

Jewish Journal

DADE COUNTY
March 23, 2011

WWW.FLORIDAJEWISHJOURNAL.COM

LOCAL

Varied views given on Jews and tattoos

BY SERGIO CARMONA
STAFF WRITER

Is it right for Jews to get tattoos?

That question was up for debate during the Miami Jewish Cultural Center Next @19th's New Sanhedrin event, "Tattoo Jew," at Temple Israel of Greater Miami.

Guests provided differing views on whether or not it's right to get a tattoo and also viewed excerpts from film producer Andy Abrams' documentary, "Tattoo Jew."

"I think it's great to have interesting dialogue where we sort of pose questions without answering them about issues that are so unresolved for those of us who are grappling as

Jews," said Elizabeth Schwartz, The New Sanhedrin chair, following the discussion. "I think the thing that was so interesting about tonight is that there were a lot of people that took for granted that of course Jews can have tattoos and then there were a lot of other people that took for granted that of course Jews can't have tattoos."

The New Sanhedrin program is a modern system of argument based on the principles of the early rabbis' original Sanhedrin. During the debate, Miami resident Lissette Mendez, who was proud of her tattoos and pro-tattoo, said she grew up in a very secular household



Chaim Lieberman shares his opinion about Jews and tattoos during the Miami Jewish Cultural Center Next @19th's New Sanhedrin event. Staff photo/Janeris Marte

but that her family still freaked out when she had just received them.

"My family just freaked out because they were people who tradi-

tionally would not have gotten tattoos whether they were religious or not but probably being Jewish had something to do with it as well," Men-

dez added.

Miami resident Chaim Lieberman cited a passage in Leviticus 19 where it says that one shouldn't cut into the flesh and cut oneself and said that getting a tattoo involves a needle and pulling from within the body. Several tattooed Jews said that they got them as a means of Jewish cultural identity. Pro-tattoo guests said that getting a tattoo was also a way to respect Holocaust survivors. However, Miami resident Melinda Cowen, who opposed tattoos, said, "There's something about a tattoo that offends me so much because of the Holocaust."

Abrams, who lives in St. Louis and is currently

working on the film that highlights Jewish-themed tattoos as permanent expressions of Jewish cultural connection and identity, was unable to attend the event. When he heard about the debate's details during a phone interview, Abrams was excited because that was intention for the discussion.

"I'm not promoting for or pushing against people getting tattoos who are Jewish," Abrams added. "There's a lot of differences of opinions about tattoos within the Jewish community and people should take the chance to be educated not just about the issue but about people's differing opinions."