



The Shofar

Congregation Beth Ahavah @ Rodeph Shalom Newsletter

A GLBT synagogue welcoming people of all gender and sexual identities since 1975

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Annual Congregational Meeting

Wednesday,

June 16th @ 7:00 PM

All members invited.

Deli Dinner.

Choose your leadership and make your vote count!

Call 215-923-2003 or email bethahavah@rodephshalom.org to let us know you are coming so that we can order food accordingly.

Shabbat Services



Friday
June 25th
8:00 PM

Join us for BA style services preceded by dinner and followed by an oneg and shmoozing.

Services led by Evan Weiner



Dinner - 6:00 PM

Sazon Restaurant & Café

941 Spring Garden St, Philadelphia
215-763-2500,

www.sazonrestaurant.com

Call Jeff Strauss to let him know you are coming, 215-880-5251.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Happy summer 2010! While July and August is vacation time for many of us, I urge you to consider attending our Shabbat service on June 25, 2010. Evan Weiner will lead the service. Please come out to support him and begin your Shabbat with old friends and possibly new friends. Attendance to services has been low, and the thought has crossed my mind as to why do we continue to do them. This past Friday night served as a reminder to me why BA continues to conduct a Shabbat evening service and how important it is for our/your community. It is important because we raise our consciousness. We are able to express ourselves in BA style and tradition. We also are able to welcome people who still look us up because they are passing through, are students at local universities, or need that connection of other GLBT Jews. Haven't we all felt that way at one time or another? I think you would agree the answer is yes. Despite our small size, I was so glad to see a minyan at this past Friday night. The service was warm, participatory, and attended by old and new faces. Please join us on June 25th before we break for the summer and return on the High Holy Days.

While speaking about returning, please know that RS turns no one away for inability to pay dues. Please note that RS is very proud of the fact that they are in a good financial position and provides some level of support to a large part of the congregation. Do not feel alone. Despite these past economic times RS is in good economic shape. If anyone is renewing a membership and needs to talk with someone about their dues, do not hesitate to reach out to me, jeffstrauss1@aol.com or 215-483-3861, Catherine Fischer, cfischer@rodephshalom.org or 215-627-6747 x 46, or Roy Feinberg, Executive Director, rfeinberg@rodephshalom.org or 215-627-6747 x 15. It is a conversation that we may think is difficult but it will be easily remedied by speaking to Roy, Catherine, or myself. And please be assured that these conversations are kept strictly confidential.

Please join us for our congregational meeting on June 16, 2010. If you are unable to make it, please make sure you submit a proxy. We will vote for our board members and will also give you a review of the past year and what the future has in store.

My apologies for leaving Eve Miller's name off of the letter that went out with the proxy. Eve will be finishing her 2nd year of her two-year term on the BA Board of Directors. Thank you Eve.

Wishing you all a safe and happy summer 2010.

Shalom,

Jeff

Jeff Strauss

YAHARZEITS



David Jason Finn
June 4, 2004
16 Sivan/May 29
Beloved kin of
Larry Finn

Paul Ehrlich
June 8, 2001
17 Sivan/May 30
Beloved father of
Phyllis Ehrlich

ANNIVERSARIES



June 14
**Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell &
Nurit Levi Shein**

June 31
**Steve Rosenberg &
Rich Civalier**

BIRTHDAYS



Edward Feldman
June 15

Phyllis Ehrlich
June 16

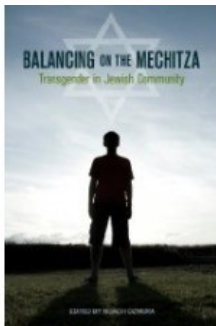
Nurit Levi Shein
June 18

EQUALITY FORUM THANK YOU

Dear Readers:

Our special thanks to Nurit Shein for graciously submitting her inspirational and informative d'var torah that she presented at the Equality Forum Shabbat Service in May for your reading pleasure in this month's issue on page 3.

Thanks also to Evan Weiner for helping Jeff Strauss in setting up and Richard Pardys and Alan Zamochnick for hosting BA's table at the Piazza on Equality Forum Sunday Out.



An Evening Discussion with Noach Dzmura, editor of *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in the Jewish Community*

Wednesday, June 2nd @ 7:00 PM
Congregation Rodeph Shalom

Please join us for the east coast launch of the new anthology, *Balancing on the Mechitza*, edited by Noach Dzmura, an activist for transgender inclusion in the Bay Area Jewish communities and a consultant for Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity.

Mr. Dzmura will introduce and read selections from the text to illustrate the celebrations and challenges of transgender Jewish life from all points on the gender spectrum.

This event is co-sponsored by Congregations Rodeph Shalom, Beth Ahavah @ Rodeph Shalom, Mishkan Shalom, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the YES! Coalition and the TransFaith Online.

This event will be of interest to Jewish and non-Jewish participants of all genders. Although the event is free, please RSVP so that we may plan for refreshments.

