

April 12, 2002
Tazria-Metzorah
Drash by Tanya Weiss

Beth Chayim Chadashim, Los Angeles

I want to talk tonight about how wonderful it is to be getting married. How lucky I am to have found such a wonderful person as Leah to be my partner. I also want to mention how much BCC is a part of how good my life is. I have been a part of BCC since 1996. Six years doesn't seem so long but it's been an incredibly full six years. I have spent a lifetime growing and learning here. I originally came to BCC to be married and in that process decided I really liked Judaism. So a Jew was born (through conversion, of course). And over time I have learned the value of community, especially when going through difficult times such as the death of my brother-in-law Roger a few years ago, and my own divorce. I have learned the value of participation. Coordinating the High Holidays and giving a pitch on Yom Yippur have helped my self-confidence and gave me the courage to become bat mitzvah last year. The people I've met and the experiences I've had all contribute something to the person I've become. Well, that and therapy. And, in the process of becoming the person standing before you tonight, I met the most wonderful person ever. She came into my life at a pretty bad time but that was the only bad thing about it. My bride-to-be, Leah, is my best friend, my soul mate. She is a deeply caring person who makes me smile, inside and out. And 2 years ago, I knew I would be the luckiest person in the world if I could wake up to her every day and tell her I love her. I can't imagine someone as lucky as I am.

And so, as I began to think about my drash and study the torah portion for this week I felt very good. It's a double portion, how much luckier could I be. Then, as I'm going chapter by chapter looking for something to relate to the wedding and how I feel, I'm finding topics like "Defilement by childbirth", "skin ailments" and "Defilement by discharge from sex organs." Not exactly inspiring stuff. Then the Rabbi calls me and says, by the way, we're observing Yom Hashoah that night as well. And that reminded me of something else the Rabbi talked to us about. In Judaism, the 7 weeks between Passover and Shavuot are considered a period of partial mourning due to tragic events that happened at this time in Jewish history. To honor this part of Jewish history and respect the sense of mourning during this time, the custom developed not to plan weddings or other festive events. And there is so much to mourn right now considering we are still in mourning for the lives lost, less than a year ago, on September 11. And the current crisis in Israel. That's a lot of mourning. A lot of remembering. So, what better time to have a wedding. The writer Elie Wiesel explains that if a funeral procession and a wedding procession come to an intersection, the wedding procession goes first, following the principal that joy takes precedent over mourning. We should remember the loved ones who are no longer with us. But we should also remember that life continues. Life can be wonderful and should be

celebrated with enthusiasm. Still, it's a little strange having a wedding surrounded by such heaviness.

I was determined not to let this get me down. It's my wedding and it's going to be uplifting if I have to rewrite the calendar. And then I realized that just because I'm getting married doesn't mean I can ignore the reality of what's going on in the world. Good things and bad things happen to everyone at various points throughout our lives. We need to celebrate life and goodness when we can. We need to honor and remember those lost along the way. Those who enriched us by their presence. Those who taught us, even by bad example.

And then other issues have come up as well. What does it mean to be marrying someone when it can't be legal. There's a built in loss there. My cup cannot be full. I have joy because I found someone very special I want to share the rest of my life with. Yet, the joy is diminished because the law won't recognize us. On forms, I will still have to mark myself single.

Recently, I came across this quote:
"Homosexual conduct is, and has been, considered abhorrent, immoral, detestable, a crime against nature, and a violation of the laws of nature and of nature's God upon which this nation and our laws are predicated. Such conduct violates both the criminal and civil laws of this state and is destructive to a basic building block of society – the family."

This was written by Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, upon denying custody rights to a lesbian mother, Feb.15, 2002.

I'll just focus on the last part of the quote, "such conduct is destructive to...the family." We all know that what is destructive to family is people with these kinds of opinions and authority. Messages like this which perpetuate fear, and hatred, and stereotypes hurt us all. So, even though I feel joy in marrying the woman of my dreams, I feel sadness that the law won't recognize her importance to me because she's not a man.

And as I think this through, maybe this is the perfect time to have a same-sex, non-legal wedding, during a time of partial mourning. During a time when a Jew's cup isn't quite full anyway. During a time when we are reminded that the world still needs some work.

And when the day comes that we will be allowed to legally wed, maybe we can pick a day that won't occur during a time of mourning because our cup will finally be full.

Shabbat Shalom