienced in difficult situations with our own parents when we were children, which we did not manage to resolve at the time. If bad feelings are not worked through, they tend to stay in our subconscious and are reactivated in emotional crises. Each of us probably knows our own "favourite bad feeling"; it may be anger, or hurt, or rage, we may feel helpless or rejected; but whichever one is 'the favourite', is the one we feel when things go wrong. We also tend to project our feelings onto others, giving our explanation for their conduct, even though their true feelings may be quite different from our fantasies of them.

Therefore, what husband or wife feel, when they discover that their partner is homosexual, is really a reflection of their personality and emotional make-up and a result of their own past experiences; and their reaction often a response to how they feel about infidelity. The homosexuality initially at any rate, is an added insult to the hurt of unfaithfulness.

Probably most husbands and wives would be content for marriage to a gay partner to continue if there was not any third party involved. A few, undoubtedly, do have extremely strong feelings about the nature of homosexuality, believing it to be a sin and to be unnatural, and they may find it impossible to compromise themselves and accept this so-called sexual deviation.

Most people are less rigid in their outlook, although even in these permissive days, most couples still expect, or hope for, sexual fidelity in marriage; and the shock, hurt and pain of discovering that husband or wife loves someone else, or has been making love to someone else, is experienced as a personal and painful rejection.

It is probably this feeling of rejection, as much as anything else, that is so hurtful. The feelings of disloyalty, of being forced to share, when sharing was not part of the contract, the pain due to a lack of commitment, and the feelings of loss, are probably experienced by any husband or wife discovering that their partner has been unfaithful or loves someone else.

There are other extra dimensions of pain in the discovery of homosexuality. Some of these make the hurt worse, others may ease the burden. As the very nature of marriage is based on a heterosexual relationship, very few people going into marriage, who aren't gay themselves, give any thought to the possibility of their partner being homosexual; and, therefore, when it does arise, it does present a shocking revelation.

Most know little about homosexuality, and will, instinctively fall back on the stereotypes and the myths; and it may take some time before they can begin to accept that their husband or wife doesn't fit the stereotype and that their basic personality has not been changed by this new information about their sexual preferences, so that the two images can be superimposed. Some husbands and wives have said that although the infidelity came as a cataclysmic shock, the homosexual aspect was easier to bear than if there had been heterosexual adultery. The feeling that it was not due to any shortcoming in themselves, and there was nothing they could have done to avoid it, sometimes assuages some of the pain and guilt that is so often aroused.

Others feel that it is much worse, for if husband or wife is attracted by someone of the opposite sex, there is always the chance that the charm, the love and the attractiveness of the partner can win them back, whereas with a homosexual love affair, there is a feeling of impotence, and an unbearable realisation, that there is nothing that the rejected partner can do; and though there may be forgiveness and reconciliation, there is always the possibility that a similar situation will recur.

There is often also a fear about the effect on the children of the marriage. How should they be told? Will they be able to accept the situation? If they do accept it, is it likely to damage them either at that moment, or in the future? Will it affect their sexuality? Straight partners may be particularly aggrieved, bitter or angry when they realise that the homosexuality was recognised before marriage and that they had been told nothing about it.

Unfortunately, young homosexuals still are often advised to get married

in order to "get it out of their system", and they may themselves sometimes choose to get married, in the hope that they will miraculously change their sexual orientation.

Marriage is never the answer for homosexuals who are afraid of facing up to their true needs. Marriage requires a total commitment of two people to each other, and it is dishonest if one partner goes into the relationship knowing that he or she is unable to give themselves physically, fully and freely. However, the nature of marriage itself is changing, and there are already more options for those wanting to live together than ever before.

Some men and women who know themselves to be bisexual are able to marry and lead a happy and fulfilling life. There does, however, need to be honesty between the partners, so that there are no secrets about the past, even though it is not necessary to categorize in detail all past experience.

It is important, however, that nobody is forced into marriage by a parent or well-wisher in the hope that marriage will make it all come right, because it hardly ever happens that way.

