

## October 12, 2018 / 3rd of Cheshvan, 5779

Dear chevreh,

Twenty years ago today (the day after National Coming Out day), a 21 year old college student, Matthew Shepard died after a brutal attack in a homophobic hate crime in Wyoming. Next week his ashes will be finally placed in the cathedral crypt of The Washington National Cathedral, a place where presidents and other influential Americans have been laid to rest. We've come very far in the national fight to support LGBTQ rights, yet there are still 20 states which do not consider attacks against LGBTQ people to be hate crimes, including Wyoming.

In this week's Torah portion, parashat Noach, the rainbow features prominently as a sign of the covenant God promised to all living things on Earth that God would never destroy the world again by a flood. It's ironic right now that the promise is about floods, because not only have we experienced horrible actual flooding and storm surges all over the world recently - and we heard horrible forecasts from the UN this week about future climate disasters - but metaphorically many of us feel flooded now in these dramatic times. Yet the rainbow persists in serving as a symbol that brings comfort, awe, joy and hope. We even have a bracha, a blessing to say when we see a rainbow:

בְּמַאֲמְרוֹ וְקִיָּם בְּבְרִיתוֹ וְנִאֲמַן הַבְּרִית זִכְרֵהָ עוֹלָם מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ 'ה אֲתָה בְּרוּךְ

Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the universe, who remembers the covenant, and is faithful to the covenant, and keeps God's promise.

Additionally, the LGBTQ movement has taken on the rainbow as its sign of diversity. Harvey Milk asked gay activist and artist Gilbert Baker to choose a symbol and Gilbert chose the rainbow to represent pride at the Pride March in San Francisco in 1978. After Milk's assassination later that year, the rainbow symbol grew even more important and widespread. Today people wave rainbow flags to show support for the LGBTQ community all over the world. The national Jewish LGBTQ organization is called "Keshet", which means "rainbow." As we read Noah in these times which are "flooded" with distressing news and realities, let us be inspired by the symbol of the rainbow, in appreciation for the diversity of our nation. In addition to being a rainbow, "keshet" can mean "bow", as in an instrument of action. Inspired by the [rain]bow, let us do our part in making sure that fewer floods come our way, by preventing the acceleration of climate change, and addressing the inequality often present in recovery processes.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Diana