

And, finally, the time has come once and for all to speak out against the outright discrimination, demonization and vilification of those whose sexual orientation is different from the majority. More than enough credible science

has proven that homosexual behavior is as natural an orientation for homosexuals as is heterosexual behavior for heterosexuals. Moreover, homosexuals and lesbians have made up approximately 10% of the human race for as far back as we can trace. It is simply in theological as well as sociological terms a part of the human condition, part of the divine plan which cherishes the idea that all human beings are created in the Divine image, male and female, gay and straight, black and white, atheists and believers, all are created by the one God who calls us into life, the one in whose image and likeness we are brought forth.

Homosexuality is not a sin, it is not an aberration, it is not an anathema it is simply an alternative sexual orientation scripted into our DNA. Rabbi Bernard Raskas, a Conservative rabbi in St. Paul, MN clearly makes this point in an essay entitled, Judgment on us, not gays and lesbians, in which he writes:

“The fact is that one’s particular sexual orientation is deep-seated. Recent research in neurobiology, genetics and twins studies are increasingly confirming that sexuality is, in the main, predetermined and fixed in the chromosomes. Sexual orientation, like the color of the eyes, perfect pitch, attitudes and personality is a matter of biological and psychological roulette.

The fact is that homosexuality has been documented since the beginning of recorded history in all cultures and societies, among all peoples of all ethnic, ages, occupational, educational and sexual backgrounds, as well as in most educational sectors in society.

The fact is that in 1973 the American Psychiatric Society officially acknowledged that homosexuality is not an illness.

The fact is that the study of sex and the process of sexual difference and individuation reveals an amazing complexity we are just beginning to understand.

The fact that we think we can recognize gays and lesbians by voice, gait or manner of dress is a myth and sheer prejudice . It is time we take prejudice out of the closet and recognize it for what it is – inappropriate, ignorant, immoral and un-Jewish.

Homosexuality must not only be fully accepted into society but held to the same standards of sexual ethics as are heterosexuals. Monogamous, loving and faithful long-term relationships are not only what same-sex couples desire and aspire to, but is also what society should foster. Just as the institution of marriage is a stabilizing force in society for straight couples, so it is equally beneficial to society in the gay community. Instead

of ostracizing gays from the society's mainstream, we ought to welcome them fully into the vast array of human endeavor for the benefit of our nation.

From a Jewish perspective, as a Reform rabbi, I have the right, no the obligation to abstain from slavishly adhering to repugnant, time-bound, outdated biblical ideas such as stoning to death disrespectful children, upholding the institution of slavery, the second class treatment of women and the denunciation of same-sex relations as an abomination before God. In their day and time, maybe these ideas served some misguided purpose. Today no one except the most bigoted among us would countenance support for slavery, the subjugation of women, or the stoning of children, and yet these same progressive free thinkers, think nothing of lawful discrimination against gays and lesbians. The time has come to speak out against those who deny to others the same legal rights they claim for themselves. The time has come to insist that DOMA, the so-called defense of marriage act and the proposed Marriage Protection Amendment – which would enshrine discrimination against same-sex couples in our very Constitution be repealed, repelled, and defeated, wherever it raises its bigoted head. Tax-paying citizens, all legal Americans, must be held accountable to the same standard

of justice and equal standing under the law. This is not only in keeping with our own Constitution, but is the foundation of Jewish jurisprudence. As it states in Torah: “There shall be one standard of law for citizen and stranger alike”

Finally, I believe with every fiber of my being, that same-sex couples who seek to consecrate their love in the presence of God and their community through the rite of Kiddushin, the Jewish wedding ceremony, should be granted that same privilege as heterosexual couples. A loving, committed relationship within the context of holy matrimony, is something which must be hallowed and celebrated as a gift from God regardless of sexual orientation.

The time has come to rail against hatred, bigotry, discrimination and prejudice and to support full and equal rights for all Americans regardless of sexual orientation. Rabbi Raskas concludes:

One of the real tests of morality and Jewish ethics today is not how gays and lesbians act, but how we do. The judgment is on us, not them. We are being measured for our fairness, for our understanding, and yes, for our

love and respect for all human beings created in the image of God – and that is all of us.

In conclusion, once again, I turn to the glorious and prophetic words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who wrote:

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The “tide in the affairs of men” does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: “Too late.” There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. “The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...” We still have a choice today.

Today, Hayom, let us choose to end the war in Iraq and begin to bring our sons and daughters home, to enact legislation which will provide universal health benefits for all Americans, and to end discrimination and prejudice against gays and lesbians.

In our Haftarah this morning, the prophet Isaiah challenged us with these demanding words:

“Is this the fast I look for? A day of self-affliction? Bowing your head like a reed, and covering yourself with sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not *this* the fast I look for; to unlock the shackles of injustice, to undo the fetters of bondage, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every cruel chain? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to clothe them, and never to hide yourself from your own kin?”

This is our clarion call to justice. This is our defining image among the nations. This is the purpose of our existence as a people. May we do all within our power individually and collectively to bring God’s blessing of healing into our fragile and imperfect world and in so doing bring nearer the day when ***HEBREW GOP 431***

“They shall not hurt or destroy in all my Holy mountain for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the sea-bed is covered by

water. And all shall sit under their vines and fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.