

Shabbat Korach - June 27, 2008 – 25 Sivan 5768 (Pride Shabbat 2008)
Congregation Or Chadash, Chicago, Illinois
Rabbi Larry Edwards

LEADERS & DANCERS

As we take note of Emma Goldman's (1869-1940) birthday, we recall her famous statement: "If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution." But, just to show how hard it is to know for sure who said what, or what was actually said, Alix Kates Shulman points out that

Perhaps she said, "If I can't dance I don't want to be *part* of your revolution," as my purple T-shirt claims under a picture of Emma looking demure in a wide-brimmed hat. Or was it rather, "If I can't dance *to it, it's not my* revolution," as the quote appears in a 1983 "non-sexist yet traditional" Passover Haggadah?

In fact, though the sentiment is indeed Emma Goldman's, one she frequently pronounced and acted upon, she wrote none of the above, notwithstanding that each of these versions and more has been attributed to her on buttons, posters, banners, T-shirts, bumper stickers, and in books and articles, for nearly twenty years. Here, rather, is what she did say, in her 1931 autobiography *Living My Life*:

At the dances I was one of the most untiring and gayest. One evening a cousin of Sasha [Alexander Berkman], a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway. It was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the anarchist movement. My frivolity would only hurt the Cause.¹

Someone (I'm not sure who) once said (something like): "A leader is one who can get people to dance to a tune that they do not yet hear."

Yet, there are true leaders, and there are false leaders.

Last week Howard (let's put him in the "true leader" category) told us about the episode of the spies who were sent to scout the Land, and whose fearful report resulted in 40 years of wandering in order to ready the next generation to enter the Land. The ten who spoke with trepidation spoke honestly about what they saw, but they saw only with their eyes. Caleb and Joshua, the two who spoke with confidence, spoke not only about the Land – which all agreed was flowing with milk and honey – but also spoke through the eyes of faith, faith that believed God's promise and the promise abiding in the people.

¹ **DANCES WITH FEMINISTS** by Alix Kates Shulman
[Published in *Women's Review of Books*, Vol. IX, no. 3, December 1991.]

The end of last week's *parsha* brought us the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, the fringes which are to be placed on the four corners of our garments. We are to look at them, and be reminded of God's commandments. We look at them, but we are not to follow only after our eyes and our hearts. Presumably that means that we are not to live our lives solely according to the glitter of immediate desire and short-term gratification, but to live mindfully, training our sights on our obligations.

The scouts were tribal leaders, leaders of the people, but only two out of twelve had the courage to see through the eyes of trust and hopeful expectation. This week we meet another kind of leader. Korach instigates a revolt against the authority of Moses. He claims to speak on behalf of the people as a whole: "Are not all the people holy?" But tradition reads Korach through a hermeneutic of suspicion: he speaks in the name of the people, but craves power for himself.

We have encountered at least three models of leadership in two weeks: leaders who see only with their eyes and speak truthfully of what they see, yet are unable to see beyond what is immediately apparent. Joshua and Caleb were able to see beyond the surface of things because they understood that history is made by seeing beyond the superficial and understanding and influencing the direction of events. The third model is that represented by Korach: the leader who sounds like he is speaking the truth, but whose truth is only a thin cover for personal ambition, a demagogue who craves wealth and power for himself and his immediate associates.

(In a way, the entire Book of Numbers could be read as a kind of treatise on leadership, for we also reach here the culminating moments in the careers of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. A couple of weeks ago, Dave Morck discussed Moses' prayer for the healing of his sister, a gesture that required the putting aside of any jealousy or lurking anger. This too is a quality of great leadership.)

Who can get people to dance to a tune that they do not yet hear? What music could not yet be heard back in 1975?

Those who created this congregation could not have known, 33 years ago, just where any of this would go, but they saw, through something like eyes of faith, that the Torah must be large enough to speak to and include all Jews.

There was no way to spy out the future clearly back then. Who could have predicted corporate sponsors for Pride, LGBT rabbis, same-sex marriage in Massachusetts and California (bi-coastal same-sex marriage), or Pride parades in Jerusalem?

Of the latter, Ha'aretz reported that this year's parade passed without incident. About 3000 showed up. There had been protests from the ultra-Orthodox, but milder this year – they realized, perhaps, that they were adding to the parade's publicity. The Mayor of Jerusalem is still a narrow-minded spokesperson for one segment of Jerusalem's extremely diverse population. A suit was filed by the Jerusalem municipality to ban the

parade, saying it was a "provocation that harms the delicate texture that exists in Jerusalem."

The organizers of the parade responded that "all the parties in Jerusalem, including the police and the representatives of the ultra-Orthodox, have found ways to work together, so as to spare the city needless hate. The parade will be conducted quietly and with pride." The Supreme Court responded swiftly and dismissed the suit.

Our friends at [Jerusalem Open House](#) came up with a lovely slogan for this year:

"*Ahavat Chinam*" (Infinite Love) - the seventh Jerusalem March for Pride and Tolerance.

JOH has steadily expanded the vision of the parade. It is publicized not only as a Gay Pride parade, but as an event that seeks to embrace the broadest possible understanding of what Jerusalem should represent to the world. The announcement on the website proclaims:

Jerusalemites have known for thousands of years how important it is to love thy neighbour as thyself. The respect for people's beliefs and lifestyles, however different from yours, are the very spirit of this Holy City. For Pride, and with Infinite Love, we march every year.

On Thursday, June 26th, the Jerusalem March for pride and tolerance will be held, with the thousands of friends and members of the LGBTQ community in Jerusalem, and all those who support democracy, equality, and the freedom to love.

Ahavat hinam, which they translate as "infinite love," is a clever and profound slogan. It riffs on the Talmudic phrase *Sinat hinam* – groundless hatred – the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem. This time around, JOH is calling on the people of Jerusalem, and on all of us who love Jerusalem, to consider what a future might look like if people were motivated by "infinite love," "groundless love," love that is just love for its own sake.

Newspapers reported yesterday that the march proceeded from Gan Ha'atzmaut (Independence Park) in Jerusalem, through King David Street, and ended with a big rally at Gan Hapa'amon (Liberty Bell Park).

Far fewer police were on duty this year than last, and far fewer protesters were in evidence.

But the issues, as we well know, are far from settled. History does not move in a simple direct line. Neither does our understanding of Torah.

The *tzitzit* that remind us of God's commandments are both tangled up and individually separate, knotty and flexible. They are an interesting and complicated symbol of Torah. We look at them, and we wrap ourselves in them; we hold them tightly and let them go. So too, a phrase like *ahavat hinam* reminds us of the broad vision of a Torah that makes room for all, that embraces us with open arms.

Jerusalem Open House, like Or Chadash, is blessed with leaders who are not in it for themselves, but have dedicated themselves to that broad, inclusive vision. There is much still to do, but this is a weekend to look back, and ahead, with pride, with expectation, and with some amazement, to listen for the music that we do not yet hear. When it comes to *ahavat hinam* – groundless love – no one will be left out.

And at *this* revolution, everyone is invited to dance!