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What Gay Pride Parade Stabber Has in Common With His Victims

[Ysoscher Katz](#) August 2, 2015

Image: Getty Images

I wish Yishai Schlissel, the perpetrator of the deadly crime at Thursday's Jerusalem gay pride parade, had paused for a moment to first speak to the marchers. If he did, he would have realized how much he had in common with them.

I know Schlissel. Not personally, but I know the personality. I grew up in the Haredi community and am familiar with that type of mentality. When I was still part of that community, I was not that different. While I left that community long ago, I remember what drives its members.

Like every other religious community, Haredi society is based on an elaborate hierarchy of values that organizes and frames members' lives. First and foremost in that lineup of ideals is *kedusha* (sanctity). Religious sanctity and spiritual purity are the Haredi communities' most important values, carrying both religious and material importance. They believe it makes their communities spiritually healthy and physically safe.

The converse is also held to be true. Impurity is dangerous, hurting people both religiously and physically. Because of their particular theology, they contend that the consequences for erring on these issues are harsh and immediate.

Haredim have a robust metaphysics. They believe that the world operates on a quid-pro-quo axis: Man acts and God reacts. Based on their interpretation of the Torah, God too shares their heirarchichal lineup. His list of values reflects theirs, with sanctity carrying paramount importance. A lack of sanctity thus spurs God to react violently and aggressively.

This belief sparked terror in Schlissel when he was faced with the gay pride parade. In his view, the gay community's goal is to contaminate Jerusalem, the holiest of cities. He accordingly deemed that it was his duty to thwart that desecration. According to his worldview, if he did not react, his family and community would suffer divine consequences.

I agree with his ideology — partially.



Image: Getty Images

Schlissel is right that sanctity is of vital importance for the wellbeing of society. I, however, vehemently disagree with him on the purpose of the gay pride parade. The gay community marched to bask in the sanctity of Jerusalem, not to subvert it. What he and those he represents fail to understand is that aside from having a different sexual orientation than Schlissel, the LGBT community is a religious mirror image of him. They are attracted to Jerusalem for the same reasons, viewing it as the center of holiness. It is the place where all Jews, regardless of race, color, gender, or sexual orientation, go to recharge their batteries spiritually.

In “othering” the LGBT community, we have at times managed to obscure the obvious: that our LGBT brethren are us, sharing our hopes, values, and aspirations.

We all crave moments of transcendence. It is what allows us to overcome life’s vicissitudes, pain, and frustration. It enables us to take time out from the daily grind.

The harder the life, the more important those moments of transcendental experience. You could, therefore, reasonably argue that the LGBT community deserves Jerusalemite transcendence even more than Schlissel does. That makes his violent rage even more reprehensible.



Suspected anti-gay attacker is arrested after several people were stabbed at Jerusalem gay pride parade.

While Schlissel's murderous rage is inexcusable, the LGBT community and those of us aligned with their cause also need to look ourselves in the mirror. So far, we have conceded the communal conversation to the fringe elements in society. We need to reclaim it. The fanatics have managed to paint this as a battle between good and evil. It is not. Rather, it is a conflict between two wildly divergent views on how best to achieve the "Good."

Those of us who support the LGBT community's striving for equality and acceptance believe that their fight is sacred. They deserve to have their struggle sanctified within the Jewish pantheon of religious struggles.

The journey of the LGBT community can rightly be described as a long and intense dialogue with the divine. They are trying to figure out how their complex story fits into the significant Jewish narrative unfolding in contemporary Israel. We should celebrate that Jerusalem will one day be a chapter in the magnificent story that

they will tell. It will be an inspiring tale of a community that succeeded collectively in overcoming obstacles on their way towards rich and spiritually integrated lives, whereby they managed to synthesize who they are with what they believe.

While those of us who listen closely already know this is the case, the larger world is mostly oblivious to their experiences and spiritual aspirations. The Jewish community needs to listen and we, the LGBT community and their supporters, need to share and publicize more. We should make the community's religious aspirations to sanctity much more explicit. This way, we stand a chance of stopping the next Yishai Schlissel in his or her tracks.

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