Shabbat Shalom!

Today we are celebrating TBZ’s 7th Annual Pride Shabbat. How very blessed we are to be members of a religious community that welcomes, respects, and honors member of the Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender, and Queer community, as well as their friends, allies, and families.

I am the proud mother of an adult, trans son. My youngest son’s transition was a journey for us both, and TBZ and our Judaism played an important role for each of us.

What became clear to me early on, as B. was exploring the possibility of transitioning, was that like Moses, he would be leading the journey. I would, like the Israelites in the desert, be following behind. We would be going into new territory that for me would at times feel uncomfortable, unfriendly, and even dangerous. I would wonder at times what I would lose if I lost my daughter, who I had always been close to. And, I was uncertain of what might lie ahead if B. became my third son. The journey required a faith that was hard to access at times.

As a mother, I wondered how to balance my love and support while expressing my concern for his wellbeing, happiness, and safety. I wanted to protect him from possibly choosing a life that would be very challenging. I wondered if he really had a choice.

In the end, I came to understand that the only choice I really had was how I responded. And, I wanted to respond with love and respect. I observed B.’s courage in the face of so much uncertainty and many challenges. And, I decided to join him with my own.

In this week’s Parsha, the last in the Book of Leviticus, God promises a time of security, peace, comfort and dignity to those who are faithful to the Commandments. For B., and for all the GBLTQ Jews in our community here at TBZ, I am so very grateful to our Rabbis. Reb Moshe and Rav Claudia, and to our community, for creating a religious home where God’s promise has been realized.

During B.’s transition, TBZ played an important role. Twelve years ago, as my father lay dying, Reb Moshe led B. and my other two sons in a meaningful, loving, Jewish goodbye as they gathered around their beloved grandfather’s bedside and sang to him in Hebrew. In conversations with Reb Moshe at that time and after, B. learned to appreciate that the rituals, traditions, and wisdom in Judaism could be especially comforting, centering, and calming in uncertain and challenging times. I know he returned to that knowledge during his transition.

B. had a moving experience while at a GBLTQ camping week during the process of his transition. Being sensitive that as a Jewish man well past the age of Bar Mitzvah he should have already learned how to appropriately do the rituals for putting on his tallit, he asked a dear friend who had already transitioned and was also a practicing Jew, to teach him how to do it. As they stood outside, a group of friends, some Jewish
and some not, gathered around to watch the lesson. As B. and his friend said the blessings together, B. felt that he now was becoming a man in a Jewish way. It was especially touching to him because he was surrounded by friends who were supporting him during his transition, some of whom now watched with tears in their eyes.

Later, with friends at Keshet, B. helped to create a series of workshops to teach others how to put on tefillin, tallit, and even to celebrate a transition and new identity with a mikveh ceremony.

I think it’s also noteworthy that in Judaism we consider the taking on of a new name as medicine for the soul. While B. chose his own new first name, he asked me what we would have called him had he been assigned male at birth. He used that name, ____, as his new middle name.

A few years later, TBZ granted him the respect and appreciation to be one of the presenters for a community workshop we held here on understanding what it means to be trans. Clearly B.’s dignity and sense of belonging has been enhanced in his Jewish community.

B.’s and my journey continue. I have learned that despite and maybe because of his transition, our loving bond remains strong. And, that he remains the kind, generous, thoughtful, fun person that he always was.

B. has recently moved to Canada to be with his wonderful, warm S. . He promises to be back often, and bring S. to our welcoming community.

And, the journey of our Jewish People continues. In our tradition we are counting the 42nd day of the 49 days of wandering in the desert. We are almost at a time when we will be ready to experience the Oneness of Life.

And, we have come a long way to make life much easier for people in the GBLTQ community. There are fewer obstacles and less stigma. But, our struggles are not yet over. Recent events in North Carolina and other states in our country, as well as places all over the world remind us we still have much work to do.

May we continue, together, to fight for the equality, respect and safety of all people.

And, may we live in the grace of God’s promise of security, peace, comfort and dignity.

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