

**Speech by Rabbi Paul Jacobson
at Dayenu's Mardi Gras Shabbat Dinner,
Friday 1st March 2013**

Every night before going to sleep, my daughters, like other young children, delight in hearing lullabies. Their latest favourites include "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "Ba Ba Black Sheep," and "I Can Sing a Rainbow." Admittedly, Lisa and I first thought that "I Can Sing a Rainbow" was an original tune from the popular children's show *Play School*, but the lyrics are attributed to Arthur Hamilton, with the song having been written in 1955.

Red and yellow and pink and green, purple and orange and blue
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too
Listen with your eyes, listen with your ears, and sing everything you see
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing along with me.

While the colours in Hamilton's song are not necessarily the colours of the rainbow per se, the purpose of the song, when taught to children is to help them name colours, and appreciate the colourful brilliance that fills their world on a daily basis.

Such a reminder has great meaning for each of us. Just this morning, I sat at my computer, looking out the window at a dreary, gray, rain-filled day. *Listen with your eyes.* Though there wasn't much colour to be had in the sky, I still marveled at the different shades of green in the leafy trees outside my window, the way the different coloured buildings glistened in the endless drizzle. I even paused to notice the number of cars passing by on the street – blue, grey, black, silver, dark red, white, fire engine red – a rainbow of colours right before my eyes.

Listen with your ears. From moment to moment, the sound of the rain on the roof of the synagogue shifted and changed, sometimes more intense, sometimes less so. Sometimes the sound of the wind was audible and gusty, other times, calm and still.

And sing everything you see. Tonight, on our Mardi Gras Shabbat, we consider the symbol of the rainbow for other reasons. Since the 1970s, in celebration of the colours of life, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities throughout the world have used a rainbow flag as their symbol. The rainbow is a reminder of the diversity of both the LGBTI community, and of the beauty that can be present when people from all walks of life are embraced by and integrated into community, are respected for their differences, rather than distanced and excluded. The current version of the rainbow flag, also known as the freedom flag, contains six colours symbolizing different values – red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, blue for harmony, and purple for spirit – all colours and values for which each of us strives to cherish, love and protect, day in and day out.

The image of a rainbow is also a powerful symbol in Jewish tradition. After creating the world and destroying it in a great deluge, God presents a rainbow as a sign of the eternal covenant with humanity. Nachmanides, in the 13th century, comments on the shape of the rainbow, saying that if it were an archer's bow, the position of the bow would mean that the arrow would be pointing toward the heavens, rather than toward the earth. Nachmanides uses the symbol of the rainbow to teach us that God isn't pointing any arrows toward us, and won't destroy our world.

But somehow, we humans still have the power to do so much damage, to inflict so much hurt, to cause others unending pain. In lives that are filled with such colour, in lives where we are wowed and amazed by aesthetic magnificence, we still struggle to recognize the colourful brilliance that exists within our community and within each other. In lives that are filled with such colour, we find still that so many people are distanced and excluded from taking a rightful place in the Jewish community and politics still get in the way of love and marriage? In lives that begin with unconditional love, acceptance and being lulled to sleep with images of beautiful colours, how is it that we learn to hate, to discriminate, and to hurt?

What if we were, instead, to see the rainbow of possibility that exists in each other, and through our words and our deeds, teach others to do similarly? *Listen with your eyes* and see the beauty, the loving heart, the thoughtful mind, the giving hands of each person in this room, all of us colourful in our own, special, unique ways. *Listen with your ears* and allow yourself the time to hear each other's stories, to listen without prejudice, to listen without judgment, to stop and listen and accept, to recognize that there is more to be gained by including colours in the spectrum of our communities, rather than excluding them. *And sing everything you see.* The vision of Judaism, the vision of covenant, is that where everyone, no matter our differences, is recognized as being created in God's image. The vision of Judaism, the vision of community is one where we see there is abundant love in our congregation, our world, our tradition, love enough for everyone to feel welcomed, included, cherished, sanctified, and blessed.

Red and yellow and pink and green, purple and orange and blue...
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing along with me.