

## Shabbat Shalom

This week marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the six day war. In June of 1967 Israel stunned the world with its lightening ability to hold back and neutralize and defeat the combined Arab armies of Syria, Jordan and Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudia Arabia. On June 5 1967 all of its air force but 12 planes left to pre-emptively strike the Egyptian air force destroying it on the ground. From June 5-7 the Israeli army fought an extensive campaign in the Sinai desert and Gaza where Egyptian forces had been massing over the course of the last several months. Israel took advantage though of the lack of coordination between Egyptian troops, Israelis complete air superiority and the lightening speed of the advance made the Egyptians run. On the front of the West Bank, Jordan was reluctant to enter the war but they did so attacking Jerusalem and trying to reach toward Tel Aviv. Israeli forces fought back and by June 6 Israeli forces were in place and fought back encircling Jerusalem with paratroopers at the Battle of Ammunition Hill and on June 7 Israeli forces marched into the Old City capturing the Temple Mount for the first time in 2000 years! The battle for at the Northern border took longest –by June 9 and 10<sup>th</sup> Israeli forces had pushed back the Syrian troops to the plateau of the Golan Heights. The ceasefire was signed on June 10. Israel had captured all of Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the

Golan Heights. Tiny Israel had the sheer tenacity and will to fight for its survival against the Arab forces who were building up their armies to attack and push Israel into the sea.

That tenacity, the sheer determination to fight for what you believe in, to fight for your life, your well being, your very survival is something that has been a Jewish hallmark throughout our history.

Tonight we also celebrate Gay and Lesbian Pride Shabbat. In doing so we acknowledge the struggle for equality and freedom that gay people everywhere continue to engage in world wide. Although we are blessed to live in West Hollywood and Los Angeles where we have an amazing sense of connectedness, freedom and equality there are still many areas where we are not yet free. Compared to many places in the world—we, Gay and Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people live in a utopian world here—where gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender folks can more openly live without fear of death or imprisonment. Where we can make our families—have or adopt children if we wish, even share many of the responsibilities and privileges of married life if we choose to... But in many, in fact in most places in the world, sexual minorities live in deep closets of fear, imprisoned in reality or by the hatred that surrounds them. It often takes extraordinary determination and will to live and to fight for equality.

So tonight we give thanks to God who created us as we are and we give thanks that we live in a place of such freedoms to live and be who we are.

But that freedom to live and be who we are didn't just happen. The struggle for equality even though it is a righteous struggle—did not happen over night. Nor did it happen just by chance. There were and are many risk takers who work tirelessly for gay and lesbian freedom. There have been powerful fighters and organizers who have defied the odds and fought back the armies of hatred. In small ways and large there have been individuals who have made an incredible difference in the gay and lesbian community. Remember the organized gay and lesbian community isn't that old. The pride festivities this weekend commemorate –the Stonewall riots of New York in June of 1969. But there are earlier gatherings and earlier moments of gay history—and Los Angeles has been a key city in the formation of those organizations and groups that gave early shape to the struggle for gay freedom—Among those early organizations prior to Stonewall were the One Institute, the Mattachine society and Metropolitan Community Church!

But there were and are individuals who have helped to make that happen. Harvey Milk was indeed someone who helped to shape our gay community. He was the third openly gay elected official in the entire United

States. He was elected as a supervisor in San Francisco's 5<sup>th</sup> district—the Castro in 1977 after two previous unsuccessful bids for election. Harvey Milk a Jew, born in New York –served in the Navy and following living in Dallas and New York he worked both on Wall Street and in the theatre as an Assistant Director. He was involved in directing the plays—Jesus Christ Superstar and Lenny about the comedian Lenny Bruce. He moved to San Francisco with his partner, Scott in 1972 opening a camera store in the Castro and becoming active as a community leader. He founded the local gay business Alliance in the Castro and often interacted with government agencies.

