

Dvar for Interfaith Pride Shabbat

Parsha Eikev, [Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25](#)

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Each week a portion or parasha from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses is read in the synagogue. There is one reading for each week of the calendar year beginning with Genesis at Simchat Torah in the fall and continue through the Torah week by week. This week's parasha is Eikev (עִקֵּב) the second word, and the first distinctive word, in the parashah) is the 46th weekly Torah portion (פָּרָשָׁה, parashah) in the annual Jewish cycle of Torah reading and the third in the book of Deuteronomy. It comprises Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25.

Eikev is a continuation of Moses' final speech to the Israelites which recounts the journey through the wilderness and reiterates the commandments that they are to follow. There are also instructions on how the Israelites are supposed to go into the land, that G-d will be the one who permits them to defeat those in the land already and take over. It also contains part of the Shema which is part of daily Jewish prayers and is a reminder to follow G-d's commandments, or mitzvot.

As the Israelites are about to enter into the promised land there are a number of injunctions on how they are to behave. Yes, there is the conquest, but at the same time there are instructions on how to treat the stranger, the immigrant, the widow, and, by extension, the oppressed who are in the land. While these instructions were given at a specific time in history there are lessons we can learn from them in the context of today's LGBT and queer communities.

We are a stiff-necked people, we have attitudes and ideas that lead us to do things that draw us away from loving G-d, and loving our neighbour. Moses cites a number of examples in this

reading when the Israelites rebelled and did not follow the instructions that were given, the most famous and well known is the golden calf that Moses found when he came down from Sinai with the tablets containing the ten commandments

G-d's command to welcome the stranger, welcome the immigrant, those of us who are under the LGBT or queer umbrellas are the strangers for the most part, many are also immigrants. We all face the injustices of oppression. It is easy for us to see how this applies to those in wider society and how we are treated by it. We also are called to look within our own communities and see how we treat those who are the strangers in our own communities.

One way to understand this is to remember the creation narrative in Genesis 1. G-d creates human beings in their image. As one translator puts it "God created human kind *zachar u'nikvah* male and female *and every combination in between.*"¹ So if we are created in the image of the divine, and we are to love our neighbour as well as ourselves it is incumbent that we remember that our neighbours are also human, also made in the image of G-d. If we share in this image, it is important to remember to fight against the injustices and oppressions that happen within LGBT and queer communities. We are often neighbours and strangers in our own communities.

On the one hand, there is this command about how we are to love our neighbour, love the stranger, but we can also look at this from the perspective that as LGBT people we are in the process of crossing into the promised land. Indeed, in many ways we have already begun this process. In many ways, LGBT people in North America have made great strides in terms of

¹ Margaret Moers Wenig, "Male and Female God Created Them - Parshat Breshit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)," in *Torah Queeries : Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 16.

rights and awareness that has reduced discrimination. At the same time, we are still in the process of crossing over, being openly part of wider society.

We celebrate pride week as a way of recognising how far we have come, but we must watch that it doesn't become a false pride? There is often a danger that we will forget that there is still much to be done both in the wider world and in our own queer / LGBT communities. False pride tends to lead us to think that we can stand still, that we don't have to continue to work to make the world a better place for everyone who falls under the queer and LGBT umbrellas. False pride means that we have stopped remembering how we got to where we are. We still have to live up to our ideals and ideas about equality for all, much like the Israelites were commanded to remember G-d, the commandments, and live rightly after crossing over into the land that was promised to them. How will we finish crossing over into what we see as our promised land? Will we fight for, and recognize the diversity in our communities? Or, as happens all too often, will portions of the community be left behind because those in more powerful positions have what they want out of the struggle?

Sources:

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Parashat Eikev: Love the Stranger by Igaël Gurin-Malous on Friday August 07, 2009 17 Av 5769, from Torah Queeries (web) Deuteronomy 7:12 - 11:25, <http://www.keshetonline.org/resource/love-the-stranger-parashat-eikev/>

Wenig, Margaret Moers. "Male and Female God Created Them - Parshat Breshit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)." In *Torah Queeries : Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser and David Shneer, 2-18. New York: New York University Press, 2009.