

**Beth Chayim Chadashim
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**Bat Mitzvah drash
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I've been thinking a lot these past few weeks about what it means to become Bat Mitzvah, especially for someone like me who hasn't been a Jew for very long. (Not even 4 years.) I usually think about a Bar or Bat Mitzvah as representing a transition from child to adult, but for me, it's a transition from what to what. And I really couldn't decide for the longest time what this means to me, what kind of transition or transformation am I making. So, I wasn't going to do it. I even tried backing out this week. But that didn't seem to work either. And on the morning that I hoped the Lakers would sweep the Blazers in game 3 of the 1st round of the NBA playoffs, I finally figured it out. This is just something I'm doing to please my parents. Oh, no, wait, I guess that doesn't apply to me. Actually, this represents an affirmation of my commitment to Judaism and a celebration of my learning to chant Torah. Celebration is not always easy for me. So often I feel like an orphaned Jew. I have no Jewish blood relations and so holidays and life cycle events tend to sometimes be a source of sadness. Who is going to be happy for me? Who is going to put that pressure on me that they're looking forward to spending a particular holiday with me or to seeing me become Bat Mitzvah? I could have backed out today and there wouldn't really be anyone disappointed, maybe just confused. I think that orphaned feeling is what was keeping me from looking forward to this event with joy and a real sense of commitment. So, here I am. Fortunate to have many supportive people in my life, not because they're related to me, but because they love me and care about me. And that does bring me joy. I'm not actually sure what finally compelled me to do this, but I'm glad I am doing this.

My verses from Torah became my verses sort of in the same way I am becoming Bat Mitzvah. Fran said "How about these?" And I said "Okay." Fran and Bob then said "You don't really want these verses. They aren't very pleasant." And I thought, life isn't always pleasant. So, I said I wanted to keep them. The reason I said I wanted to keep them is just because what better thing to talk about, not necessarily the verses themselves, but just the fact that life isn't always pleasant. We can't always pick and choose what we want to deal with or what we want to talk about. It just is. And then I thought, well, maybe I'll take a look at them and see if there is something in there that perhaps has meaning for me or somehow applies to what I'm going through now. It sounds really nice in Hebrew. The first verse talks about not letting your cattle mate with different kinds, not to sow your fields with 2 kinds of seed, you shall not put ON a cloth made from 2 kinds of material. And I'm thinking "same gender marriage". On the one hand you shouldn't mix and on the other you shouldn't match. This verse also states "You shall observe my laws" which the rabbis interpret as a commandment whose purpose and meaning are not clear to us but we must perform with simple, unquestioning obedience. Does that sound like any Jews you know?

And the next verse talks about if a man has carnal relations with a woman who is a slave. And it's like "Oh, my God!" How can the Torah talk about people being slaves. And then I realized that it's not saying people should be slaves but that people are slaves and they should not be punished the same as people who are free. And it would appear that these 2 verses don't really have anything to do with each other at all. And then I found the connection.

The 2nd verse also states that a woman who is a slave isn't allowed to legally marry. And that is also true for same gender couples. We are slaves, or no better off than slaves. And that won't change until we legally have the right to marry. I also think, being slaves, we shouldn't have to pay taxes either, but it's a little hard to get around that one. If we could just get all the gays and lesbians not to pay their taxes for one year, you'd see how quickly we get our rights.

But I don't mean to be getting too political. It's just that the unpleasantness these verses represent are a part of life. They are a part of our reality. Maybe, since becoming Bat Mitzvah is a joyous occasion, it's not the right place to talk about unpleasantness. I guess it's just the bittersweetness of anything.

When gays and lesbians have their commitment ceremonies, it is sweet because they are publicly affirming their love and commitment to one another, and it's bitter because they can't do that legally. I am becoming Bat Mitzvah, and that is a joy in anyone's life. It is sweet to be surrounded by loved ones and friends, and for me, it's also bitter because I have no Jewish family. I have no blood or family ties to a culture and a people I really want to be and feel a part of. So, for everyone who came here today to celebrate with me, and even if you didn't- Thank You for being here. And if you were wondering about the Lakers outcome, they did sweep the Blazers, which was sweet. Unless you're a Blazers fan, then you're bitter. Shabbat Shalom.