

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

In a city where passing a law that the world is flat would not be unheard of (Edgar Schoen), a newly formed group headed by the "free" thinking Michael Hess has decided that the millennia long tradition of circumcision is simply not suitable anymore.

OUR HISTORY IS PLAGUED WITH EVENTS SIMILAR TO THIS THAT REALLY DID COME INTO ACTUALIZATION AND WHICH LEFT THE JEWS IN A PREDICAMENT WHERE THEY WERE NOT LEGALLY ALLOWED TO OBSERVE THEIR MOST BASIC LAWS.

His reasons, while shallow in nature, have managed to gain wide support from the citizens who only recently outlawed plastic shopping bags and free children's toys in a McDonald's Happy Meal.

It almost seems absurd that in this day and age such a concept could come so close to being a reality, with the proposal gaining 5,000 more signatures than is required for

it to go to the polls. The ballot, which is set for November, will impose restrictions on brisim to the penalty of a \$1,000 fine or a year in jail if passed.

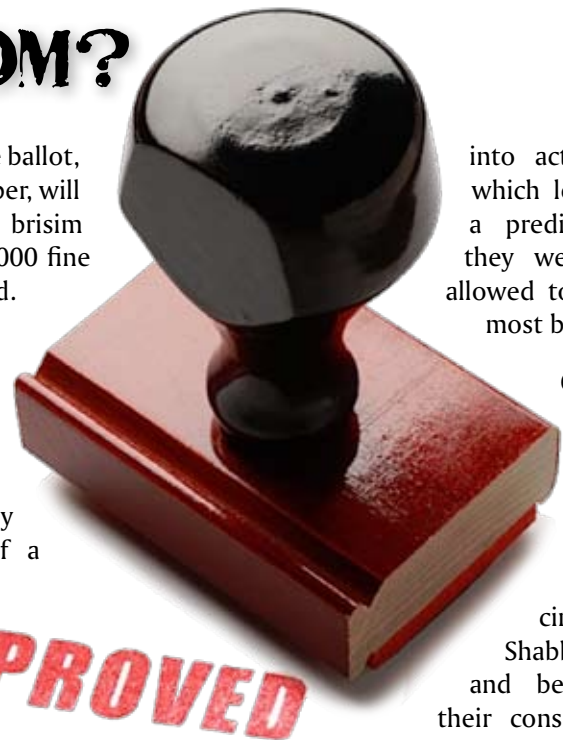
Whether you're a Jew sitting in San Francisco watching this debacle unfold, or one hearing of it from the slowly dissolving comforts of a

frum community in Brooklyn, news of this kind is quite unsettling.

At a time when a right such as this risks being lost, individuals from within the Jewish community and without have joined together to vehemently oppose the ballot from even coming into actualization, let alone passing. The Committee for Parental Choice & Religious Freedom formed especially in light of this and much antagonism has also been shown from the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, and a number of Jewish and Muslim individuals who joined together to follow suit.

Controversial events certainly achieve at least one advantage: they blatantly remind us of our holy ways and how important they are in the face of possibly losing the right to be able to openly observe them.

The San Francisco Circumcision Ban has not been and hopefully will not be passed. However, our history is plagued with events similar to this that really did come



into actualization and which left the Jews in a predicament where they were not legally allowed to observe their most basic laws.

Chanukah symbolizes one such event. The Greeks imposed a ban on Torah study, circumcision, and Shabbat observance, and believe you me their consequences were a lot more severe than a hit to the bank account.

Communist Russia did not make such observances any easier, either. Multiple stories are told of the eltere Chassidim and the ways in which they sacrificed their safety to ensure chinuch and limmud haTorah continued.

It seems history really does repeat itself. At a time when we are faced with the possibility of losing such a legal right it is only natural to start contemplating all the other rights we take for granted.

How would you react to a ban on Torah study today?

Rather than ponder too long on such a thought, appreciate the freedom we are blessed with in this area. Comforts that come to us with ease often don't get the attention they require until they face the possibility of being taken away. Openly learning, for significant periods of time, in the comforts of any chosen location, are factors we should appreciate, take advantage of, and truly cherish.

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