



opinions

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JEWISH LIGHT EDITORIAL

Misplaced Faith

“There are many cases where people acting on their conscience have been castigated by the government. ... This is really an important value for our country, in a diverse country, where you can be tolerant of people’s lifestyles but allow people of faith to exercise theirs.”

– Jeb Bush, *New York Times*
First Draft blog, March 30.

Over the past few days, we have heard from many on the conservative end of the spectrum, including former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, that the recently enacted and signed Indiana religious freedom law is of the utmost importance in protecting religious observance.

We respectfully disagree.

The law, which is both like and unlike a similar federal law enacted in the early 1990s (the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or RFRA) and a number of state statutes, purports to ensure protection against public incursions into private religious exercise.

However, Gov. Mike Pence and the state have taken huge heat from many individuals and companies that believe the law’s intent and effect is to allow individuals to exercise discrimination in the guise of religious doctrine. Most vocal have been those who interpret the Indiana law to allow businesses to deny serving the LGBT community, whether for same-sex marriages or otherwise.

There are lots of disparate views as to whether the law would enable that result. Pence and legislators deny that intent and indicate that a clarifying amendment may be coming soon.

Some states that have similar statutes protect against LGBT discrimination in other laws, and the federal government has its own set of protections. It should be noted that Missouri adopted a version of the RFRA statute in 2003, which at the time had some Jewish organizational support. Missouri does not have a law that includes the LGBT community among the groups protected against discrimination. Missouri legislators should take another look at that omission in view of the current, very real controversy.

The federal law was the subject of U.S. Supreme Court deliberation last term, in the much discussed *Hobby Lobby* decision that, among other things, allowed for-profit corporations to insert a religious defense to certain coverages under the Affordable Care Act.

Just as the court got *Hobby Lobby* wrong – essentially by ignoring the number of pre-RFRA cases that denied business entities the religious rights afforded individuals – Indiana has gotten this one wrong for two different reasons.

First, there is no compelling set of circumstances or situations requiring the passage of such a law. The claim that all sorts of religious practices or beliefs are being trod upon is a straw man being proffered to support its adoption. This is an effort to protect against a problem that largely doesn’t exist. The Obamacare situation was in no way exemplary of some widespread set of invasive regulations.

Second, unlike other states with RFRA knockoffs, Indiana has no anti-discrimination law preventing LGBTs from being treated differently under the law. Pence’s response that an amendment might be forthcoming seems less driven by intention than by the massive outpouring of criticism, including responses from companies and organizations threatening to sever ties from the state and forego having events there.

This law, not unlike voter ID laws predicated on limited or no evidence of voter fraud, seems more intended to build political support among a particular bloc of voters than it does seem needed to address a true social ill.

What is a social ill that requires significant focus and attention relates to the first part of Bush’s quote, the issue of tolerance or, as we prefer to call it, acceptance. Where are the public resources being dedicated to counter proliferating anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and anti-LGBT behavior in this country? The level of public education about these issues seems scant indeed.

The religious majority in this nation of ours deserves just as much protection as any minority in the practice of its beliefs. This is beyond question. But to use the RFRA laws as a sword to suggest there is substantial intrusion on private religious practice lurking out there is a deceit.

And to do so while a much more serious problem continues to grow – vitriol and violence toward minorities – is a distraction of the highest degree.



Steve Greenberg Cartoon

D’VAR TORAH – PESACH

Four children or four faces of ourselves?

BY RABBI ROXANNE J.S. SHAPIRO



Rabbi Roxanne J.S. Shapiro is Rabbi and Director of Life Long Learning at United Hebrew Congregation.

On the eve of our Passover *sederim*, we will sit and read from our *haggadot*. We will participate in blessings and retell the story of our exodus from Egypt. We will taste foods and point out their symbolism. We will give thanks.

During the course of the seder, we come to understand that the seder itself was designed to grab interest and stimulate questions. From strange items on our plates to special ways to dip our food, this different approach to our meal begs one to ask why. The Four Questions are part of our seder. Yet, even after they are asked, we read about the Four Sons (also referred to as the Four Children) so we can understand that not only may our questions evoke answers, our answers may be heard differently by different types of children.

The background to the piece on the Four Sons comes from our ancient rabbis in the Mishnah. We are told that each of the answers provided to them comes from the Torah, although there is some debate about how they are applied. We know that Mishnah Pesachim 10:4 explains to us that “the parent teaches according to the knowledge level of the child.” Thus, it seems our rabbis created a proper response for each type/level of child.

While on the face of the text, we understand that the wise child is wise because he has both knowledge and a positive mindset. The wicked child is called such because no matter what his knowledge level might be, he has a poor attitude. The simple child has the interest, but not yet the knowledge. The last child does not even know to ask. But as we dig deeper, as we question more, we ask ourselves if these children are really four separate children or really all separate aspects of a single individual.

I can recall, as a child at the seder table, always hoping that the order of reading would allow me to be cast as the “wise child”. I would laugh as my brothers inevitably became the “wicked child” or the “simple child”. And, of course, in those years where I became one of the other children, I would cast off any connection to my part and my personal nature. Now, as an adult, I seek out the various parts so that I may give them each life and credit.

What is so wrong with the “wicked” or “defiant” child? Is

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