



Parashat B'reshit
Affirming the Sanctity of Same-Sex Love

by Gregg Drinkwater on Friday October 20, 2006

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Genesis 1:1 - 6:8, Shabbat

Advocates for lesbian and gay inclusion in the Jewish world spend a lot of time in a defensive posture, attempting to prove to skeptical co-religionists that they got Leviticus 18:22 wrong (“It isn’t about gay sex between loving partners, it’s about rape”), that they misunderstood the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (“It’s about the hospitality, stupid!”), and that David and Jonathan really were more than just friends.

When we tire of the defensive arguments, we pull out our civil rights and social justice placards, focusing on ethical obligations with a long and proud history in Jewish thought and activism. We highlight Deuteronomy 16:20 (“Justice, justice shall you pursue”) or Leviticus 19:18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”). We invoke Abraham Joshua Heschel, Emma Goldman, and the countless Jewish leaders who have always stood at the forefront of social change, advocating for the oppressed and disenfranchised.

But rarely do we have the opportunity to pro-actively affirm, rather than simply defend, the sanctity of same-sex love. Parashat Bereshit gives us just that chance. Parashat Bereshit functions as the foundational text of love in Judaism, a designation most Jews might more readily give to the Song of Songs with its powerful eroticism and sensual energy. But like the rest of creation, the source of love, the purpose of love and love’s beginnings all emerge in the opening verses of Bereshit.

Most of us know the general outline of the first chapters of Genesis: In the beginning was void and emptiness, but then God creates the universe, piece by piece. With each new act of creative energy God sees that it is good, or “tov.” After filling the heavens and the earth, God creates the first human and then suddenly, in Genesis 2:18, we are told of the world’s first “lo tov” (“not good”) moment: “The Lord God said, “It is not good for Adam to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him” (*VaYomer Adonai Elohim lo tov heiyot ha Adam levado e’esev lo ezer kenegdo*).



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The first and most profound need of the original human – the model on which we are all based – was to experience love and companionship. Before finding fulfillment, Adam had to first experience loneliness – love’s absence – love as something denied. Lesbian and gay people understand Adam’s pain, for they too have experienced a world that denies them their love.

But Adam found love in the arms of Eve, the two becoming the first heterosexual couple and a model for traditionalists opposed to gay inclusion. How, then, can Bereshit be a proof-text that affirms the sanctity of same-sex love?

It all depends on where you see the climax of the story. When reading Bereshit, traditionalists see clear and obvious evidence that God places heterosexual union at the core of the divine plan, and that the synergy between a husband and a wife is nothing short of a reflection of the joyous harmony of creation. It is the “big bang,” if you will, that shapes human destiny and gives each of us a sense of self and belonging. In this read, the union of man and woman recreates the original balance of Eden, bringing us ever closer to the will and wisdom of God.

When reading Bereshit through a queer lens, you see something different. The divine plan is still there, with its focus on synergy and the joyous harmony of creation. But where the traditional view finds the climax in the union of a man and a woman, the queer read sees the joining together of Adam and Eve as merely a vehicle for the real end point: love. More specifically, love as *tikkun* - as repair and as a solution to the ultimate loneliness of being.

In the traditional view, male/female unions are understood as both means AND end. The queer perspective understands such unions as only a means. The end – the goal – is love and re-union, however we get there. Our hope is to recreate the original balance of Eden, and each of us finds our own path to that re-union. The beauty and the power of Bereshit lies in God’s response to the *lo tov* of loneliness – the creation of love and companionship – not in the creation of heterosexuality.

This shift in viewpoint does not require one to disregard parts of Bereshit or to radically reinterpret the verses. It does not require a defensive posture. It simply requires a different perspective on the will and wisdom of God – a perspective that sees the truly radical nature of the idea that we are all created *b’tselem Elohim*, in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The truth of being created *b’tselem Elohim* is radical because it comes without limits. In the infinite diversity of humanity – in each and every person – we find the spark of God. Gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex, each of us is created in God’s image, and the gift of love, of *tikkun*, is God’s gift to us all. From this perspective, an affirmation of same-sex love no longer seems like a stretch. It is but a reflection of the will and wisdom of God.



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