

Enlarging Sacred Space: K'dusha & Same-Sex Marriages

By Rabbi Daniel Siegel

The attitude of the Jewish renewal community to same-sex relationships is rooted in our sense that holiness is not a closed and limited commodity. For the Torah teaches, “Make sacred space for me to dwell, and I will be with you” (Ex. 25:8).

This verse appears in that part of the Torah which contains the instructions for building the *mishkan*, the sacred tabernacle, which was our portable temple in the desert. Sacred space happened whenever and wherever the wandering paused and the *mishkan* was assembled.

Later, during the days of the two temples in Jerusalem, we experimented with the idea that there is a permanent sacred space, limited to the space above the ark in the holy of holies, in the building set on a permanent foundation.

However, when the second temple was destroyed, the rabbis reverted to a new version of the older idea, when they said: “From the day the temple was destroyed, G!d’s home in the world is the four cubits of *halachah* (B’rachot 8a).” This means that wherever and whenever we practice, there we create sacred space.

Our movement for Jewish spiritual renewal has always been about expanding holiness, creating new holy spaces wherever we are and whenever we can. We have believed that holiness is not a closed system, so that if we add holiness here, we must take it from there.

According to that limited-holiness assumption, if Jews are holy, others are less holy; if men are holy, then women are less holy.

Rather, we have seen holiness as coming from the infinite G!d, who is eager to respond to our desire for holiness by releasing ever more *shefa*, abundance, into our world.

This is the reason we are an inclusive movement and this is the reason we have always supported the extension of *k’dushah*, holiness, to places and people to whom it has been denied.

Our movement for Jewish spiritual renewal invites people to come home to Judaism and to bring with them the treasures of who they are and what they have learned. Our holiness can only add to theirs and their divinely bestowed gifts can only add to ours. In fact, there is no



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“our” and “their” at all, only the merging of the many individual faces of *k’dushah* into a whole which is much more than the sum of its parts.

ALEPH supported the leadership of women not because feminism is or was either politically correct or daring, but rather to release the holiness that had been pent up in women so that it could become part of the publicly shared whole. Men become enriched by contact with women’s spiritual expressions and liberated to find new expressions of *k’dushah* within themselves.

We are environmentalists for the same reason — to recover and reveal again the holiness inherent in the planet and in all the life forms created as interdependent parts of *shechinah*, the divine indwelling.

Extending the recognition of *k’dushah* is also the source of ALEPH’s inclusion of gay and lesbian people as participants and leaders. And it is *k’dushah* that directly leads us to this special issue of *New Menorah*, exploring the sanctifying of committed, long term relationships among gay and lesbian people and the need to include them and their relationships within the framework of marriage.

Actually, writing about this as though there were something called “ALEPH” which supports or endorses is itself misleading. ALEPH as an organizational expression of the movement for Jewish spiritual renewal is itself the creation of people who felt out of step in some way, whose holiness was not being recognized, and who have been building a Jewish home for themselves. All of us share a spiritual search for meaning and the experience of G!d in our lives and we acknowledge that in each other. This shared search, the recognition that all of us are on it, binds us in a way that no ideology or preference for or against tradition can separate us.

What a challenge for us: to continue our work in expanding the recognition and expression of holiness to those who have felt excluded, to develop the resources which allow for deepening these expressions and, at the same time, to connect with the people with whom we used to feel out of step and to learn to walk together.

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PS: I especially want to thank our Chief Operating Officer and previous Executive Director Susan Saxe and Rivkah Walton, the director of the Insitutue for Contemporary Midrash, whose ideas and phrases are the core of the above.

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