Many homosexuals marry in order to have children and do not realise that although they may, at the time of their marriage, be in love with their straight partner, their homosexuality will ultimately surface and demand gratification. Marriage is still, even nowadays, geared to fulfilling the expectations of family and friends, without taking sufficient account of the real needs of the couple concerned. Whether the marriage continues or not, depends on how much it actually meets the psychological needs of husband or wife, and how painful they imagine a break will be.

Sometimes the homosexual partner will find the situation intolerable and wish to break up the marriage. Others may feel that children and family are the most important and will want to try to ignore their homosexuality and their homosexual partner and attempt to settle into a seemingly heterosexual marriage. A few will want the best of both worlds, children, family, husband or wife and homosexual lover.

The straight partner may be shocked or stunned by these reactions, and also hurt that although they are apparently the innocent party, they are the ones who are expected to make the adjustment. There is also the very real problem of how the straight partners cope with their own sexual needs, and they may experience great personal conflict in trying to decide whether they should or should not meet these needs outside marriage.

Other reactions may be shame and embarrassment and of not knowing who can help or who can be told. When the pain is so great and the grief and shock so unbearable, friends and family soon find themselves deeply involved in

the situation, giving support, taking sides and offering advice. In any crisis situation, the individuals concerned must work out the solution for themselves. It may be painful, it may be difficult, it may involve making choices between seemingly equally extremely unpleasant alternatives, but ultimately the solution will only have validity if it is arrived at by the people actually involved, and not imposed upon them by others, however loving and caring those others may be.

Counselling is often needed, with an opportunity to look at the situation and explore its reality, and then to make decisions that are practicable and possible. This should be done with someone professionally qualified for the task, such as a social worker, marriage counsellor or rabbi.

Sometimes husband and wife can explore the situation together and work towards a future that will be the most appropriate and the least painful for everyone concerned. Very often a joint search for a solution is not possible, and husband or wife, or both, will need to work separately with a counsellor, in order to arrive at the best possible outcome of the present situation, and ensure that similar situations do not recur.

Some couples faced with this predicament have been afraid of going to their rabbi for help because they believed that the traditional Jewish attitude to homosexuality might preclude spiritual help. Rabbis are increasingly dealing with congregants' problems, in terms of that congregants' needs, rather than within any rigid framework of right or wrong, and many rabbis are beginning to question more traditional attitudes to homosexuality and look at the problem from the point of view of the individual homosexual, their partner and their family.

It is sad that with a rejection of religious observance, there has sometimes also been a rejection of spiritual awareness, with a concomitant loss of spiritual strength.

Times of crisis require the mobilisation of all resources, and many individuals, couples and families have been better able to cope with the pain, the grief and the uncertainty, by utilising the spiritual strengths of Judaism and the compassion and understanding of its rabbis.

There is bound to be a great deal of uncertainty about the future, for there is never any guarantee that any solution will be right, or that any resolution will be for the best.

In England at present, it is very, very unusual for a homosexual father or mother to be given the custody of children; so this may be a powerful factor in keeping otherwise totally unsuited couples together.

On the other hand, it may be that almost any couple could stay together and have a fairly reasonable partnership, if they feel that is important enough for them to do so, and if they both feel a strong enough commitment to their own marriage.

It is absolutely essential that if they do decide to stay together, they should both be given an opportunity to look at what this might involve.

Many marriages fail because the partners not only have different expectations for themselves, but also because often neither has any idea of the expectations of the other. This is particularly true for the marriage in which one partner is gay and the other straight. They therefore need to look at the areas of their life which they intend to share with each other, and those areas that they are to share with others outside their marriage. They need to examine their feelings about sharing and togetherness, separation and privacy, and their feelings of mutual hurt and dependency.

They also need to spend time looking at their own future sexual relationship; and make opportunities for talking about their feelings about marital sex, if this is to be re-established.

