

MARDI GRAS SHABBAT 2021

This Shabbat we join together to celebrate 21 years of the Jewish community marching in the Mardi Gras parade, 21 years of Dayenu, and we celebrate the LGBTQI+ members of our community. In this 21st year I decided to look at the 21st letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is the letter shin, a letter which according to tradition, is the representation of Divine light shining in the world as we create a mirror of the Eternal light here, amongst us. How poignant and meaningful that this year our Mardi Gras float is all about shining light, “Jewish stars shining bright,” sharing the light of each soul, reflecting the Eternal light and flooding the world with its beauty.

In our Torah portion this week, Moses returns to the mountain to commune with God for a second time and bring back a new set of tablets of law, after he smashed the first ones. He spends time with God and when he descends from the mountain his face is shining and glowing with an ethereal light. It is almost too pure for others to gaze upon as the beauty and awesome power of the light emanating from him radiates into the world. Our commentators have asked what was the reason for that deep light shining from within Moses, and they answer that he is reflecting the light of God and when we look into Moses’ face, we see the love and embrace of God shining from within.

We are called upon to be the light of Moses, to look into the eyes of every human being and reflect back the divine within them. To be the Eternal’s mirror so we gaze into one another’s souls and see the beauty and holiness in every human being. And this Shabbat we are reminded that the white light is made up of a rainbow of colours, that every strand is important, that our commonality is embraced and our differences celebrated.

As I was thinking about the acronym LGBTQI+ I realised that there are seven strands that comprise the acronym, seven communities, each one a weaving together of many diverse individuals to form a rainbow with its seven colours, which when gathered shed a pure and beautiful light. But sometimes the letters of the acronym get in the way, we have worked hard so that they roll off our tongues and we can say them in a breath but in so doing, we can forget the individual communities which make up each and every part of the whole, that each letter is significant and important and every letter has a story, and that story is comprised of thousands of stories. So tonight I would like us to spend a moment reflecting upon each of the letters, the communities, the individuals they

represent and bringing the light of each one, their holiness, their sacred beauty into this space.

L: Lesbian,

G: Gay,

B: Bisexual,

T: Trans, Transgender, transsexual

Q: Queer, Questioning,

I: intersex, and

Plus: the many other colours which reflect the non binary nature of humanity, that remind us that no letter and no acronym can ever be enough to represent the many ways that we are in the world, the spectrum of our being.

But we also need the letters, the words, we need to be together with others, to share our journeys, to find community and souls who have had our experience, who can help us give voice to who we are and what it means to walk in the world on our individual path. We are challenged to create community from diversity, to join together with others in whom we easily see ourselves and holiness reflected and to meet and see the holiness in others from whom we are different, so together we can shine the light of God from all of our souls.

The letter shin, which represents 21 and light, is comprised of three equal prongs, one of the interpretations says they represent thought, speech and action, three elements necessary for the light to shine into the world. Thought: We need to think, to understand, to open our minds to one another and the sacred light within. Speech: Then we need to speak, to tell our stories, to hear from one another what are the truths, the struggles, the challenges, the joys and the celebrations. Conversations where we truly listen and hear, when we look into each others eyes and see the light of another's presence, the sacred story they tell, and then act as God's mirror, reflecting their beautiful light back to them in the rainbow of colours. Act: And finally then we need to act, we have understood, we have listened, we have spoken but we also need to make sure that our words are brought into action, that we create sacred spaces where all can be embraced, known, loved and honoured for who we are deep within, we can see the light shining and glowing into the world.

This year's mardi gras theme is Rise and we are called to rise to the challenge, to lift up and to shed a rainbow light into the world. So how do we rise?

We rise when we create communities where it is safe for LGBTQI+ Jews to be all of who you are and express your own authentic selves

We rise when we celebrate together the blessings of Dayenu, 21 years of being the shin: a place of thought, speech and action.

We rise when we remember our history and tell our stories, remembering from where we came and how we came to be.

We rise when we acknowledge the struggles which continue to exist for some LGBTQI plus Jews to find a home in community and a place of belonging and then we listen and act to create that home

We rise when we celebrate the victories and successes, the joys and triumphs

We rise when we create a space where everyone can speak their truth and know someone will be there to listen and truly hear.

We rise when we stand together and raise our voices in protest when we see violence, hatred and discrimination in words and in deeds increasing in the world and when we speak out against legislation which would allow for discrimination and hate in the name of religion.

We rise when we support and acknowledge the bravery, courage and vision of all who speak out and create a voice for LGBTQI plus Jews

We rise when we feel the blessings of community for everyone who is here and acknowledge there are many who are not here, not able to find a place, a voice, a welcome and we rise when we work to open doors for them to come inside.

We rise when we have difficult or uncomfortable conversations, when we are open to hearing perspectives which are different from our own and we find the courage and humility to listen and understand

We rise when we extend a hand, an invitation, a welcome to another and we reflect holy light

We rise when we celebrate the LGBTQI plus community, the incredible diversity, the love, joy and blessings that you bring to enrich all of us

We rise when every single one of us is a mirror for the holiness within

those we encounter, and we shine our light into the world and celebrate,
Jewish stars shining bright and creating the world as we dream it can be

Shabbat Shalom

