

2008 Yom Kippur Sermon
Given by Rabbi Shifra

I was chosen to give the social action talk to you today, and I truly consider it a great privilege. I guess I was chosen for this honor because just about everyone knows what a pro-family religious conservative I am. But if you didn't know, let me tell you about my pro-family, religious conservative stance. I am pro-family because, simply put, I am in favor of families, seems obvious, right? Of course, I am in favor of all types of families. They don't have to look like my family. And in fact, I hope that there's not another family walking around that looks exactly like my family because that would be spooky. I'm glad there are many different kinds of families, and so I support any marriage that is a partnership based on love and commitment between two people.

But that's not all, and here's where the religious part of my thinking comes in. It's ok with me if you don't believe in G-d, but I do. I believe that there exists a force greater than ourselves that calls us to justice even when we are surrounded by injustice that connects us all even though paradoxically we are all different, that calls us to preserve, protect, respect and have compassion for all life, that sanctifies our marriages. So as a religious person, I think it is important to call this sacred commitment "marriage" and not just "civil union." Its not only about the laws, rights and privileges that come with a civil union. Its about dignity and sanctity. To me, this partnership is sacred and when we acknowledge its sanctity we silently and subtly give that couple some of what they need to get through the tough times that every marriage faces.

And that's where the conservative part of my stance comes in. I want to help loving families stay together.

I'm standing here explaining all this to you because I want you to vote no on proposition 8, and I'll tell you a story about that. A couple of months ago, on the first day that same sex couples were allowed to legally marry in the state of California I went to the County building to officiate at a few weddings. There I overheard a woman in her mid 70's about my mother's age and she looked so... well, straight, like my mother, talking about how after being with her partner for over 40 years, she was afraid to get married

because they would go on record as a same sex couple. She was afraid to ask that her relationship of 40 years be granted the dignified acknowledgement and privileges that my husband and Peter and I take for granted. Why? Because she is afraid of being targeted by people who claim to be pro-family religious conservatives but are at best quite confused about the fundamental loving message of their religion and at worst filled with hatred and fear of people who are not like them. But its time for our society to once and forever embrace equality for all.

I'm asking you to not only vote no on 8, but to support the no on 8 campaign in every way that you possibly can at this historic and crucial turning point in our history.

Rabbi Paula spoke in her sermon today about how she doesn't take the unetaneh tokef prayer literally. Even though I also don't imagine God having hands and eyes, or maintaining a data base, for some reason I still experience myself as being watched over. And I do experience my mistakes and negative actions as building up until I truly repent and seek forgiveness and get myself back on the right course.

So I even though I don't take G-d as a person in the sky literally, there is a great indescribable truth there that these simple images are trying to describe.

People often ask me questions that let me know that they take the Torah literally. I think a couple of years ago I told the story about a French woman named Nicole who came to services at my congregation in Seattle with a box of live pigeons for me to sacrifice to expiate her from her sins. And although the whole story is really funny, its actually very sad to me that she would read the Torah and take away from it that she could cleanse herself from her wrongdoing that way.

And recently when the kids at Temple Beth El did a play on the 7 days of creation, someone asked me how I could believe that and still accept the scientific evidence for evolution.

For Jews, the truth of the Torah has **never** been about whether the events depicted in it actually happened. The Zohar says that the stories in the torah are like a beautiful garment on a person. Only fools look at what a person is wearing and think that they know that person. A deeper person would look at the person themselves, their actions

and words before they think they truly know the person, but a truly wise person realizes that they don't know that person until they have an enduring relationship and then they can look into the soul of that person. The Zohar says that the stories of the Torah are like the garment of the Torah. What the Zohar means is that the Torah reveals the human condition and the inner mysteries of the psyche and teaches great life lessons only in relationship. So my Torah is not the same as your Torah because the real Torah is the Torah that takes a relationship, an interaction with the truths of my life and sometimes a struggle to uncover.

I guess a rabbi was chosen to give the social action talk this year because this upcoming vote is not really about gay marriage. In so many ways proposition eight is about religion and the bible, and what it REALLY teaches. Rabbi Rick, Rabbi Paula and myself are listed supporters with Jews for Marriage equality along with CCAR president Rabbi Janet Marder and the majority of rabbis in California.

And what do all these rabbis think the Torah teaches about this? The fact that a passage in Leviticus condemns homosexuality isn't the end of the discussion, just as we didn't stop our discussion on personal repentance at the point where Leviticus outlines how we must sacrifice pigeons to cleanse ourselves from our sins.

It can take a lifetime of study to learn what you already know. You know. Your heart knows. Hillel summed it up on one foot - "what is hateful to you do not do unto others, this is the whole torah now go and learn."