

Rabbi Lisa Edwards  
BCC November 8, 2008  
Shabbat Lech-lecha – post prop 8 obama krystallnacht

Yesterday I got the long view again.

DID you see the California section of today's LA TIMES? {HOLD IT UP} Yesterday I attended these services at Hebrew Union College – where our student rabbi Joe Hample is a student – and where BCC member and our dear friend Agnes Herman, you know, widow of Rabbi Erwin Herman, the people for whom BCC's Humanitarian Award is named – presented the students of HUC with the Yanov Torah – a Torah scroll that had been cut into pieces by the Jewish inmates of the Yanov labor camp so that they could smuggle those pieces into camp, hide them away, and use them for prayer when the Nazis weren't looking. After the war the pieces were sewn back up into a Torah scroll – in the not distant future Joe will bring that scroll here for us to see and touch – to see the way it's warped and water-stained – tear stained, I imagine – parchment held together by fraying threads. Read this article by Duke Helfand – it's powerful.

The Yanov Torah was presented to HUC yesterday as a commemoration of Krystallnacht – the night of broken glass – the anniversary of which falls this weekend. You might remember a few years ago when BCC hosted the citywide Krystallnacht commemoration – the weekend that Olga Grilli came to visit – when we took our survivor torah scroll to join with 30 others housed in southern California.

On Tuesday, as we've all heard by now, more people of California voted for the rights of chickens than voted for the rights of same sex couples. But even in my sorrow and my fury and my fear, I realized yesterday that to have that vote fall the same week as Krystallnacht makes it less frightening. Krystallnacht came after the government began stripping away the rights of Jews in Germany, it was the beginning of the government sanctioned violence against Jews. Nothing like that is happening here – the government of California, remember, has moved in our favor – both the CA Supreme Court and the State House and Senate before it have moved to legalize our marriages.

And make no mistake – they will ALL become legal and REMAIN LEGAL eventually.

Tara Borelli, one of the marvelous staff attorneys at LAMBDA LEGAL, will be speaking to us in just a little while about what is happening in the aftermath of Prop. 8's success.

Those of you who have seen or talked to me this week know that I, like you, have ridden the roller-coaster of emotions – from fury to sadness to fear – all part of the mourning. But also part of the mourning is looking for the silver linings and there are so many --- the 44 (more?) couples we've celebrated here in community since last May when the Supreme Court handed down its ruling. With every breaking glass at every wedding, couple after couple helped shatter fear and homophobia, each couple helping bring to God's world a new era of fairness, equality and love. All the many guests at all the weddings all summer and fall – you could see it in their faces and feel it in their hugs – those who finally got it

and those who got it years ago all were able to join in true delight for the love they witnessed, and also for the power of government sanction.

But we also knew, as we raced to fit in so MANY WEDDINGS before election day, that the day after might bring what sadly it brought – the fact that even though so many people got it – get it -- Even though so many more people were able to vote “hope” over “fear” for president, so many of those same voters couldn’t bring themselves to see love over fear when it came to prop. 8.

The tactics of our opposition were fierce; their lies extraordinary.

Let me read you one from a flyer sponsored and distributed – just last week – by our Orthodox Jewish neighbors up the street on Fairfax:

FAMILY FIRST it reads

Many have declared that Prop 8 must be negated because of civil rights. This is good propaganda but sheer nonsense. Incest and bigamy are not civil rights.

Many have called for equality. Ridiculous! Rejecting bigamy is not advocating inequality.

....

Save our Families!

Save our Children!

Save our Society!

Vote Yes on Prop 8

Given this and other yes on 8 tactics and language, we should – we do – take pride in how close the vote was. I know you’ve seen many of those statistics. 8 years ago prop 22 won by 22 percentage points; prop 8 won by 5 percentage points. And also as Tara will soon tell us – it’s far from over.

So let me share with you some short pieces of the last few days: ONE IS this photo that Zsa Zsa Gershick took at the rally Wednesday night, of an African American woman holding this sign: I have a dream that one I will not be judged by [my sexual orientation] but by the content of my character.”

