

## Shabbat Shalom

Another June is here and Gay Pride month is with us. Although last weekend was the Christopher Street West Festival and Parade the truth of the matter is that the events we commemorate this month happened at the end of June in 1969. Judy Garland, gay icon and idol had just died of a drug overdose on June 22, 1969 ( a Sunday) and gay men everywhere were in deep mourning. June 27 was the first Friday night since her death and The New York Police Department chose to raid the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. The patrons, who were already upset with Judy's death, decided not to take their harassment and fought back. Thus began three days of rioting and fighting the police. Forever known as the Stonewall Riots or Rebellion, the Los Angeles Gay community was challenged a year later to come up with a commemoration of that event and thus LA's Christopher Street West was born. Thirty-five years ago Rev. Troy Perry and Morris Kight gathered the community to march down Hollywood Blvd. No floats, no pulsing music, police lining the route ready for a riot—it was a protest march. A statement of communal strength at a time when still here in Los Angeles, entrapment by LAPD and vice raids were standard operating procedure.

How we forget what Gay Pride is about. Now rather than a real display of communal strength and solidarity we get a drunken weekend that is more like a circuit party with commercial sponsors!

What is gay pride about? Is it just an excuse to have a weekend to party? Or is gay pride something deeper? Should we be celebrating our community's diversity?

Look at how we've grown since the early days—not just organizationally although that alone is very impressive in the variety of groups and affiliations that are within our community. But we've grown in visibility through the hard work of so many. We are more visible in politics, more visible in the work place, more visible in schools, more visible in the media both television and print media. We are more visible in the religious world, more visible in business and unions, more visible in every possible career. Today there is even growing momentum to reverse 'the don't ask don't tell' policy of the military. **H.R.1059** A bill introduced by Democratic Representative from Massachusetts, Martin Meheen it is co- sponsored by a Republican from Florida Ileana Ros-Lehtinen 85 other congresspeople. There is a drumbeat

even from some parts of the political right that sees that in a time of war especially, to be dismissing gay men and lesbians from active duty makes no sense.

But our visibility didn't happen over night and it didn't happen because of circuit parties. It happened because we as a community have worked hard to challenge injustice and hatred. Individuals took risks and came out to family and friends and co-workers. Our civil rights organizations like Lambda and the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco have worked hard to get just court rulings that have overturned discriminatory practices at every level of government from the Federal level to the local level. Gay Employee groups at large corporations have banded together and demanded domestic partnership benefits and diversity training for all employees. Those of us in religious circles have paid a huge price to come out and demand justice in the pews of our synagogues and churches. Some of us have lost jobs and some of my straight Christian friends have lost their collars by standing up for gays and lesbians and equality.

This is the true essence of gay pride. This is what we have to be proud about—that in such a short amount of time we have made such great strides as a community. That we no longer only have to meet one another in the dark bowels of a seedy neighborhood bar—but can in the light of day demand our equality. This is what we ought to be celebrating. The amazing record of achievements by our community on the road to equality. . We should be celebrating the fact that we have had individuals who were willing to be out for us—to give a face and a name to our cause.

Not Paris Hilton—who not even a month ago—made such homophobic comments about her feelings upon seeing two men kissing. Is this really what Gay Pride should celebrate?

Or should gay pride return to its strength—where community organizations can participate with out costing it an arm and a leg. Should gay pride be just an excuse for an outdoor disco or should it inspire gay and lesbian people and the straight community to take up our cause for justice and equality?

We still have so far to go. We are still disadvantaged—we still face discrimination—although it is better than the old days. We still haven't won the right to marry—and still cannot adopt in many states. There are still places where it is illegal to discriminate in Housing and employment and

places where sexual orientation isn't recognized for the purposes of reporting a hate crime. Some churches and some Jewish denominations still refuse to ordain openly gay and lesbian people as clergy and refuse to recognize our unions spiritually. We don't have nearly enough openly gay legislators, elected officials, judges, policemen and women, teachers, doctors, nurses, clergy, business leaders, parents and city commissioners. There is still tremendous misunderstanding and hatred of transgender people—even among gay men and lesbians. So indeed there is still a far way to go.

I am no prude—and I like to dance. But if our gay pride celebrations are only focused on the shallow then we have lost the essence of what we should be celebrating. So as we acknowledge and celebrate the many achievements and accomplishments of our community tonight here, the time has come to help transform the notion of gay pride celebrations—to gay pride inspirations. Let us let our values of inclusion, diversity, spirituality, and justice transform gay pride into a celebration of our whole selves.

Then will we have reason to rejoice as the Psalmist did—the stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.