

Pride Healing Havdalah Sermon

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A couple of weeks ago we celebrated Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah. The rabbis asked if all or just part of the Torah was given at Sinai. Many of our sages suggested that in fact the Divine only gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and not the entire Torah. They further surmised that Moses composed the rest of the five books during the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the desert.

But questions still remain—for as we know from the narrative, there were two tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. The first was shattered by Moses when he came down from the mountain and saw the Israelites dancing before the golden calf. And the second was composed after the first two were broken. Again, our sages asked what became of these shattered first tablets? Were they thrown in a heap to be forgotten?

The Talmud answers that the broken tablets were placed in the holy ark along with the second intact set. They were not tossed away, nor were they buried as we generally do with holy items no longer in use. They were placed in the most sacred of places the *aron hakodesh*, the holy ark. And eventually they sat next to the second tablets, the whole set of the Ten Commandments. Together, our rabbis stated, these broken tablets remained securely protected as the nation journeyed through the wilderness. To paraphrase contemporary Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider, we see then that at this transformational moment for the people of Israel a striking metaphor that brokenness and wholeness can co-exist side by side, even in Judaism's holiest spot—in the heart of the holy ark.

I would suggest that like Havdalah, the transformational point in the Sabbath where we move from the sacred to the mundane, like many LGBTQ people who have had the transformational moment to proclaim and perform the truth of their existence, we still carry our/this brokenness in us. Our losses, our grief and pain dwell in our hearts and minds forever. And for many, despite as one author noted, shifting attitudes, many LGBTQ people who live outside our bigger cities or live in many non-western countries in this world still face obstacles and in some cases death because of who they are.

At this moment in history it would seem that the image of the broken tablets of Shavuot offers us an accurate representation of our lives and the life of the world around us. Not only are we in the midst of a pandemic with the fears and anxiety that it has brought to the world, but as well, we are seeing the outcry of brokenness from the Black community around us. As Jews, as queer Jews, we recognize, we empathize, we rise up with communities of colour to remove the systemic yoke of oppression that they experience daily.

The Chassidic Rebbe, Reb Menachem of Kotzk, said, “there is nothing more whole than a broken heart.” Like the symbolism of the whole tablets and the broken tablets placed side by side, many who have brokenness in them still find wholeness, resilience and strength to not only lead more fulfilling and meaningful lives but to help to make changes within this broken world. As James Baldwin stated, “not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can change until it is faced.”

Despite my often cynical outlook, I do think that we are on the cusp of change... That there will be a cure, a vaccine, found within the next year or so to prevent the spread of the literal virus that is wreaking havoc on our world. And I believe as well that there will be an end to the metaphoric virus of systemic racism, hatred and bigotry that has for centuries ravaged communities and lives.

I believe that hatred and intolerance of LGBTQ people will be a thing of the past... That every denomination from all religions in this world and every political stripe in all this world will heed the message of scriptures of the Genesis narrative... a creation story that is not about white people or black people or brown people. It is not a story about heterosexuals or homosexuals but rather, it is a story about all peoples. It tells us that all peoples, of all races, religions, ethnicities and sexualities are created in the image of the Divine and thus must be treated with dignity and respect... That when the world was created, as scholar Margaret Wenig interprets, the Divine made day and night, and all that was in-between—dawn, morning, noon and evening—and similarly when male and female were created so was all that is in-between, gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer.

Perhaps today we are near the time for us to mend the crack that is in everything and gather up the brokenness and let it stand beside the wholeness for healing and for change.

Aviva