

Parashat Re'eh 5764
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Some of us went last night to yet another rally in West Hollywood - this one to protest yesterday's CA Supreme Court decision "invalidating" the over 4,000 weddings that took place between same gender couples in San Francisco this past February. The mechanics of a rally on the day the Court handed down its decision had been planned some time ago - what remained uncertain was whether it would be a protest or a celebration, whether the mood would be one of anger and sadness or pure rejoicing. We live daily now with such tensions. In this week's Torah portion God gives an odd command: ve'hayita ach sameach! you shall have only joy! [Deut. 16:15]

I say "odd" because commandments about emotions are a fairly rare commodity in Torah, yet there they are: love Adonai your God// do not bear a grudge// do not covet // be only joyful! Does God really expect us to feel whatever we're commanded to feel, or even more problematically in today's verse: ve'ha-yi-ta ACH sameiach - does God expect us to feel ONLY joy, ONLY one emotion?

At the very beginning of this portion, God gives a different peculiar command: Re'eh, see, says God through Moses, anokhi no-tein lif-nei-KHEM ha-yom b'racha uk-lala. "today I set before you blessing and curse." [Deut.11:26].

Re'eh - SEE - is in the singular, but lifneiKHEM is in the plural. Hey, you over there, that's right, you -- See, I have set before all of you blessing and curse. What are you going to do about that? Of course there are many interpretations, but one I like is from the commentators who say that Moses is telling the people that God has put everything before us - a world filled with blessings as well as with curses - and it is up to each one of us to look at it all, to SEE it all, and then to choose -- in a way, it's a commandment about attitude, about each of us sees and feels when we look at something.

During the rally last night I looked around at lots of couples who stood arm-in-arm and holding their newly "invalidated" marriage licenses. At times they were teary, at times angry - but most of the time they seemed to hold each other close, and there really was quite a lot of cheerfulness in the air. I felt in from the crowd an uncontainable kind of joy as I looked around at families, at couples who had married, and at those who plan to do so, whether on the steps of City Hall or under a chupah in this sanctuary. Or like Bracha and Davi - who did both.

Did we know only joy last night? well, no - we had, after all, been hugely disappointed. But even deep disappointment and righteous indignation couldn't suppress the truth of those relationships - the depth of those relationships, the joy of

those relationships. Even deep disappointment and righteous indignation couldn't suppress the FACT of those relationships, the reality of those relationships, the meaning of those relationships in the lives of the people in them, and in the lives of those of us who look at them and see them for what they are - not curses - but blessings God-given blessings.

The huge step forward we'd taken in February, turns out to have been into a brick wall, not through a doorway. But as any of you who have done any remodeling well know - overnight a doorway can appear where yesterday there was only a wall. The Supreme Court yesterday ruled only on those marriage licenses issued in February in the city of San Francisco, it has not yet heard or ruled on a case that will determine whether same gender couples have an equal right to marry in the state of California. And even if it should happen that such a case also goes against us, we know it is only a matter of time. The insistence of the right-wing against us intensified after the San Francisco weddings, yes, but why is that? Because those who look at the world and see curses could also see that a whole lot more people were looking at the lines of happy couples and seeing - for the first time - how such couples bring blessings to the world.

My favorite t-shirt at last night's rally was the one picturing two grooms and the sentence that read: "No heterosexuals have been harmed in the making of this marriage." And indeed, despite the fear mongering that has gone on lately and continues to increase, people are seeing the truth of that statement. In fact, they are seeing that the opposite can even be true - that EVEN heterosexuals too can feel blessed by the presence of love in the world! By the way, our good friend Rashi, perhaps the most famous Torah scholar of all time, looked at the commandment I mentioned earlier -
ve-ha-yi-ta
ach sa-mei-ach
and you shall have
only joy!" and said this about it: "According to its plain meaning 'you shall have only joy!' does not denote an actual commandment, rather, it denotes a promise." [the Orlinisky interlinear Pentateuch with Rashi commentary, Devarim, p. 156 S.S.& R. publishing]

And about such promises we can indeed all rejoice!

Shabbat shalom