Sometimes, when husband and wife do stay together, the straight partner finds that they are presented with another quite unexpected situation, when the rejected homosexual lover goes to them for comfort, solace and consolation; and although it may sound bizarre, it seems that husband or wife can occasionally understand the problems of the rejected lover and offer real help and support. A few have set up a "menage a trois" which has suited them admirably, although it is not a realistic solution for most, because of the inherent difficulties involved.

There are many options and many possibilities. The problem of homosexuality in marriage is in some ways very different from any other problem, although in many aspects it is similar to other marital upsets.

The responses are personal, and the solutions equally personal and equally individual. At the time of denouement, it may seem that the hurt is so great and the injury so unforgiveable, that no solution that does not involve punishment, hurt and retribution could even be considered. Counselling can often give a new perspective and a different view. Individuals can be helped to grow through the pain, and gain new insights about themselves and fresh understanding of the needs of others.

Friends and family are an inestimable help when a crisis occurs, but their role should be to give support, offer comfort, and cushion some of the pain that is being felt. It is usually totally inappropriate for anyone involved in the problem to attempt to counsel; and however tempting it may be to take

sides, apportion blame, level criticism or offer advice, for this may prove to be damaging to the individuals concerned as well as destructive of any hopes of rebuilding a relationship. Parents may be particularly upset by many of the revelations, whether their child seems to be the innocent or the guilty party in the marriage. They too may find counselling helpful, in enabling them to come to terms with, and understanding, their own negative feelings such as anger, guilt, shame. For if these are not looked at and dealt with, they may preclude or diminish their efforts to help their children as constructively as possible during the difficult months or years that may be ahead.



## THE JEWISH PROBLEM

In Britain, it is difficult to be overtly gay and at the same time be a practising member of a religious community. So, many homosexuals have had to make the choice between 'coming out' and being rejected by their co-religionists, or remaining as practising congregants and denying their homosexuality.

Traditional Judaism has always frowned on homosexual behaviour, citing scriptural texts to add weight to their arguments, but recently, traditional attitudes have been questioned on many fronts, and new interpretations given to Biblical passages and Talmudic commentary.

Many Rabbis and scholars now believe that the voluntary and mutual loving and caring of two adults who are free to commit themselves to each other, is good and brings happiness to the whole community. The sexuality to be deplored is that in which one individual forces their attention upon another, or exploits another and fails to commit themselves to their partner.

We are moving into a world in which individuals have to make their own decisions about their own life-style and their own religious practices. There are those who believe that the precepts and practices of Judaism were laid down for Moses and the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai, and that they are eternal, immutable and unchangeable. Some believe that those who do not follow the rules and observances laid down for a semi nomadic tribe more than 3,000 years ago should not be allowed to participate in Jewish rituals and Jewish services, even though there are spheres of activity such as attitudes to usury and capital punishment and the role of women, to name just a few, where even the traditional teachings have been re-examined and re-formulated to make them more appropriate and relevant to life in the 20th century.

There are, however, many others who believe, that it is the basic teaching that is important, and that changing circumstances and ways of life must alter the nature of religious observance. Jews, on the whole, no longer live in small, close-knit hierarchical communities in which the role and behaviour of every individual fits into a common matrix with everyone dependent on everyone else for their status and their way of life.

Most of us live in a world of assimilation in which it is all too easy for Jews to lose their Jewish affiliations and their Jewish identity, and it seems unnecessarily destructive, in these circumstances, to exclude quite arbitrarily many who have deep religious faith and deep religious conviction.



Many homosexuals say that they feel rejected by the Jewish religious community. Probably much of this is an internal feeling experienced by individuals and then projected onto the Jewish community to which they wish to belong; but it is also true that few congregations welcome known homosexuals, and many will actually try to prevent them joining.

The traditional attitude to homosexuality is that because it is a sin, homosexuals are not acceptable; although it might be possible for any individual to have his case re-assessed, if he could bring evidence to bear that he could not help his situation, and could do nothing to keep away from homosexuality.

