

Parashat Korach

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

by Karen Perolman on Friday June 26, 2009

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Numbers 16:1 - 18:32, PRIDE! 2009

"It's the most wonderful time of the year..." A warm summer day, smiling couples walking hand in hand down sunny streets, little kids waving flags, parades with music and floats, people dancing in the streets, good food, seeing old friends...this could describe any perfect summer day. But since it is the end of June in New York, I'm talking about PRIDE!

This weekend New York City celebrates Gay Pride and the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. New Yorkers of all sexual orientations, gender identities and allies will be celebrating by marching in the parade, attending social events thrown by every gay organization in the city and attending Pride-themed religious events.

Pride falls on different Shabbat each year, but it is no coincidence that this year, Pride falls on the Shabbat of *Parashat Korach*. The connections may not be immediately clear, but two important lessons emerge from this week's Torah portion. These lessons may come from ancient texts, but their larger message speaks in a loud and firm voice and adds a new level of meaning to our Pride celebrations.

On its most basic level, *Korach* is the story of rebellion, of speaking out and against those in power. The text tells us: "Now *Korach*, son of *Izhar* son of *Kohath* son of *Levi* took himself along with *Dathan* and *Abiram* sons of *Eliab*, and *On* son of *Peleth*, descendants of Reuben, to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites" [Numbers 16:1-2]. What was Korach's complaint? Why was he rising up? The text speaks in an eerily modern voice: "'You have gone too far! For all the community is holy, all of them, and *Adonai* is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above *Adonai's* congregation?'" [Numbers 16:3]

Korach's complaint can be understood as a cry of inequality. If all the Israelites were holy, *kol eidah kulam kidoshim* why were some holier than others? What qualities did Moses and Aaron possess that Korach lacked? Why were Moses and Aaron singled out by God? Perhaps his question is more basic, more human: "why are you holier than me?" "Why do you see yourself as better?" "How are we any different from one another?"

For the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community, these questions are undeniably familiar. When we are confronted by bigotry, hatred, homophobia and inequality, we may find ourselves asking the same questions. “Why are you holier than me?” “Why do you see yourself as better?” “How are we any different from one another?” Pride weekends and events are a time to “rise up,” not as Korach did with inflaming accusations and violence, but rather with *geyava*, with pride for our community, our friends and neighbors and ourselves. Silly as it sounds, Pride is the time to be proud, outlandishly, fabulously, over-the-top proud of how far we’ve come, to celebrate the miraculous achievements of the GLBT community over the last year.

Yet, it is not the time to be complacent, to naively believe that the work is over. One only needs to read the Department of Justice’s [memo supporting the Defense of Marriage Act.](#), or watch the (CBST) in Manhattan [video of the Westboro Baptist Church protesting in front of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah.](#) to see that there is much work to do.

Which brings us to the second Pride lesson of *Parashat Korach*. At the end of the portion, after Korach and his followers were swallowed up by the earth, God instructs Aaron on the responsibilities of the Levites. “All the best of the new oil, wine and grain – the choice parts that they present to Adonai, I give to you. The first fruits of everything in their land, that they bring to Adonai, shall be yours...” [Numbers 18: 12-13]

God is speaking of the Israelite sacrifices that will be made for a variety of reasons and that the Levites will oversee. When the Israelites bring their best produce and goods, the first of their harvest, the Levites may enjoy them and eat of them. These first fruits and the best of oil, wine and grain are without a doubt, difficult possessions for the Israelites to donate. It cannot be easy to give the best of what you have, without seeing much in return.

Like the Israelites, Pride calls upon us to recommit ourselves to the causes that we care about the most. The roar of the Pride parade calls on us like a *Shofar* to serve as a reminder to wake up and rededicate ourselves to the important work which Pride celebrates. For each of us it is different. Can we, despite the difficult economic times, be more generous with organizations that work toward marriage equality and human rights? Can we donate our time to making phone calls, hanging out flyers or sending emails? Can we dig deep within ourselves to ally with a community that we do not belong to? What are our first fruits and best goods that we can give to our community? While we are not responsible for completing the task of equality and riding the world of injustice, we also cannot sit back and do nothing. [Based on *Pirkei Avot* 2:15] This is the time to act.

Wishing you a very happy Pride!



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.