

supporters. He praises Israel's government for withdrawing from Gaza and the West Bank. But he also sees the Bush administration's refusal to provide aid to the Palestinian Authority under Hamas leadership as a mistake.

"Hamas is still a democratically elected group and we are now in a box," he says. "We pushed for an election, the observ-

followed by state Sen. Carl Andrews at 17 percent and Owens at 14 percent. Yassky trailed at 9 percent, virtually tied with Perry's 8, but more than 20 percent of the respondents were undecided, making the contest essentially wide open.

Owens, who lives in Prospect Heights with his wife,

the district," said Messenger, president of the American Jewish World Service, as she boarded a plane en route to Sudan. "I certainly don't expect him to dwell on it, but from his point of view it is a piece of who he is, and knowing people from different backgrounds makes better politics in general." ■

## Group Libel Is Also Abuse

The two of us in the Orthodox community – Rabbi Avi Shafran and I – who are willing to challenge the cesspool of journalistic bigotry and distortion directed against the Orthodox constantly run the risk of having our denials of what is false served up by the hate-mongers as proof of a cover-up. This is especially true of the ugly falsehood that there is a high incidence of sexual abuse – higher than elsewhere – in yeshivas and day schools. The absence of data supporting the charge does not deter those who peddle lies and bigotry. To the contrary, in some perverse way, the lack of evidence serves as a surrogate for evidence.

Group libel is a sin, consisting of the claim that wrongdoing by some group members is representative of the group. The First Amendment affords protection to group libel, but it does not remove the moral stain. Last week in this newspaper, Robert Kolker reprised his ugly libel of the Orthodox, first published in *New York*, in which what allegedly was done by a single teacher in one yeshiva is said to be representative of Orthodox Jewry's Catholic Church problem. In his response to Avi Shafran's balanced article, Kolker exhibited a reckless disregard for the truth.

In a notable 1943 dissent, Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote with great emotion about Jews being the most vilified people in all of history. This vilification often centers around sexual claims, as readers of *Mein Kampf* would know. Orthodox Jews are far and away the most vilified of all Jews and among the most vilified people on the earth. No other American ethnic group experiences what we Orthodox experience, often from other Jews. There is absolute joy in mudville as the vilifiers do their dirty deeds.

We Orthodox Jews are not freaks in a sideshow and our purpose on this earth is not to serve as punching bags, as week after week bigots with pens are given ink and space. The Orthodox have sinners for sure, but to an extraordinary extent this is a people who live good and honorable lives, people who work hard and with integrity and struggle to maintain their

families, people who have created a network of voluntary agencies helping the needy that dwarfs by a wide margin all that Federation does, people who show enormous kindness to others. In each category of social pathology, including sexual abuse and criminal activity, the incidence among the Orthodox is far below what it is elsewhere, including among secular Jews. What do the Orthodox get in return? A steady diet of journalistic hate.

What I write will not stem the effluvium. There will be sharply critical letters that in addition to accusing me of a cover up will make the infantile point that my column is "paid," a circumstance arising from the fact that there is no other way to get it published on a weekly basis. As an aside, Hella Winston whose awful book on ex-Chasidim I sharply criticized, originally wrote to the *Jerusalem Post* where the article was also published. There was no mention of the column being paid because it wasn't. When she got around to writing to this newspaper, she added that bit of infantilism.

While she and Kolker now claim that her book deals with sexual abuse among Chasidim, in fact it does not and there is no more than a brief reference to the subject. As for this reference, in an email to me, Winston acknowledged her mistake in relying on unreliable sexual abuse statistics. I will add that her dissertation advisor told me that the original manuscript was far more hate-filled than what appears in print.

There have been incidents of sexual abuse in Orthodox schools. The well-being of children is the highest obligation of all schools and such behavior must never be tolerated, excused or covered up. In my thirty-three years as president of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School – there are four schools – there was no more than one minor matter of possible indirect abuse and we acted immediately. I am certain that the number of incidents at Orthodox schools is low, which doesn't discount wrongdoing when it does occur. By the same token, we must not discount the absence of cases during an extended period

of intense public scrutiny of the subject.

Kolker and others who have no proof say that a shanda factor and other elements of Orthodox life result in a severe underreporting of Orthodox abuse. When Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes responded to Kolker's group libel saying that his office has investigated all claims of sexual abuse, Kolker responded by saying that unique measures must be taken to investigate the Orthodox. Here we see the full flowering of his bigotry.

One interesting change in yeshiva and day school education is that while in earlier periods parents were content to have schools educate their children and they would stay out of the way, nowadays parents are more like big brothers and big sisters as they are on top of all that their kids experience in school. When they feel that their children have been treated unfairly, they take out their long knives and are ready to skewer the principal or teacher. When sexual abuse happens, they would know about it and they wouldn't be silent. The absence of evidence is telling.

While these charges against the Orthodox are wildly exaggerated, they take a toll, as they add to the journalistic profile of a people who constantly do bad things. No other American ethnic group is subject constantly to this kind of vituperation. Another consequence is that while I and Avi Shafran challenge the vilifiers, most Orthodox Jews say, "why bother?" They believe that we are hated and there is nothing that can be done or said to stop the flow of hatred. They believe that Jewish journalism has a standard for religious Jews that encourages vilification.

Comments can be emailed to: [mschick@mindspring.com](mailto:mschick@mindspring.com)  
or sent by fax to (212) 334-1324.

*It's summertime and the living should be easy or at least easier.  
No column until September.*