Telephone: 215-923-2003 or Email: bethahavah@rodephshalom.org

8th Annual Gay Community Night at the Phillies



Citizens Bank Park • Philadelphia, PA

Monday, August 23rd, 7:05 PM

Phillies vs. Houston Astros

Bring friends and family so we can have our name on the side message board (Groups of 25 or more qualify.)

Cost: \$20 per person - seats in sections 301-305

Reservation Deadline: July 18th

Gay Community Night at the Phillies: August 23rd, 7:05 PM

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Amount Enclosed: # of tickets _____ @ \$20 per person = \$_____.

Please make check payable to Rodeph Shalom and mail with coupon to:

Rodeph Shalom, 615 N. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19123

Equal Not Special: The Struggle for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion

Friday Night Services, April 30, 2010

One of the central teachings of Judaism is Veahavta Lereacha Kamocha – you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. These words, attributed to God – and transmitted by Moses To the people of Israel in the book of Leviticus, have inspired volumes of commentary throughout the ages: Rabbi Akiva said that this is a major principle in the Torah – Klal Gadol Ba'Torah. The 12th Century Rabbi Moses Ben Nahman, the Ramban, explains that the desire that we have regarding ourselves, to live and be well, should carry over to others. His idea is also supported by Maimonides (Mada 6:3) who writes that we should speak in praise of our neighbors and be careful with the honor and the property of others as we are with our own. This principle carried over to Christianity and other traditions as the “golden rule” – it is said that when Confucius was asked by Zigong ““Is there any single word that could guide one’s entire life? The Master replied: “Should it not be reciprocity? What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others””.

And of course we are reminded of the Hillel story: When an individual, who wanted to convert, came to Hillel and presumptuously demanded, "Teach me the Torah while I stand on one foot," Hillel answered, "What is hateful to you, do not do to another. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and learn." (Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbat 31a).

What is interesting here is that Hillel’s response is not worded in the positive – “love your neighbor,” but rather, Hillel uses the negative – do no harm. Hillel saw a person who was not able to take on the heavy obligation to actively do good for others. It was enough to tell him not to hurt another individual.

In today’s world, our social and legal treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and couples does not even meet this low threshold set by Hillel. How do we, as progressive Jews, view this notion of Veahavta Lereacha Kamocha in a diverse society? How do we advocate for the other? And how do we confront hate and prejudice? Homophobia is still a reality in our society. Hostility towards - or fear of - lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (or for short - LGBT) people is the root of the discrimination experienced by many of us. Homophobia manifests itself in different forms, from

hurtful homophobic jokes to physical attacks, subtle and overt discrimination in the workplace, negative and sensational media representation, and on the other hand, invisibility.

I would like to address two forms of homophobia and the resulting discrimination – the personal and the institutional. Let me tell you the story of two of our clients. The first time I met sixteen year old Jake was on a rainy evening when he walked into our storefront at 12th and Locust. He was cold, hungry, and disheveled. He also looked very frightened. As he opened up and talked, we learned that he had been on the streets for the past week because upon finding that he was gay, his father threw him out of the house. He had nowhere to go, not even to friends since he had not told anyone that he was gay. Jake’s story is not unusual, according to studies, more than 40% of homeless youth in America are LGBT. They either run away or are thrown out of their homes when they come out to their family. They often drop out of school to avoid the constant name calling and the physical bullying they sometimes experience on a daily basis. Young LGBT people like Jake are also four times more at risk for suicide than their heterosexual counterparts. All Jake wanted is to be accepted for who he is. No child should be denied a home and an education.

Charlene is a transgender woman (which means that she was born male but is now female). Like thousands of commuters every day, Charlene boarded a SEPTA bus one evening, making her way home after a long day’s work. As she swiped her TransPass, the bus driver noticed the card’s gender marker, affixed with an “F” for female. In a loud voice the driver told Charlene that she could not use that TransPass because she was not female. Because she did not appear “female” to him, he assumed that she was using someone else’s TransPass. The driver demanded that she either pay the \$2.00 fare, or get off the bus. Charlene leaned in closely to the driver and quietly explained to him that she was transgender. The bus driver continued in a loud voice “What do you mean?” Embarrassed by this escalating scene, and anxious to end the conversation, Charlene paid the \$2.00 and quietly took her seat.

Charlene was not asking for special rights, just her equal

right to ride the bus like anyone else. No individual should be denied the basic freedom of using public transportation.

