



Parashat Vaetchanan

But G-d Said No: Why Moses Couldn't Enter the Promised Land, and What The LGBT Community Can Learn From It

by Stephanie Silberstein on Friday July 23, 2010

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Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11

In *Parashat Vaetchanan*, Moses pleads with G-d to allow him to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. This is an impassioned, personal plea, so personal that it is written in the first person. Moses is desperate to get into the Promised Land. He can see it, taste it, smell it...but G-d will not let him enter.

As non-heterosexuals, we all have stories of the promised lands we wanted to enter, and how, thankfully, G-d said no. I am not talking about the true Promised Land, the land flowing with the milk and honey of freedom and equality, but of the world belonging to other people, heterosexual people. People whose lives seemed easier because they didn't have the struggles LGBTQA people deal with on a daily basis. For me as a biromantic asexual, the Promised Land was that of sexuality. Asexuals do not have sexual desires or sexual feelings. And so I felt left out of my friends' world, which was full of sexual innuendo and the pain of celibacy, and the world of romance, full of people who did not want to date me because they presumed, without getting to know me, that they would be sentenced to a lifetime without any sexual contact whatsoever. I pleaded as Moses pleaded, wanting to be like everyone else, wanting to fit in.

But G-d said no.

A friend of mine pleaded with G-d for years. She is both bisexual and transgender, and thought G-d would condemn her for both of these qualities. She pleaded with G-d to let her into the Promised Land of straight men, where she would be free of her family's condemnation, free of the religious friends who believed non-heterosexuality was a sin, free of the conflict between her love of G-d and her understanding of who she was. She was so torn up by this conflict that she pleaded with G-d to end her life if He could not bring her to this so-called Promised Land.

But G-d said no and no again.

For those of us who have accepted our sexual orientation, it is easy to see why G-d says no to our prayers that we be made heterosexual. The more we accept ourselves, the happier we



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seem to be, because we are no longer fighting G-d's vision of who we are. G-d intended for each of us to be a certain way in order to fulfill certain purposes. As it is written in Psalms:

When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, though my body was yet unformed. - Psalms 139:15-16

If we feel comfortable enough with ourselves to build bridges with some heterosexual people, we also quickly discover that their lives are not as perfect as we thought. Certainly they don't have to fight some of the legal battles we do. Heterosexual people are allowed to marry and in most cases can adopt children more easily than their LGBT counterparts. But there are still disapproving family members, friends who think they are not girly enough or masculine enough, broken hearts, and all the disappointments that come from being alive.

So the Promised Land we so desperately sought did not exist. It was not really the Promised Land. It was just another, prettier version of the desert we'd been wandering in all our lives.

This analogy is all well and good for us, but what about Moses? Why did G-d say no to his impassioned plea to cross the Jordan? Surely his Promised Land was not illusory, since G-d appointed Joshua to take his place in it.

Moses blamed the Israelites, who did not keep G-d's commandments and frustrated him with their constant complaining. On the surface, he appears to be correct. When the Israelites were desperate for water and complaining that they wished they had died in Egypt, Moses became impatient and cried out, "Are we to bring forth water out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10) G-d, apparently furious that Moses gave himself credit, responded that Moses would not enter the Promised Land.

It seems strange, however, that G-d would say no to Moses' impassioned plea for forgiveness. This is the same G-d who molded Moses from birth to lead the Israelites out of slavery, who put up with Moses' disbelief in himself and frustration with his followers' inability to trust in his leadership for over 40 years. Why, then, does G-d say no to Moses' entering the Promised Land?

Could it be that the Promised Land was an illusion—not to Joshua and the rest of the Israelites, but to Moses? Moses hoped that once they reached the Promised Land, the Israelites would settle down and follow G-d's commandments. He would no longer be called upon to mediate between them and G-d when they broke the Law. This is why his last act is to repeat the Ten Commandments to the Israelites and exhort them to follow the Law. In reality, the Israelites did not settle down at all, and had Moses crossed into the Promised Land, he might have found himself still mediating and judging, two activities that tired him out.



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So Moses was not so different from us LGBT folk after all. We, too, get tired of the battles. We, too, want to enter a Promised Land where we can have peace. Rejecting ourselves in order to fit into heterosexual society clearly is not the answer...but what is?

G-d's answer to Moses is to "feast his eyes" upon the Promised Land until he has had his fill, then begin training Joshua to take over as leader of the Israelites. In other words, accept his fate and use the position he has been given to strengthen someone else. G-d's instructions are, literally, "strengthen him and give him courage."

As members of the LGBT community, we can do the same thing. Some of us are parents, aunts, uncles or teachers. Most of us know someone who may be struggling with hir identity. Perhaps it is a young person who is trying to come to terms with hir sexual or gender identity. Perhaps it is an older person who at long last has accepted who s/he is but feels too old to express it appropriately. Whatever the case is, we can each reach out to someone. We can encourage someone to be hirself a little more.

We can reassure someone that hir feelings are normal and acceptable. We can raise our children to be proud of who they are—no matter what their sexual and gender identities—so that they can truly become leaders. Perhaps one day one of those children, instead of wishing s/he were dead, will lead the LGBT people into the true Promised Land, into a place where we have complete freedom to be ourselves and complete equality under the law.

If G-d is saying no to a deeply impassioned prayer, ask yourself what you need to accept in your life. Whether it's your sexual orientation, your gender identity, or simply your role within the LGBTQA community, it may be the key to saving someone else's life—if not your own.



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