

Alcoholism and Drunk Driving - 1983

Issue

- 1) To reduce the number of highway accidents and fatalities caused by drunken drivers.
- 2) To recommend action on the alarming level of alcoholism in our society.

Background

In 1982 there were approximately 49,301 highway fatalities of which approximately one-half were caused by drunken drivers; 8,484 of these fatalities involved youths between the ages of 16 and 24.

Studies have shown that a lowered drinking age results in increased alcohol-related accidents. The National Safety Board cites, for example, the state of Michigan, which lowered the drinking age down to 18 in January 1972 and raised it back up to 21 in December 1978. In the first 12 months after the age limit was raised a study showed a 31% reduction in alcohol-related accidents among drivers aged 18-20.

In Illinois a study showed an 8.8% decline in "single vehicle nighttime male driver" accidents involving drivers 19 and 20 when the drinking age was raised in 1980. A large majority of single vehicle nighttime male driver accidents consistently has involved drinking drivers. The National Safety Board concluded, based on the experience of the states that have raised their minimum legal drinking and purchasing age, that alcohol-related accidents in the 18-21 year old age group can be significantly reduced by raising the minimum legal drinking age.

A Jewish principle is that each individual is a precious entity created in the image of God. Jews must treat their bodies with respect and not bring harm to themselves for their own sake and see that they do not bring harm to anyone else. Alcoholism is an illness. However, alcohol-related accidents and driving while under the influence of alcohol require consideration and action beyond medical attention.

Resolution

Therefore the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods urges its affiliates:

1. To educate themselves, congregation and community about the serious problem of alcoholism and its destructive effect on the family and society.
2. To join, where possible, with other community groups, to recommend and advocate appropriate legislative actions regarding this serious problem, including:
 1. In states where the legal drinking and purchasing age is younger than 21, to work toward raising the minimum age.
 2. To work for the enactment of a correctional program which includes suspension of drivers' licenses, mandatory treatment of offenders, fines sufficiently high to serve as a deterrent to repeat offenses, and compensation for victims. In case of death or serious bodily injury caused by a driver under the influence of alcohol, a mandatory confinement and full provisions by law should apply.
3. To address the increasing problem of alcoholism among Jews including the denial of the problem by the Jewish community. Intemperate use of alcohol must be recognized as antithetical to Jewish teachings and values and we call upon Sisterhoods, congregations and the Jewish community to establish

guidelines and standards for communal behavior that will discourage abusive use of alcoholic products.