

DAVID HARTMAN, RABBI

STUDY OF THE RABBI
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February 14, 1968.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm,
c/o Jewish Life,
84 Fifth Avenue,
New York 10011, N. Y.

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

I write this letter in response to your article in Jewish Life and would like clarification of some of the categories that you use ~~and~~ appear to me, at this moment, confusing.

I would like to know if you are expressing a Jewish view when you, on one level, argue that homosexuality was the sin of Sodom and was viewed as a sin where the punishment that is ordained by the tradition is death - to a view that sees homosexuality as a disease. Would you say then that the Bible and Talmud viewed homosexuality in the framework of a sickness. If so, it would appear strange that punishment for sickness is capital punishment. One would imagine that a different move should have been suggested.

Secondly, you maintain that homosexuality between two consenting adults should not be treated as a criminal offense in the United States and you say this in terms of "consistency and expediency." Now, am I to understand from your argument that if adultery and incest would be prosecuted by the courts, you would then view homosexuality within the same framework. Even more, if your position one that you would like to see adultery and incest treated by the courts and since it is not, one cannot treat homosexuality within this framework. If you argue that homosexuality is a sickness then I wonder how you can at the same level maintain that your argument is based upon expediency and consistency.

The third point that I would like to clarify is, what is your criterion when you call homosexuality a sickness? Are you, then, speaking as a rabbi, as a person, as a doctor? I think the category of sickness is a medical one who should be treated by people who are competent to deal with sicknesses and their treatment. On what level are you using this term "sickness"? Do you mean it in a loose sense like we call a murderer "sick" or a person who cheats children as being really "sick". This sense of "sick" is not a biological category or medical category, but it is another way of saying "disgusting". Therefore, I think I would like again this type of clarification. If you mean it

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in a loose sense then you are really not going away from the Biblical but rather saying that this is an abomination, it is a morally evil act. But you choose not to use the term evil or sinful, but you are using it as a "sick" act and really meaning the same thing, are you not? Are you saying it is "sick" because fundamentally the Bible says it is repulsive, or are you saying that it is sick because this doesn't psychologically fulfill people. These are two very different moves and I think it is very important that you clarify what your position is.

May it not be possible that the groups that you attack for accepting homosexuality don't view it as "sick" in the psychological sense as you may view it and you would then have to argue how you could make the psychological move not based purely on the theological move and the Biblical move that one finds in the tradition. Therefore, I would appreciate it very much if you would clarify your stand.

Yours sincerely,



David Hartman.
Rabbi.