

## O Jerusalem! 'It's time Sec 377 was changed'

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**DNA**  
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Thirty-year-old Yonatan Gher is aware of gay rights and issues, not just in his home country, Israel, but also across the world. Gher, executive director of Jerusalem Open House, Israel's largest gay rights organisation, and his partner of seven years, Omer, a psychologist, are determined to lead life on their own terms.

Their quest has brought them to Mumbai, where an unidentified surrogate mother — a 28-year-old Mumbai housewife — delivered a baby for them; their son, Evyator, will be raised a Jew in Israel by his fathers.

"We will tell him how special he is and that he was 'made in India'," says Gher. And when their son turns 13, the age when a Jewish boy is believed to enter manhood, the couple plans to bring him to Mumbai, so that he can learn about his roots.

"Israel is a diverse country and more accepting of gays and lesbians. But coming out of the closet is tough for a gay person in Israel, too," says Gher. "My family was more accepting. Once I came out of the closet, my father asked me if it was still okay for him to crack gay jokes."

Gher says Israel is very progressive, "in some ways". Since 1993, the country's armed forces have been allowed service without any distinction based on sexual orientation.

And while Israel does not conduct same-sex marriages, it recognises same-sex couples who get married abroad. "And yet, we had to come to India for our baby," he muses.

Gher and Omer have had ample chance to observe life in Mumbai. "We visited the office of Gay Bombay and heard about the first gay parade organised by Mumbai's queer community," Gher says.

About Section 377 (see box), he adds, "It is high time this archaic law was changed. England changed its laws in the '60s and Israel in the '80s. It is unacceptable because your country is telling you that your identity is illegitimate. It's ironic that about 10% of the population is termed an outcaste because of a law that was not even written by an Indian."