These examples of personal discriminations are sadly mirrored in institutional discrimination. Consider for a moment some very basic human needs – safety, housing and employment. In 19 States there are no laws protecting LGBT people against hate crimes. In the United States today, only 18 states prohibit housing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. That means that in 32 states a person can be denied housing because she is a lesbian. Same goes for employment – only 21 states prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, and Pennsylvania is not one of them. Only a dozen towns, including Philadelphia, have passed a special city ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. In many towns across our state LGBT individuals can be, and often are, discriminated against in their place of employment. On the other hand, a resounding 41 states have either a constitutional amendment or laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman. People like me who are legally married in one state are denied that recognition in 41 states, including Pennsylvania. On the federal level, there are 1,138 rights granted by the federal government to heterosexual couples that are denied to me, such as: access to social security after a spouse's death, access to health insurance through a spouse's workplace, custody of children after divorce, visitation rights of non-biological children, bereavement leave, ability to file joint tax returns, and access to tax breaks, ability to transfer property without transfer tax, immigration and residency priority. The list goes on and on.

We as individuals and a community are not asking for special rights, we are asking for equal rights; To be treated with reciprocity; To be accorded that threshold that Hillel called Do No Harm.

Mazzoni Center, the organization I serve as executive director, deals with the results of these discriminations every day. We serve runaway and throwaway youth like Jake, some of whom resort to prostitution to survive. We provide legal services to clients like Charlene. We help individuals who medicate the pain of external and internalized homophobia with alcohol and drugs; and we provide medical services to those who, through lack of self-esteem, have resorted to unsafe behaviors. The pain, shame, and self harm that result from alienation, rejection and labeling is palpable to me daily. Too many of our clients have been harmed.

It is true that we have come a long way in the thirty years of Mazzoni Center's existence. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. In the late 1970s single-issue organizations, focused on LGBT concerns were formed; in the last decade we have become more visible as LGBT people in the mainstream, and we continue to increasingly succeed in our strive for inclusion. Almost every major city in the US, and many small ones, now celebrate Pride Weekend. Here in Philadelphia this week we celebrate Equality Forum, giving both gay and non-gay folks an opportunity to celebrate diversity with an array of cultural and educational programs, parties and festivals. As a career officer in the Israeli army and a retired Lt. Colonel, I am particularly gratified that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is no longer a barrier for LGBT folks who serve the United States armed forces with honor and dedication.

The AIDS epidemic, while devastating to our communities, also propelled our movement forward. Through the effective response to the epidemic, the movement achieved a high level of sophistication, influence, and permanence. Our response to AIDS also enabled the creation of organizations like Mazzoni Center across the US - organizations that are dedicated to the health and well-being of lesbians and gays, and who have now set the medical standards for transgender health.

Too often, however, when LGBT activists speak out about the inequities facing our communities, we are perceived as asking for special rights. I argue that we are asking for equal rights. Even with all these advancements, our place at the table in main stream America is not yet secure. Hate crimes against LGBT people continue – when youngsters like Jake are rejected by their parents and bullied at school, when women like Charlene are denied a bus ride on SEPTA, and when gays and lesbians are banned from adoption, I know that we still have a long road ahead of us towards equality.

Although the road ahead may be long, I believe that we will reach our destination. I believe that things will change because I am part of a tradition that teaches honor and respect for all persons – Veahavta lereacha Kamocha. As Jews, we are part of a religious community that has set very clear guidelines how to treat the other, the Ger – Veahavta et hager hagar imcha, ke gerim hiyitem be'erez Mitzraim – and you shall love the other who dwells in your midst for you were once the other in Mitzraim. I believe that the essence of Judaism is most clearly revealed in the way we live as a

community. Rabbi Leo Baeck taught that the treatment of the stranger is a test of the creative power of Jewish teachings. Baeck, who was called the Rabbi of Theiresenstat, points out that within the Torah the word Ger takes on a special meaning because all human beings are called “strangers,” “pilgrims,” or “aliens.” God says “... the land is Mine. For you are strangers and settlers with Me.” (Leviticus 25:23). That statement, Baeck argues, reminds us that no people is superior to any other, no person is more sacred than any other. We were all created in the image of the divine. We are all strangers and must care for one another. Baeck perished in the holocaust but his legacy lives on in a range of institutions that bear his name. In fact, the soon to be ordained and our new Assistant Rabbi – Eli Freedman – completed part of his studies at the Leo Baeck Rabbinical School in London.

In response to Leo Baeck’s call we Jews we must take a stand. In response to the teachings of our Torah we must educate one another and our children. We must speak about the imperative of securing and preserving equality to our families, friends, co-workers and appointed officials. In response to generations of our own oppression we must advocate for the inclusion of all people regardless of sexual orientation. And in response to Reform Judaism’s belief in social justice, we must raise our voices.

Tonight, on this Equality Shabbat, let each of us rededicate ourselves to ensuring equality of opportunity, protection from discrimination, and freedom of self-expression for all. When you hear the national debate about LGBT rights, please take note – they are talking about ME, about my community, and – indeed – about all of us. On this Equality Shabbat let us make room at our tables not only for Jake and Charlene, but for all who are oppressed. And on this Equality Shabbat let us pledge to carry on our Jewish tradition that recognizes and welcomes the stranger into our home.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nurit Shein,
Board Member, Congregation Beth Ahavah
Executive Director, Mazzone Center

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