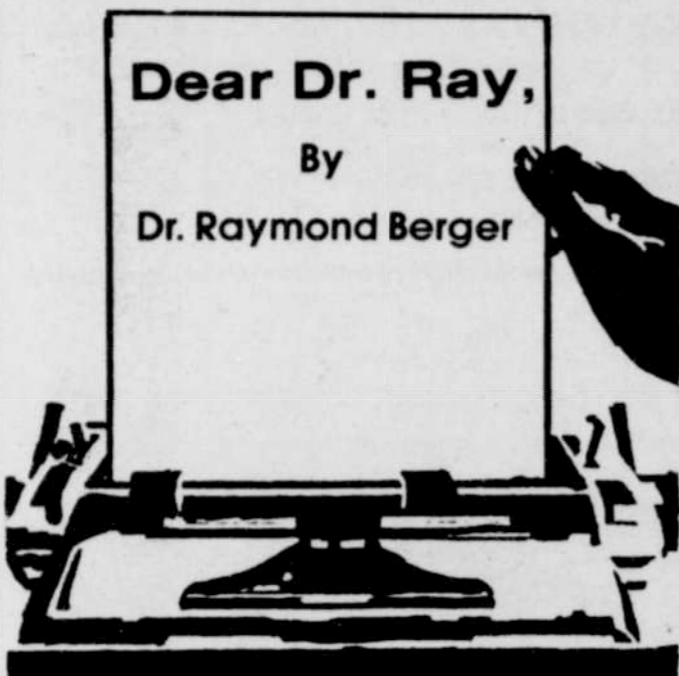


## "Is this all there is?" asks newcomer.

Dear Dr. Ray,

I am a 25 year old gay man who moved to this area a few months ago in order to start graduate school.

But another big reason for moving here is that I felt I needed to be far away from my family. They don't know that I'm gay. I don't plan to tell them, or to tell my brothers and



sisters because they are very devout Catholics. I grew up hearing all sorts of terrible things about gay people.

Before I left home I didn't know any gay people. I did have a couple of sexual experiences that were pretty anonymous, but they

left me feeling terrible about myself.

Being on my own for the first time was supposed to be my chance to get to know other gay people. I would really like to meet someone who is interested in me as a person, someone who I can relate to. I want to have a lover.

The problem is that just about everyone I've met here is either interested only in being sexual, or they are very shallow people, not the kind I had hoped to meet.

Don't tell me to go out and meet more gay people. I've tried that. I've spent many hours in gay bars, I've gone on hikes with the gay hiking group, I've been volunteering my time for gay groups. They're all superficial.

Is this really all there is to gay life? Why am I feeling so alienated? Should I go back into the closet?

*Disappointed*

Dear Disappointed,

This is certainly not an easy time for you because your experiences with gay people have been discouraging. You may feel anxious about your future.

You should know that many gay men report similar feelings, particularly when they first recognize their gayness and begin to seek out other gay people.

Part of the reason you feel the way you do is that you have unrealistically high expectations about what the gay community will offer you. Perhaps like many gay men, you spent years thinking about what it would be like to come out. In that time you may have had fantasies about what it would be like. Are your expectations reasonable?

You also seem to be in a hurry to be that fully integrated gay person we would all like to

be. But it's not that easy to throw off years of being taught that homosexuality is awful and nasty. You seem to have gotten a good dose of this homophobic conditioning from your family.

If you are in a hurry you may be rejecting good, but less than perfect relationships that do come along. It would be better to slow down. Accept the fact that it will take a while to develop close relationships. Then value each relationship that does come along, for what it has to offer.

Among my own gay clients I find that those who are very critical of "gay people" or the "gay community" are often reflecting their own homophobia. They really don't feel good about being gay themselves. Look into your own feelings to see if that is true for you.

If you feel a lot of guilt or anxiety about being gay, or if your feelings of alienation seem overwhelming, a gay positive counselor may be of help.

Don't give up! Continue your involvement with other gay people. Choose settings that

give you the opportunity to meet others who will be interested in you as a person. Support groups, discussion groups and social action organizations are better in this regard than bars.