Once elected Milk, who called himself the Mayor of Castro Street, had a term of only 11 months before he was assassinated with Mayor George Moscone by a fellow supervisor Dan White on November 27, 1978. Milk in his short term on the board of Supervisors in San Francisco enacted a gay rights bill as well as helped to defeat the statewide Proposition 6 the Briggs initiative which would have allowed openly gay men and lesbians who were teachers to be fired based on their sexuality. Milk was a populist and believed that Cities had an obligation to help its population. He was elected with the help of some of the city's toughest unions which surprised many in San Francisco. At a time when Conservatives like Dan White wanted to

reduce city services, Milk opposed this. Harvey Milk had that Jewish streak of tenacity and will and determination that fought for equality, justice and freedom. Not unlike the Israeli army of 1967, Milk pushed back at those who would do harm to the gay and lesbian community.

White was convicted of only of manslaughter in the assassination of Milk and Moscone. Even though he crawled through a window to avoid metal detectors on the day of the murders, carrying loads of bullets alongside his gun, White claimed it wasn't premeditated. Who can forget Diane Feinstein's tearful announcement about the murders? White was only sentenced to seven years. Many believed that anti-gay attitudes of the jury contributed to the lighter sentence. During the trial his defense made a bizarre claim that he was so depressed that he ate lots of junk food such as Twinkies and Coke and this contributed to his basic diminished capacity. This became known as the Twinkie Defense.

Later in his life after he had been paroled he admitted that his murder of Milk and Moscone was premeditated and that he additionally wanted to murder that day Willie Brown of the State Assembly and another fellow supervisor Carol Silver

Harvey Milk was an amazing organizer, and a martyr of our gay community. He used to say "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet

destroy every closet door." How prophetic he was—because of his example—many have gone on to politics and to a larger commitment to GLBT equality not just in our own state but around the world.

Tonight here in our own temple—we recognize our Past President Loren Ostrow who is receiving the Harvey Milk Award from Christopher Street West, Pride 2007. We know Loren's many accomplishments here in our own temple—serving on the board, Serving as president during the dedication of our building. Loren serves presently in his second go-round as chair of the LA Gay and Lesbian Center and serves on the board of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, currently as its Treasurer but also having been National Chair person!

Like Harvey Milk, Loren has contributed to building our community and has always emphasized the importance of people. His generosity and kindness are so evident in everything he does. He has brought to our congregation a steady hand and to our larger LA and National GLBT organizations talented leadership and extraordinary vision. We join tonight Loren in saluting your many accomplishments and in particular this one. You have ensured that our community thrives—its mental, physical and spiritual well being is guarded and enriched because of your dedication, devotion and service to the community. You have been a wonderful leader

and guide to us all of humility and determination, conviction and passion. You have ensured that our community organizations at every level, national, state and local thrive! You have used your grace, humor, leadership and tenacity to build up our glbt community.

We are so proud of your accomplishments and say TODAH RABBAH—thank you for your willingness to open closet doors, and bring light and healing to our community and equality at every turn.

The night of the assassination of Milk and Moscone there was a spontaneous candlelight march through the streets of San Francisco—It was at this march that Holly Near—famous folk singer and feminist wrote her ballad—“We are gentle, angry people.” This became an anthem for the gay rights movement in a way that “We Shall Overcome” became a signature of the African-American Civil rights movement. Her words, we are gentle angry people—singing for our lives—has united not just gay people everywhere—but reaches across, the boundaries of class, ethnicity and color to freedom loving people who are ready to work for justice and equality. This weekend amidst the parade and festivities—let us not forget the work and life of Harvey Milk or the outstanding dedication of Loren Ostrow who has built communities with his hands! Freedom is not complete until everyone is free—and all can partake in the equality. This weekend we need

to renew ourselves so that all may be free and equal and can celebrate their  
dignity and humanity with strength and joy and blessing.

Ken Yehi Ratzon.