One from our own Kendall Hailey, who set off for a hike in Griffith park the day before the election, and writes,

“as we started up the hill I saw skywriting. Three planes were writing the sentence "Save Traditional Marriage Vote Yes on Prop 8" I was so mad that my hike was going to be ruined by these hideous words overhead. Well, that was when nature took over. I've always heard God is in the wind and before the skywriters had even finished their hateful slogan the wind kicked up so fierce and clouds started to pass directly in front of the words. I have never seen skywriting erased so fast. And I did think I just saw God cast a vote. Too bad God is still in the minority. But only for now. With much love, Kendall

By the way, Tracy’s and my 5th grade friend Alyssa reported that at recess on Monday she and her classmates also saw this same skywriting and that as soon as they saw “Yes on

Prop 8” the whole class began to boo, and say “No on 8 no on 8.”  
So we do have hope for the future.

And one more – I just thought to read to you from the quote I keep in my wallet [another tattered piece of paper] – from the late, great lesbian writer & activist Audre Lorde:  
“Hope is a living state that propels us, open-eyed and fearful, into all the battles of our lives. And some of those battles we do not win. But some of them we do.”

Friends, we will win this one... Yesterday when rabbinic student Noam Katz read Lech-lecha to us from that tattered scroll – when I heard God charge Abraham to go forth and be a blessing – I began thinking of all the weddings over the last few months, the 44 I took part in, the 18,000 plus weddings that took place all over California, and then I knew that all those couples who bring blessing to this world? – the blessings, the love will win speedily and soon and in our day.

Shabbat shalom

Let’s read together this prayer that our friend and ally Rabbi Linda Bertenthal wrote for this Shabbat:

Two Prayers for Strength After the Passage of Proposition 8 for Shabbat Lech Lecha  
By Rabbi Linda Bertenthal, Associate Director Union of Reform Judaism, Pacific Southwest Council

Lech Lecha  
Based on Genesis 12:1

Lech lecha – let us go forth  
Go forth to pursue justice  
Justice delayed is justice denied  
Help us go forth today!

Lech lecha - go into yourself  
Find the place of strength within  
Hopes crushed, let us not despair  
Equality shattered, let us not quail  
Help us find within the dedication,  
the determination, the fortitude  
to go forth to pursue justice.

Lech lecha – go for yourself  
for your own equality,  
for your own integrity,  
for your own spark of divinity,  
for your own longing for justice.  
Inspire us, Eternal,

To see our own blessing  
from being a blessing  
by going forth.

Lecha lecha – go forth  
And we will go forth together  
Be strong and we will be strengthened  
Pursue justice and let us pursue it,  
Until justice rolls down like water  
And righteousness like a mighty stream.

Eternal, our God, empower us to go forth

[Handed out, but we didn't read, this one]  
Take Courage  
(Based on Haftarah Lech-Lecha - Isaiah 40:27-41:16)

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
Why declare, O Israel,  
"My way is hid from the Eternal,  
My cause is ignored by my God?"

Help us remember that our cause is Yours -  
the cause of justice and equality for all.  
Our way is to embrace all of Your creation,  
To honor and include all Your children.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?  
The Eternal is God from of old,  
Creator of the earth from end to end,  
God never grows faint or weary,  
God's wisdom cannot be fathomed.

Let us honor God's creation from end to end,  
And resist those who disparage God's children.  
Do you not know that we are all created in God's image?  
Male and female, gay and straight  
God's wisdom cannot be challenged - God does not create in vain.

God gives strength to the weary, fresh vigor to the spent;  
Youths may grow faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall,  
But they that trust in the Eternal shall renew their strength  
As eagles grow new plumes:  
They shall run and not grow weary; they shall march and not grow faint.

We have already begun to march; we will march on and never grow faint.  
We have run one race and nearly won; we will run again and never grow weary.  
We will march and run together and we shall never fall -  
Never fall victim to despair, never fall into the trap of returning hate with hate.  
God give us strength!

Each one helps the other,  
Saying to his fellow, "Take courage!"  
The woodworker encourages the smith;  
He who flattens with the hammer  
Encourages him who pounds the anvil.

Let us each help one another,  
Saying to our fellow seeker of justice, "Take courage!"  
The straight woman encourages the lesbian - "I am with you"  
The gay man encourages the straight - "We have seen this hate before  
And we are not afraid."

"I chose you; I have not rejected you -  
Fear not, for I am with you.  
Be not frightened, for I am your God;  
I strengthen you and I help you,  
I uphold you with My victorious right hand."

God of justice, strengthen us  
as justice, justice we pursue.  
Let us not be frightened nor despair,  
Cause us to strengthen one another  
Until justice is ours and victory is Yours.