The orthodox attitude is that if any individual could have his own weakness and inability to change in this matter accepted, (and it would have to be *his* own, for there is no recognition of female homosexuality in Judaism,) it would not be a precedent for other cases. Orthodox communities would probably exclude a practising homosexual who has 'come out' from receiving 'Mitzvot' in the Synagogue, not necessarily from any lack of sympathy with the individual, but from a feeling of not wishing to associate the congregation with a way of life proscribed by Jewish law.

Many Reform and Liberal communities, and sometimes even their rabbis, are ambivalent in their attitudes towards Jewish homosexuality.

Certainly, there is a very widely expressed view that there is no reason why homosexuals should not take a full part in the life of the synagogue — as long as they do not insist on others accepting them as homosexuals. Perhaps Synagogue communities themselves mirror the uncertainty and confusion that many individuals experience, as they accept intellectually, everyone's right to make their own sexual choices, while at the same time experiencing a strong gut reaction of fear and distaste.

Although most people have heterosexual feelings and some homosexual feelings as well, the greater proportion were brought up to believe that homosexuality was totally unacceptable, and they were, by this precluded from accepting the gay part of themselves. This occasionally created great anxiety, even though their homosexuality remained unexpressed; and sometimes results in fears and anger about it, their own feelings being projected onto anyone else identified by this label.

This has led to some who are afraid of homosexuality, behaving as though it were some infection or contagious disease, which could mislead and corrupt an entire congregation. Others feel that it is unnatural and sinful and that those who practise it, should be excluded from congregational religious practice.

A little rational thought would show that neither of these objections has any realistic basis. No Jew in this country can live his life without contact with homosexuals, and it is unrealistic to believe that they might be particularly dangerous in the Synagogue. We live in an integrated society, in which we meet many kinds of individuals; some with the same faith, beliefs and ways of life as ourselves, many more who have quite different attitudes and customs, and a different family life.

If we want our children to uphold our beliefs and value our standards, we must educate them to understand the foundations on which they are based, and allow them to make choices for themselves. We can no longer rely on a ghetto mentality and isolationism to protect a way of life.

Homosexuality is only one of the areas in which attitudes and values are changing. Parents are continually having to re-evaluate their standards and decide which are essential and have to be handed onto their children, which are desirable, and which ones may be quite inappropriate for children and grandchildren living in a world entirely different to the one in which they were reared.

Children are more likely to conform to their parent's standards, if they have their acceptable behaviour praised, than by having unacceptable behaviour pruned. It may be easier for young people to adhere to family patterns and cultures if they are given some understanding of other ways of life. Explaining other peoples' behaviour, does not necessarily condone that behaviour, whereas a refusal to discuss another's way of life, may lead to excessive curiosity and even experimentation.

There are many other powerful influences on the individual's way of life, such as school, university, work, TV and radio, and it is extremely unlikely that children or young people would be adversely influenced by seeing homosexuals being allowed to play a full part in religious observances in communal life.

Religious teaching should include a respect for others, because they are human beings, but this lesson will not be learnt if there is apparently victimisation of individuals within the congregation. Even if some do believe that homosexuality is wrong, it is no reason for excluding those who practise it from Jewish religious life, for congregations do not exclude others whom they label as wrong-doers from taking part in Jewish rites and Jewish observances.

Why should homosexuality be considered the most heinous crime of all? What about the Ten Commandments? How important are they? What punishments or exclusions do we force on those who have broken or continue to break these sacred tenets? The Jewish community is no guiltier and no

more blameless than any other. There are among us individuals whose business practices or personal life may be extremely suspect. The gamblers, the alcoholics, the wife-beaters, the deserters, the adulterers and those who no longer honour their father and mother, or keep the Sabbath day, are not treated as social or religious pariahs, so why should homosexuals — who do not harm or injure or exploit others — be subjected to such unpleasant minority persecution?