This is a special time in your life. Despite occasional disappointments, it can be a wonderful opportunity for you to explore who you are and who you can be. Thinking about this time of your life as a special opportunity will certainly help.

Best of luck to you!

Have a problem? Need advice? Write to "Dr. Ray" in care of *Just Out*, PO Box 15117, Portland, OR 97215. Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish to receive a personal reply.

Dr. Raymond Berger, an individual, couple and family counselor, is author of the book *Gay and Gray: The Older Homosexual Man*. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Berger call (503) 292-2735.

## HELP OUT

### Understanding Aids

*by Christoph Kind*

The AIDS epidemic is provoking increased alarm today with everyone asking "Could I catch AIDS?" Anxiety about the disease is understandable when faced with the lack of any successful medical treatment for a disease with such an ominous prognosis. However, irrational fears are creating an "AIDS plague" mentality. This germ phobia has led to fears of becoming infected from toilet seats, drinking glasses, showers, doorknobs, or food touched by someone with AIDS. Often patients with AIDS are ostracized by friends and family, physical contact totally avoided, and social contact reduced to a minimum. It is most important then, to educate oneself about the disease to minimize unnecessary anxieties and prejudices.

The body is protected from disease by a complex network of lymphatic organs and specialized cells called lymphocytes. These cells are of two major types. In response to anything foreign in the blood (e.g. a virus) the B-lymphocytes make specific antibodies. At the same time T-lymphocytes produce various chemicals including interferon and interleukin-2, all of which help the cellular response of the immune system to fight the virus.

One group of T-lymphocytes help direct much of the immune response and are called helper cells. Another group, suppressor cells, help turn off the antibody formation. In AIDS, infection with HTLV-III drastically reduces the T-helper cells. Lack of these cells so weakens the immune system that the person becomes very susceptible to severe opportunistic infections.

The diagnosis of AIDS is not based on any one specific symptom, sign or test but rather a clinical evaluation by a physician. The disease may mimic the flu but may continue for a year or more before the onset of life-threatening infections or malignant disease. An AIDS-related complex (ARC) of relatively milder symptoms includes: lymph node enlargement, malaise, fatigue, weight loss,

fever, chills, cough, diarrhea, forgetfulness, impaired speech, or seizures.

It is not known how often ARC develops into AIDS it may be a milder form of the syndrome, or its early stage. About 20% of people with ARC develop AIDS within a year.

Testing for the HTLV-III antibody is useful but it is important to remember that it is not a diagnostic test for AIDS or ARC nor can it be used to predict whether someone will develop AIDS or ARC.

A positive HTLV-III test means that the body has made antibodies in response to exposure to that virus. This exposure does not mean that the disease AIDS will occur. Much depends on the susceptibility of the individual. In recent studies 5%-19% of HTLV-III positive testees developed AIDS within five years.

Sexual and non-sexual transmission of HTLV-III is through body fluids (blood and semen) and takes more than just casual contact. Nothing supports fears that AIDS is spread by working, eating, sharing a pen or shaking hands with a person infected with HTLV-III.

It is of little use for anyone with concern about the status of their immune system to hope they won't become ill, or to wait, under the strain of wondering if AIDS will develop, without doing anything. Mental strain, worry, or any stress are known to effectively reduce the immune system's ability to function. The important thing is to become actively involved in your own health and educate yourself to available choices.

Any evaluation of your immune system by your physician should include a complete blood count (CBC) and a T-helper/suppressor ratio. These are not diagnostic of AIDS but give important clinical information as to your risks. A positive HTLV-III test, with a low ratio should give you strong reasons to make changes in your lifestyle and investigate treatment options.

Currently, the Portland Naturopathic Clinic (P.N.C.) is conducting research into the value of natural therapeutics in supporting immune function, specifically with respect to the AIDS-Related Complex. A confidential clinical evaluation of the person's risks for ARC or AIDS can be done at P.N.C. and includes laboratory assessment of their immune status. A number of non-toxic therapies are being investigated including botanical and nutritional immune support.

Further information about AIDS and treatment options is available at Portland Naturopathic Clinic.

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