

Pride Shabbat 2022 Drash

Why should we observe Pride Shabbat every year?

In my view, it's for the same reason that we return to Beresheit each year.

As Jews, we recognize and believe deeply in the importance of studying Torah as a lifelong obligation, commitment and opportunity. We understand that every year, we have new life lessons to learn. And in the telling and retelling, studying, questioning and exploring the mysteries, parables, nuances and commentaries, and shaping them to the world as we know it, we gain a greater love and appreciation for our community, our families, and ultimately ourselves.

And what lesson do we learn in this, the very first Parashah in our Torah, Beresheit? We read in Genesis 1:27 that we are created B'tselem Elohim, in the image of God. That's really all you need to know. That God created each of *Their* people in *Their* image.

What did I just do there? I gave G-d they/them pronouns. I believe this is consistent and makes sense. We have to look no further than the Shema: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Not one man, or one woman, but One, and All. Encompassing every type of person created in Their image. That is not the simple binary of man or woman. It's the entire spectrum of being. For G-d, and for us.

Why is this so important to me?

It's simple. Carole and I are the parents of a daughter who identifies as Cis-gender, queer, and oh, by the way, Jewish. And she is married to a Black, Southern Baptist, non-binary person, who recently changed from using they/them pronouns to using they/he pronouns, as well as legally changing their name.

Pronouns seem to be one of the most difficult concepts for people to understand and feel comfortable and natural with. Yet it is so important, for trans and non-binary people, in particular, that you recognize and respect them by using their pronouns.

There is so much to celebrate in our daughter and child-in-law's love for each other. In July of 2020, they got married for the first time. Due to COVID, they were married in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and we and most of the invited guests attended via Zoom. But the really fun part was this past May, when they got married for a second time, this time in Savannah, GA. Lots of friends and family. They honored traditions from both sides of the family. They literally jumped the broom, which is the way African-Americans signified their marriage in enslavement times. After

jumping the broom, they broke the glass. And there were puppets. And drag queens. For real. We danced our shoes off. It was a wedding for the ages. An expression of telling and retelling their own stories, reinforcing their love for each other. Much like the way we retell and reinforce our own stories as a Jewish people.

Frankly, I'm not asking you to love or understand either my daughter or my child-in-law. But I am asking you to accept them and welcome them if they walk through the door. And further, to accept and welcome anyone who walks through our door, and wishes to be a part of our Etz Chaim family, and, most important, to see them as B'tselem Elohim, each created in the image of God. To go one step further in demonstrating our allyship, we can show our support of the LGBTQ+ community by including our own pronouns in our email signatures. We have pronoun buttons in the lobby for people to wear, for anyone who wishes to. We also have handouts out in the lobby covering LGBTQ terminology, pronouns and Jewish values. Learning, asking questions, demonstrating allyship. There are many ways to show support. Or just be welcoming. Our daughter and child-in-law are just trying to live their truth, and seek only to be allowed to do so in safety and in peace.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I was quite simply blown away by the Kol Nidre address given by our synagogue president, Jamie Lyons. It was unforgettable, in no small part because she used props. [put on hat] I got this at the Atlanta Pride Parade. Carole and I strode through downtown Atlanta with the Atlanta Jewish Community and 100,000 of our closest friends. It was awesome! I was very inspired to see so many people showing their true colors, and true selves.

The importance of showing support cannot be overstated. Mistreating and stigmatizing LGBTQ+ people, especially trans and non-binary youth, leads to psychological and emotional trauma, and worse. According to the Trevor Project, LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide as their peers. Pikuach Nefesh is the principle in Jewish law that the preservation of life overrides virtually any other religious rule of Judaism. By being a welcoming and inclusive community where people have a safe place to go and find acceptance, we live and practice an important Jewish value, and maybe even save a life.

And B'tselem Elohim means being fully inclusive, not only of those of differing sexual orientations and gender identities, but also those who have different backgrounds and experiences of all kinds, from race to immigration status to national

origin to economic status. Our synagogue has a wonderful and active Inclusion Committee, which has made incredible efforts to expand our accessibility. Our goal is to be as welcoming and open as possible to all.

Each and every person is a part of G-d's creation. We are all created B'tselem Elohim.

Trust me, I am learning new things all the time, and sharing that learning with family and friends. As an ally, I think that is one of the most important things I can do. The Etz Chaim Pride Alliance is dedicated to supporting our LGBTQ+ members of all ages and their families, by educating our membership about the importance of allyship, answering questions, providing educational opportunities, and working with local and regional organizations like SOJOURN and JF&CS to raise awareness.

We are fortunate to have the support of our lay and professional leaders and the wonderful staff here at Etz Chaim.

And, of course, your support as well.

We can show support in many different ways. [pick up sign] I was given this sign by our daughter and child-in-law as a Father's Day gift a couple of years ago. I have it sitting behind me on my credenza in my home office. It's always in the background when I'm on a Zoom call.

At Kiddish, we will have a list of questions on each table. We encourage you to engage each other in conversation, using the questions we offer, or your own questions. The members of the Pride Alliance are, like me, wearing a rainbow name tag, and will be going from table to table and look forward to talking with you.

When Carole and I retired three years ago and decided to leave New York, an important consideration we had in selecting a new place to live was that it had a strong, active, vibrant and thriving Jewish community. I cannot begin to tell you how grateful we are to be members of Etz Chaim. From the moment we joined, we have felt welcomed and embraced. Etz Chaim has far exceeded anything we could have hoped for. One of the most important examples of this is the support that you have given to the creation and support of the Pride Alliance. All of us look forward to working with all of you, in growing allyship, raising awareness, educating and being welcoming. Shabbat Shalom!