We are Jews by birth and by right. Some deny their heritage and others accept it without question, but there are some for whom it is an important and inalienable part of life and who wish to make continual affirmation of their religious and spiritual beliefs. It is distressing that Jews, who have for generations experienced religious persecution and religious suppression, should attempt to enforce any censure on some of their own co-religionists.

In America, some groups of homosexuals have set up their own synagogues where they can pray and worship without harassment, and some have suggested that this would be an acceptable solution here.

Certainly, any group which wishes to form its own congregation should be allowed to do so, but excluding individuals from the larger community is no way of coping with the problem.

The family is an integral part of Jewish life, and curiously enough, although this provides great strengths for some, it also tends to create a feeling of exclusion for non-conformists. Certainly, many unmarried men and women have a feeling of not belonging to the mainstream of a Jewish community life, which seems predominantly structured to preserve the family and meet the family's needs.

This is not in any way to decry this aspect of Jewish communal life, but it does need to be understood, in order to comprehend the feelings of homosexuals who are not only outside the mainstream of Jewish family life, but are sometimes suspiciously regarded as trying to set up an anti-family and make this acceptable. Although traditionally families were composed of father and mother, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, all worshipping together, we now have a very different situation in which a family might consist of only one or two parents, with or without children, rarely with their own parents. Communities seem to have no difficulty in accepting single-parent families into the congregation, or those who are divorced or remarried for a second or third time.

A man and woman living together can be accepted by a community, and allowed to pray within the community of the Synagogue, so why should that right be denied to two men or two women who have made a commitment to each other, and wish to pray together and who want their Judaism to

be with them in the good times, and comfort them in the bad?

Many gay people have experienced particular anguish and grief on the death of their partner, when because there is a total denial of their relationship; and because traditional religious practices have no role for a bereaved partner, that partner has to forego spiritual comfort and support. Many have, at such times of crisis, had to turn to non-Jewish spiritual counsellors for help.

The community of the Synagogue should not be a self-righteous congregation of those who believe that they are the only ones who have the right to express their Judaism through prayer and religious involvement; the only ones good enough to give support and comfort, the only ones worthy enough to receive help when it is needed.

Benjamin Franklin said, "We must indeed all hang together or most assuredly we will all hang separately". The wolf of anti-semitism is fortunately not howling at our door, and we can now regard community more in terms of the mutual support its members give each other than as a bastion to protect us from outside onslaught.

Jews are born Jews. Homosexuals who are Jews have the same rights as any others to choose to be a member of a religious congregation, to give support where it is required, to receive help if necessary. If we deny these basic rights to our fellow Jews, we may find that we ultimately have to pay a heavy price.

## THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Once men or women have decided that they are gay, they are faced with making some extremely difficult decisions. Their first problem may be whether they are themselves able or willing to accept their own homosexuality.

Because teaching about sexuality tends to be arbitrary and pragmatic, we are sometimes motivated by irrational and conflicting prejudices, which do not stand up to close or detailed examination.

For instance, there are many who believe that it is right for young men to have premarital sexual experience, but would prefer that their future wives, their daughters and their sisters remain virgins until marriage. Some believe that it is right to be heterosexual, and immoral and abnormal to be gay, or refuse to accept that it is possible for homosexuals to relate on anything other than a physical basis.

Thus, hypocritical, double standards exist and the young male chauvinist, who seduces and exploits girls and women, is considered an acceptable, although rather rakish, member of society, while the homosexual in a loving, caring relationship with one other, becomes suspect and immoral.

Because of this apparent disapproval, many homosexuals may be reluctant to acknowledge their sexual orientation, even to themselves, and do their best to deny their homosexuality.

They may be afraid of approaching an establishment agency for help because of their fear of publicity and possible adverse prejudice.

They may be equally reluctant to approach a counsellor recommended by a gay organisation, because of fears that they may be unwillingly forced into a decision to accept themselves as gay whilst unprepared for the consequences.

The fears are for the most part unfounded.

