

Friday, January 10, 2014

Top rabbi wrong to stand by molester

ONE would think given the enormous publicity surrounding the tragic issue of paedophilia that has emerged across the Jewish world, including here in Australia at Jewish schools, shuls, sporting clubs and welfare organisations, that the Jewish leadership would be far more responsive than they were in yesteryear.

One would think that rabbis and lay leaders would have a heightened awareness of the issue and would be far more educated in how to respond to these issues if and when they were to arise. One would think leaders have learned from the mistakes of the past and would respond with greater sensitivity and alacrity than ever before.

Fortunately, on the one hand, many have. Within the rabbinate, one of the biggest issues to have been addressed was the myth that reporting sexual abuse to the police somehow contravened the prohibition of "mesirah" or reporting crimes to the civil authorities. Major rabbinic bodies around the world have repudiated this myth and stated unequivocally that there is no such prohibition in cases of child sexual abuse. To its credit, the Rabbinical Council of Victoria did so in 2010 before this issue was at the forefront of communal discussion and has subsequently reiterated it on numerous occasions.

Seminars and professional training have been undertaken by educators and religious and lay leaders who may often be the first to learn of allegations of child sexual abuse. Rigid policies have been introduced at schools, synagogues, youth move-

Viewpoint

RABBI YAAKOV GLASMAN

ments, and sporting and scouting clubs: The general awareness of parents has been heightened more than ever and age appropriate education of "good touch, bad touch" has been implemented for children in many schools.

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There are many such examples of steps that have been taken to ensure the safety of children is our number one priority. These are to be encouraged and supported.

But despite the progress made to date, there are still some leaders who choose to bury their heads in the sand.

In a case that has shocked tens of thousands of people around the world, Jerusalem's Rabbi Mordechai (Moti) Elon, who was convicted of sexual misconduct with a minor, was invited by Rabbi Chaim Drukman, head of Yeshivat Or Etzion, to take up a teaching position that would have



Rabbi Mordechai Elon outside Jerusalem Magistrates Court last month after being sentenced for molesting a minor. Photo: Ashernet

him working with minors. Rabbi Drukman not only afforded Rabbi Elon this teaching position but has defended his actions by accusing the court of carrying out a wrongful conviction.

This case is as astonishing as it is tragic, and for numerous reasons:

Rabbi Elon was not convicted in the court of public opinion. He was convicted in a court of law. Elon's case withstood the full weight of Israel's robust and transparent judicial system. To blatantly dismiss the court's rulings undermines the fundamental rule of law upon which any democracy is founded. Rabbi Drukman's personal opinion as to the veracity or otherwise of the court's ruling is totally and utterly irrelevant.

Chaim Drukman is a highly prominent rabbi in Israel. His actions therefore have far greater ramifications than the actions of others. Rabbi Drukman is not only the head of the largest religious Zionist youth movement in the world, Bnei Akiva, with over 125,000 members in 37 countries including Australia, but he is a former member of Knesset, a highly regarded rosh yeshivah and a recipient of the Israel Prize. His stature alone has catapulted this episode to the international stage and is matched only by the chillul Hashem it has created.

Rabbi Drukman's handling of the Elon case took place in 2013. In the past 10-15 years alone cultural attitudes within the Jewish community (and the wider community for that

matter) have shifted more than ever before on the issue of child sex abuse. For the head of a Jewish organisation to turn a blind eye in 2013 not only to an allegation of abuse but to an actual conviction is appalling.

Rabbi Drukman does not identify as a religious extremist. He is a leading figure in the Modern Orthodox world which prides itself on the integration of Orthodoxy and modernity, or Torah and Madah (Torah study coupled with an embrace of secular knowledge). That a so-called "ultra-orthodox" rabbi could harbour such contempt for a court ruling would be erroneous yet understandable. That a rabbi who spent 12 of his 16 years in politics as part of Israel's centrist National Religious party is frankly unforgivable.

More than all the aforementioned reasons combined, Rabbi Drukman's actions have exacerbated the pain suffered not only by Rabbi Elon's victims but by victims of child sexual abuse around the world. They have witnessed a convicted paedophile protected by the very religious leader who is supposed to protect them.

International pressure is mounting on Rabbi Drukman to reverse his decision. Sadly, until that takes place his actions will continue to bring shame on the Jewish world and take us one step back in our collective fight against child sex abuse.

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