

**Beth Chayim Chadashim, Los Angeles**  
**August 29, 2003**  
**Aufruf of Neil Klasky and Adrian Koffka**  
**Parshat Shofetim**

In this week's Torah portion, we find that seminal line, or edict, "Justice justice shall you pursue." This imperative, underlying the entire notion of "tikun olam" (making the world whole), jumped out at me for a whole host of reasons. First, these words were the lyrics of a camp song we used to sing, or shout, as kids at Camp Hess Kramer. I loved those summers at camp, and made so many enduring friendships there; in fact, some of my friends from those days are here tonight. I'm always touched when my adult life seamlessly intersects with my childhood.

I remember one summer at camp, the summer of 1979, when the camp director, Steve Breuer, asked my sister, Helaine and me to come with him to the staff quarters because our parents were on the news, on TV. (Our other sister, Stephanie, wasn't at Kramer with us; she was up the hill at Hilltop at a different session.) We didn't know which was more exciting - that our parents were on the news or that we got to actually watch TV. Our parents had taken in a Vietnamese family - they housed 6 people in their home from this one family that their temple Havurah was sponsoring. I remember what my parents had said on TV: that as Jews, they knew what it was like to be displaced, and they felt compelled to respond to these displaced people, these "boat people." I also remember wondering, as I watched this new family in our house on TV whether I'd get my bedroom back when the camp session was over.

The point is that this notion of "justice" has always played a prominent role in my family, and hence my own life. I had very early and ever constant examples of these kinds of acts. My mom was always active politically. I remember her working passionately for the Equal Rights Amendment. She would explain that there is simply no reason, other than discrimination and the perpetuation of stereotypes, that women should be paid less for doing the same work that men do. Her example taught me to never settle for second class status.

The whole notion of tikun olam, or making the world whole, is how my parents have led their lives. The amount of tzedukah - of dollars and volunteer hours they have poured into their communities in efforts to make our world whole is incalculable. I'm sure the reason I became a lawyer has much to do with their example.

But also, my pursuit of justice and my becoming a lawyer has much to do with my being gay. Being gay has afforded me an outsider perspective I would have never otherwise enjoyed. And it is this perspective that frames my vision of life. Thus, I pursue justice because that's my vision; it's like it's a foregone conclusion; I just can't help it.

These were some of the reasons that that line, "justice justice shall you pursue" jumped out at me when I first read this week's Torah portion. These are some of my understandings of "justice." But how does Torah define "Justice"? Not so differently, it

turns out. In Plaut's commentary on this week's parsha he reasons that viz a viz society, "justice" must include the equitable administration and enforcement of laws. To pursue justice is to contribute to perfecting the world; again, it is tikun olam. According to tradition, G-d needed both justice and love to sustain the world.

All of this talk about justice, equality and love makes me think of gay weddings. If marriage is a legal union, doesn't it follow that a just society should administer and enforce its laws of marriage equally to all? Why should one category of people in society be treated any differently from another category of people in society? It's so simple, so basic to me, and yet still so complicated, so elusive to so many others.

As you may recall, about a month ago, President Bush informed the world that his lawyers were looking into codifying marriage in the United States as only between a man and a woman. Listening to that press conference, I remember feeling personally attacked, and hurt. After all, we were in the throes of preparing for our wedding, of spiritually readying ourselves, and here is our President, who doesn't know the first thing about us, or the love we have or the life we share, telling the world that he was going to take affirmative steps to minimize or invalidate our relationship. I was actually surprised to discover how vulnerable I felt, surprised that he could touch me. And then I got angry. I was angry that this intensely personal decision Adrian and I made with each other became fodder for some national debate. I just wasn't interested in the academic debate. I wasn't interested in discussing that segment on NPR or that article in the paper. Because that wasn't why I was getting married.

I was getting married because I love Adrian. Because he is the kindest, most thoughtful man I have ever met. Another commentary on this week's torah portion reasons that to act with lovingkindness is to act justly. According to that definition, then, Adrian, and not coincidentally, the entire Koffka family, personify justice because their every acts are acts of lovingkindness.

So how to reconcile these feelings? I think it comes down to another tenant in this theme of justice, and that is the interrelationship between the personal and the political. I was always taught that the personal is indeed the political. Just as our checkbooks reflect our values, so too, on a broader scale, do our personal actions reflect our political viewpoints. By being here tonight, by supporting Adrian and me personally, you are pursuing justice. Your personal actions can challenge society to face its existing inequities, and challenge it to make its laws just, and to make the world whole. After all, none of us -- none of us as individuals, as Jews, as non-Jews, as lesbians and gays, as transgendered, as bisexuals, as women, as Vietnamese, as heterosexuals -- none of us are second class citizens.

As for President Bush and his lawyers? Well we are gay after all. Accordingly, I must rely on the immortal words of Jule Styne and Bob Merrill, as sung magically by Barbra Streisand in "Funny Girl" on the bow of that boat in that fabulous orange number and say: "Nobody, no, nobody, is gonna rain on my parade!"