There is still some prejudice against homosexuality among some professionals, but increasingly, doctors, social workers, Rabbis and Counsellors, are accepting that it is part of their task to help individuals find their way to their own place in life, and they do not exert undue pressure to make individuals conform, although most might consider it part of their task to emphasise the difficulties a homosexual might experience within a hetero-



sexual society. They would probably also spend time looking at the considerable difficulties a gay person would experience in trying to put up a heterosexual front.

### COMING OUT

The next step may be to decide to 'come out' and tell parents and friends. 'Coming out' does not mean that there has to be any public statement of intent, but it does infer that being gay is no longer a secret to be kept "in the closet"; so that there could be discussion of the subject in the way that any other person may or may not wish to discuss their sexuality, remembering that sexuality is usually a private area of experience.

The 'coming out' may involve contact with gay organisations and often confrontation or argument with family and friends as they are helped to understand the situation and know what it involves.

One of the problems is that many parents do not want to know, and would prefer not to share in the knowledge. Some shut their eyes and their ears, and deny any communication that a son or a daughter tries to make, and as a consequence, many young people find themselves having to lead a double life, accepted as a homosexual by their friends and acquaintances, but having to pretend to be heterosexual when they are with parents and family.

Of course, the legal situation does not make things easier, for ultimately, parents are able to 'wield the big stick' to a son, protesting that as well as being unnatural, their behaviour is also against the law.

### CHANGE

Many parents would like to think that homosexuals could be changed into 'normal human beings' if only they would have 'the treatment'.

What is the real situation? The use of the word 'treatment' and the wish of much of society to try to pretend that homosexuality is a disease, gives some underlying problems.

Many well-meaning people would like to think of homosexuality as an illness to be cured, while the vast majority of homosexuals regard their homosexuality as a fact to be recognised. They know that their feelings are normal and natural for them, however much society tries to deny it. A few may regret their sexual preferences, mainly because life may be difficult or uncomfortable within a society which is geared to heterosexual behaviour,

but basically, most of them do not wish to change. It is a fantasy of the straight world to imagine that the answer lies with newer or better methods for trying to realign sexual preferences.

In general, most homosexuals enjoy the physical pleasures of sex. Some may have feelings of guilt or a sense of being unclean, or of having done something wrong, and would like to be relieved of this burden that they often feel has been foisted upon them by others. Very, very few want to change and become heterosexual.

This is one of the areas that the straight world finds difficult to understand. The truth is that many homosexuals regard heterosexual sex as disgusting and distasteful. In fact their feelings about it are very similar to the feelings of many heterosexuals about homosexual activity. Thus most homosexuals are as reluctant to become heterosexuals, as heterosexuals are to become gay.

In spite of this, some individuals do try to change, although even this is usually a response to the pressures of family or friends. Success or failure is partly dependent on the motivation of the individual concerned, and partly dependent on the nature of the homosexuality, remembering that many people are actually bisexual and that those who do apparently change, generally come into this category.

Behaviour therapy is sometimes recommended. Methods such as masturbation fantasy reconditioning have been tried with limited success; positive conditioning is rarely successful. Aversion therapy is probably the most successful, although it is certainly the least pleasant. Personal motivation for any of these has to be very high indeed, and even so, is rarely successful in the long term, and any could prove dangerous or lead to later breakdown.

Analysis, psycho-therapy and counselling or family counselling rarely manages to alter sexual preferences, although they may be of value in helping individuals and their families come to terms with their situation, reducing anxiety and anger and other negative emotions and releasing psychic power for more positive uses.

Punitive measures, such as exclusion or loss of personal freedom, are even more unsuccessful, as the burden of guilt and anxiety on homosexuals is increased and they become even less able to function as productive members of society.

### EDUCATION

Education about homosexuality will improve the situation, but even this sometimes creates extra problems and added anxiety. An understanding of



any condition will help to make that condition more acceptable, and it is because of this that fresh problems arise. Some gay groups believe that one of their primary functions should be to talk to young people in schools and clubs, explaining to the 'straights' what homosexuality is all about, so that those who are gay will not be victimised and subjected to ridicule and scorn.

