My posts this week, dealing with the need to conduct halakhic debates in a civilized manner, were written in the wake of the unprecedented attack of several men on Rabbi Joseph Dweck, the Chief Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation in London. The excuse for these attacks was a class RJD delivered on the theme of homosexuality.

I have listened to the full class, and while I do not necessarily agree with all the statements or the analysis of certain texts, I wholeheartedly support RJD and his sincere concern for a large contingency of the Jewish Orthodox world, which has been marginalized and ostracized in recent decades, namely the LGBT community.

The two rabbis who launched the attack are based in London and Brooklyn, and have evidently seized the opportunity to bring down someone who poses a threat to their centers of control and influence. The method used by both is ancient yet viciously effective: 1. Take words out of contexts; 2. Stir emotions and fear; 3. Find people in position power who will accept your version of events and/or who could benefit from the attack.

We should realize that while that method works for the rabbis who launched the attack, as well as the rabbis in Israel who joined them despite their limited (or non-existent) command of the English language, it is detrimental not only to RJD, but to many others who are affected, directly or indirectly by the hatred and vitriol spread by those rabbis.

**First,** it affects members of the orthodox LGBT community, especially in the Sephardic world, who have just recently started to feel less targeted and persecuted. I deal constantly with teens, young adults, parents, who are caught in the web of fear and prejudice. Can you imagine having to convince a mother not to kick her son out of her house because he is gay, or hearing a parent admit that after long years and a fortune spent on conversion therapy he now understands that his son's orientation is not a choice, and that he regrets putting him through such suffering.

But these rabbis have set the clock back! Are they willing to take responsibility for even one life lost, as were dozens in the past year alone in the orthodox world, because of bullying, depression, and rejection? Are they willing to take responsibility for the lives of teens who, without moral and emotional support from family and community, will live a life of substance abuse? Did they ever bother to talk to LGBT teens or their parents in an honest, unbiased manner?

I guess not, as one of these rabbis has been reported to say the following of some teenagers in his community who came out: **"we should put them back in the closet, lock it, and throw the key away!"** - if he was able to get away with that kind of verbal violence, it is no surprise that he feels comfortable attacking RJD.

**Second,** the damage caused to the orthodox community is immense. The aggressive rabbis might have garnered some support and added new followers, but in the long term, such behavior will make people abandon orthodoxy and observance in droves. This kind of vituperative attacks, lack of civility, and an attempt at character assassination do not inspire anyone. They just cause people to ask how if there is a place for them in such an environment.

This brings me to the title of this article. The hypocrisy is in pretending that one is fighting for the well-being of the Jewish community and for protecting Torah values. **It is most definitely not the case!**

Rabbi Joseph Dweck's main argument was that having a certain sexual orientation is not a sin, and that the only act forbidden by the Torah is the sexual act between two men. No one can refute that, and no one can claim that this statement is heretical or blasphemous. But this is not where hypocrisy ends.

The question must be asked, as RJD pointed out in his class, why are the rabbis ignoring other transgressions. No one asks about the business ethics of a Cohen or of the way he treats his wife before honoring him with an Aliyah! Even regarding the observance of Shabbat, considered a fundamental proof of one's religiosity, the rabbis were willing to make concessions.

When the question was raised whether one who transgresses Shabbat publicly can be given an Aliyah, leading Halakhic authorities decided that the transgression must be done publicly, in front of at least ten observant witnesses, who have warned the transgressor that his act is forbidden. Since this usually does not happen, they have allowed those people to be active members of the community.When it comes to the prohibition mentioned in Lev. 18:22, two witnesses are required to prove transgression, but these rabbis are willing to treat a person as a convicted felon according to Torah law without any legal proof.

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 9:2) and Maimonides (Edut 12:2) even when someone confesses to Beth Din that he willingly had relations with another man, we do not accept his confession (though with another witness he could convict the other participant). This is not to say that I think matters should be brought to court, but rather that the rabbis should uphold halakhic standards and not bend them at will.

The other great hypocrisy, which screams volumes, is the thundering silence of the very same rabbis on missteps and sins of religious leaders which they should have publicly denounced.

There is not enough room here to list the many acts of corruption, embezzlement, and sexual harassment which plague the orthodox community. Yet we have never heard these rabbis launching and attack against any of those perpetrators. To the contrary, they try to defend them or relocate them.

Let the attackers say clearly and unabashedly, that they have been waiting to target the rabbi who threatened their base of power and control, and that they have latched into homophobia to promote their cause.

So I tell them here: "It is not too late for you to regret and apologize, but if you decide not to do so, your actions will be judged by the Jewish community and Jewish history".

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Haim Ovadia