

GJC Pride Shabbat 2018

Friday evening, June 15, 2018

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As we enter into Shabbat together, I want to share a few words about what it means to be in this space: the first Pride Shabbat at Germantown Jewish Centre.

I was lucky to be part of a visioning meeting for this Shabbat. That meeting was a burst of creativity and laughter and connection. We also reflected on the vulnerabilities people bring to the experience of being openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and gender non-conforming in Jewish community. What I took from that conversation is that the inaugural Pride Shabbat at GJC is a chance to lift up the energy and the beautiful souls of our LGBTQ members and their families—to share with our community how empowering it is to create a queer-affirming space, a space where people can bring their whole selves, in joy. Pride is, after all, a celebration!

I know I am not the only one who feels differently when I am in a space that is queer-led or queer-majority or expressly queer-affirming. I can let down my guard; I inhibit less of my expression, especially my expression of affection; I hold my head differently.

Unfortunately, many queer people of my generation, and our elders, did not always find such spaces growing up. Many of us found growing into our adult selves—growing into our coming out—to be scary or lonely. Many of us experienced alienation from our physical bodies, from our voices, from Jewish community. Pride is a chance to replace that alienation with celebration. We heal with balloons and parades, with glitter and rainbows. And we heal by creating a space to be with one another.

When we come together we claim our Torah. Our tradition, from the first verses of Torah describing the creation of the world, separates things into categories that appear binary: light and dark, day and night, female and male, Shabbat and weekday. We shape our lives, our ritual and our communities around these distinctions: here we are at sundown on Friday, gathering to welcome Shabbat. We know those distinctions can appear rigid, and they can cause pain to those of us, for example, who experience life in-between and across the categories female and male. Tonight, here, we can remind each other that the space in-between is sacred too. So much of the richness of our tradition lies in exploring the in-between.

Take night and day, for instance. For hundreds of years, attempts to distinguish between night and day have given our rabbis the opportunity to consider the states of dusk, dawn, twilight, first light, and every shade between starlight and sunrise: the entire rainbow. There is a lot of in-between. The rabbis are fascinated with these questions. The Talmud begins with a discussion of when one may recite the evening Sh'ma. I'm sure you're not surprised that there were multiple opinions about when "night" begins. We can feel that complexity now, sitting under the deepening sky, poised between today and tonight, transitioning into Ma'ariv.

Among my multiple identities, I strongly identify as a morning person. So I'm glad that the rabbis also asked the question, "When does day begin?" I especially love the teaching that in the early morning, one may first recite the Sh'ma when there is enough light to see the face of a friend from a distance of four cubits. [Kids demonstrate 4 cubit distance] This teaches us that when we want to locate ourselves in-between, when we are stretching the tradition beyond the binary, we can't do it alone. We need to be in community, turned toward each other. We need to be able to see one another.

That's why we're gathered together tonight: so we can turn toward one another and see that every shade of gender expression and every person seeking their beloved has a place in our tradition and a place in our community. In our daily liturgy we thank God for giving us the wisdom to distinguish between day and night—which is really, as the rabbis teach, the wisdom to recognize one another in the space in between.

As we enter this Pride Shabbat, we hold onto that blessing. We are aware, too, that we are blessed with freedom. Given the tremendous expansion of freedom for LGBTQ people achieved in our lifetimes, we must assure ourselves that we will use our freedom to work toward liberation for those who are still bound.

We are also grateful to those who came before us: those who had the vision that GJC would be a house of prayer for all people, including queer people. We are grateful to our parents and those who have parental roles in our lives, who have nourished us with love. And we are grateful to our community's young people, who show us the path forward.

This is what it means to me to mark Pride Shabbat at GJC. May we enter into Shabbat aware of the blessings of our community, our freedom, and our ability to recognize one another. May we savor this space in which we heal through celebration. May we envision the Sabbath queen arriving on a Pride float, adored by her people,

radiant, crowned in sequins. And may we hold onto that image of liberation through this Shabbat and beyond as a glimpse of the world to come.

Shabbat Shalom.