This might be acceptable to some adults, but another facet of the campaign arouses anxiety and apprehension. This is to help young people understand their own nature and accept their own homosexuality, and thereby help young homosexuals avoid the misery and pain that many go through until they are able to 'come out'.

The authorities on the other hand believe that most adolescents will eventually be heterosexual, and they are afraid that some who identify themselves as gay, may be encouraged to remain homosexual, by being given 'permission' to do so, instead of exploring and accepting their heterosexual needs.

This is basically one of the problems of a free society, and possibly schools and clubs are right to exclude any organisations, social or political, who exist only to make converts and to present their own side of the story in partisan terms. However, children will eventually live in a world of options and temptations, and one of the primary functions of education should be to give young people basic information about possibly contentious issues such as homosexuality, politics, contraception, racism, drugs and pornography, and offer adequate opportunities over a wide time span to look at all sides of the arguments, for and against, and their feelings about them, and encourage them to discuss them freely and fully.

This is probably most suited for young people during their last years at school, although some discussion may be needed earlier, if the subject becomes an issue, as a result of publicity in films, TV or newspapers.

It may be difficult to decide whether topics should or should not be discussed within the school setting, but teachers should not pretend that they keep children away from prurient gossip by refusing open discussion, and it is sometimes healthier for a subject to be aired in the classroom than to accept the inevitability of the false information that is shared in the playground.

It is a difficult topic, and teachers should always tell a head of department or another in authority that they have had discussions or that they hope to in the future.

Shutting anyone, adults or young people, away from the information that is available is liable to result in the contamination of the democratic process

and decrease the individual's chance for making reasoned choices.

Part of the education process of adults, is to help them to realise that homosexuals are as 'normal' or 'abnormal' as anyone else, but this will only come about when ordinary gay people, leading ordinary lives, doing ordinary jobs, 'come out' and are seen by the rest of the world.

As long as homosexuals seem to be only camp or butch or closet queens or transvestites or transsexuals, society will find it difficult to accept that homosexuality is not abnormal.

## HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE

Judaism is certainly not yet ready to accept the marriage of two persons of the same sex, but it may be that with changing attitudes, even this may not be unknown in the future, although 'marriage' may be an inappropriate word to use.

Marriage in the synagogue is seen by different couples in different lights. Some see it as a social necessity. Some marry in a synagogue to please parents and family and to ensure that their children will be accepted as Jews. Others regard their union as a deeply spiritual moment in their lives and they want to have God and God's blessing with them when they make their vows. For those who believe that the family is a building block of the community, it is also a public affirmation of their commitment to each other and an acknowledgement of its exclusive nature.

Some homosexual couples may feel as strongly about the nature of their own commitment, and wish to make a pledge in public, to feel that their union has been blessed. In these circumstances, some Rabbis have been willing to conduct a service in the house, blessing the home and those who will live in it, and many couples have expressed their thanks for this opportunity to reaffirm their belief in God and their love for their partners.

## INTEGRATION

There is already considerable integration because most homosexuals are not identifiable in society, and they work alongside heterosexuals and join in leisure activities, either because they are interested in the aims and objects of the group, or because they can help the group, or because they enjoy being with other members of the group. Sexuality is a private function — no-one has to declare their sexual preferences. In society in general, there are many variations of opinion and experience. Bernard Shaw said "There are few differences between men and women, and those differences that do

exist are only important on very few occasions."

The same could certainly have been said about being straight and being gay.

We live in Britain in an integrated society in which the avowed aim (though rarely achieved) is for anyone black or white, Christian or Jew, man or woman, to participate, regardless of their colour, creed, sex or political persuasions. Along with this we create opportunities for minorities with similar interests, such as naturists, Jews, Roman Catholics and bridge players, to meet either to pursue their common interest or to be together because they identify with each other.

