The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: Celebrating 50 Years in Pursuit of Social Justice!



Text Study Extension: LGBT Rights – The New Frontier of Civil Rights

The new frontier of the civil rights battle is the struggle for equality for the LGBT community. The following extension of the "Civil Rights and the Jewish Tradition" text study provides an opportunity to highlight this issue with audiences, such as teens and young adults, interested in connecting the work they are currently doing to secure equal rights with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Civil Rights Today: The LGBT Community

From ensuring the right to vote for all citizens to ending racial profiling, the Reform Movement fights for equality for all individuals and communities. Today, the struggle for LGBT equality is at the forefront of efforts to secure civil rights. Discrimination against LGBT individuals is still condoned—and even encoded into local and federal laws—in a range of areas, from employment to marriage, from immigration to adoption.

<u>Introduce the Text Study by Discussing the Following Questions:</u>

- How do you define a "civil right"?
- Considering your definition, why is the struggle for LGBT equality considered the new frontier of the Civil Rights Movement?

Discuss the Following Texts:

Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence. (Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death—and they retain the bloodguilt. (Leviticus 20:13)

And God created humans in God's image, in the image of God, God created them (Genesis 1:27)

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

- What tensions do you notice between these statements?
- How do we, as a community, resolve these tensions?
- What are the implications of a humanity that is created in God's image?
- How does Genesis 1:27 relate to the text from the Babylonian Talmud?

Discuss the Following Quotation:

In his address to the Reform Movement at the Union for Reform Judaism's 47th Biennial, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated: **"It is tragic that so often in history men have used the Bible and religion to justify their prejudices and to crystallize the status quo."**

- Discuss this statement in light of the above passages. Do you agree?
- What are other examples of how Biblical texts are used to justify prejudice and crystallize the status quo?

- Why is this tragedy particularly applicable to the issue of LGBT equality?
- How have you seen Biblical texts used for the opposite purpose—to advance equality, liberty, and change?
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the hero of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Who are the heroes of today's struggle over LGBT equality?

Discuss the Following Reform Jewish Perspective:

"In my view, the Jewish condemnation of homosexuality is the work of human beings – limited, imperfect, fearful of what is different, and, above all, concerned with ensuring tribal survival. In short, I think our ancestors were wrong about a number of things, and homosexuality is one of them. . . In fact, the Jewish values and principles which I regard as eternal, transcendent and divinely ordained do not condemn homosexuality. The Judaism I cherish and affirm teaches love of humanity, respect for the spark of divinity in every person and the human right to live with dignity. The God I worship endorses loving, responsible and committed human relationships, regardless of the sex of the persons involved." (Rabbi Janet Marder, Senior Rabbi at Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, CA and former President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis)

- Is your congregation already actively involved creating a safe and welcoming space for the LGBT community? In what ways?
- Is your congregation or community involved in advocating for equal rights for LGBT individuals?
- Explore some ways in which you and your community could become more actively involved in this important civil rights struggle both communally and legislatively.