Integration should not have to be forced on anyone or any group, but society does need to work towards a safer environment, in which minority groups can be accepted, without having to explain or rationalise or deny their affiliation.

There will probably always be some gay groups, some gay discos, some gay organisations, but we, as Jews, remembering the exclusion that we suffered from social groups, clubs and sports centres before the second world war, have a particular responsibility to encourage homosexuals who have 'come out' to be members of open groups and allow them to take their place in our societies and on our committees.

It is easy to identify under-privileged groups who need charity, and as a community, Jews take their responsibility to their fellows very seriously, endeavouring to care for the old, the disabled, the sick and the bereaved.

It is sometimes more difficult to identify the groups that need compassion, and meet their needs; for we often assume that their troubles are of their own making; and, as a result, withdraw the emotional support that they require.

The families of homosexuals very often feel alone and uncertain, and afraid of asking for help, lest they be castigated and blamed for circumstances over which they have no control.

We have moved out of the age, which shuts away those like the mentally ill who do not conform, into a more enlightened society.

Our enlightenment is in part due to improved understanding, and in part to a respect for the integrity of individuals, and their right to live their lives in peace, as long as they do not exploit or damage or hurt their fellows. We should now be prepared to extend this compassion to homosexuals and their families, offering our support, and recognizing that the health and strength of the community is dependent on the health and strength of its individual members. We are all vulnerable. They need our compassion now. We may need them in the near future.

## INFORMATION

The following listings should be of help to those requiring information on the gay scene — national and local organisations, social groups for the sexual minorities, counselling and befriending organisations, social activities, meetings and conferences, student gaysocs, gay publications, etc.

Gay News "Gay Guide" — the most comprehensive, up-to-date gay guide for Britain and Ireland, free monthly supplement in every other issue of Gay News which is available from bookstalls.

Gay News Ltd., 1A, Normand Gardens, Greyhound Road, London W.14  
01-351 2161

Gay Switchboard. 01-837 7324 twenty-four hour a day service, seven days a week. Telephone information on all gay organisations and services based in London, but able to provide information on activities and groups world-wide. Also able to give individual Gay Switchboard numbers for towns and cities around U.K.

The following organisations are concerned with the promotion and interests of the sexual minorities. Some have counselling services, social groups and other activities.

Albany Trust. 42, Tredegar Road, Wilmington, Dartford, Kent.

Campaign for Homosexual Equality (C.H.E.) BM C.H.E., London WC1N 3XX  
01-359 3973. This organisation can put you in touch with local groups.

Friends (Quakers) Homosexual Fellowship. Alex Kerr, 10, The Row, Hinton Waldrist, Faringdon, Oxon.

Disabled Gays (Women) Gemma, BM 5700 London WC1N 3XX  
(Men) Graydaid, 36, Pembroke Street, Bedford 0234 58879

Gay Liberation Front. 5, Caledonian Road, London N.1.

Irish Gay Rights Movement. P.O.Box 739, Dublin 8. Dublin 786593  
(Mon-Fri 19.30 — 21.00)

Jewish Gay Group. Weekly meetings. BM J.G.G. London WC1N 3XX  
01-903 2381

Kenric. National, non-political organisation for women. The Secretary, BM/Kenric, London WC1.

National Union of Students Gay Rights Campaign. N.U.S. Endsleigh Street, London WC1.

Sappho. Gay Women meet weekly in upstairs room of The Chepstow, Chepstow Place, W.2. Tuesdays 7.30 p.m.

National Icebreakers. (Counselling) 01-274 9590 or write: BM Gaylib London WC1N 3XX.

National Friend. 274, Upper Street, London N.1. 01-359 7371

Parents Enquiry, 16, Honley Road, Catford, London S.E.6. 01-968 1815.

Beaumont Society. BM Box 3054, London WC1N 3XX.

The Raphael Centre, 100, Ashmill Street, London N.W.1. 01-289 7002.

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