The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.
—Psalm 118

THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY HEVRA OF CONGREGATION B’NAI JESHURUN PRESENTS

The Stonewall Seder

A Ritual Dinner Celebrating GLBT Pride
June 17, 2007

GUEST OF HONOR
Lisa Kron

“Coming out of the closet’ is a metaphor which describes not only my emerging identity as a lesbian, but as a Jew, and most recently as a person who believes in God.”
—Elisa Goldberg

“I grew up being told all these stories about being Jewish. That’s part of my tribal consciousness. But... I realized no one tells our gay stories except for ourselves.”
—Andrew Ramer
The Stonewall Seder: How it came to be.

I had the blessing of being present at the 6th ALEPH Kallah, in Colorado in July of 1995. And during a meeting of the “Gay and Lesbian Mishpocha” group, I met Ray Schnitzler, who gave me a copy of the Berkeley Queer Minyan’s “Queer Pride Seder.” I was very excited by this seder. This was not simply a gay and lesbian centric version of the Passover Haggadah. No, this was the recognition that there was a completely different holiday of liberation that needed to be celebrated by GLBT Jews -- Gay Pride Weekend. A holiday that could draw on Jewish traditions, and at the same time draw on the queer tradition as well.

When I shared the pages of the Queer Pride Seder with the members of the Gay and Lesbian Committee at my synagogue, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun in New York City, everyone felt the same way -- we had to adapt this material and celebrate this holiday in our own community.

B’nai Jeshurun is not a gay and lesbian synagogue. However, even though it is a Conservative synagogue it has held commitment ceremonies for same gender couples since the 1980s. It’s a place where lesbian and gay folk are not denied places of responsibility and honor in the community (in fact we hold many of them). And we wanted to honor that in turn, as well as tell the stories of queer Jews who have been instrumental in the struggle for LGBT civil rights. We felt the liturgy created by the Queer Minyan was a good foundation to build on.

I went to work on a first draft, and presented it to the committee members and the rabbis at BJ. It went through several rounds of revisions. And as one might expect, there was much debate. To this day there are a few things in the text that people still strongly disagree on. But when it was done, we held our first Stonewall Shabbat Seder on June 28, 1996. Rolf Hirschberg, a former patient of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, and a gay German Jewish refugee who had been living on the Upper West Side for more than 60 years was our first Guest of Honor. The event was so moving for so many people that the rabbis suggested we make it an annual dinner, in effect, adding a holiday to our synagogue calendar on the Shabbat evening before Gay Pride Day in New York.

That’s exactly what happened, and over the next six years the text was revised in a few ways. Rituals that didn’t work were discarded. And since the telling of the story includes the ongoing story, the final section was updated each year to reflect new developments in our quest for full freedom. In those following years our Guests of Honor included Joan Nestle, the founder of the lesbian Herstory Archive; Congressman Barney Frank; and filmmaker Sandi DuBowsk, director of Trembling Before G-d. Attendance for the dinner ranged from 90 to 140 people.

As people left the community however, there wasn’t the energy to continue to hold the dinner. The logistics of organizing such a large and complicated event every year was a job no one was willing to take on at that point, so we stopped doing it. But because I had been
inspired by the text that I’d received, I printed up several hundred copies of the last Haggadah and distributed it at conferences of LGBT Jews as well as at the Gay Spirit Culture Summit in 2004.

Between copies that people took from the seders held at BJ, and the copies given out later, other communities began either performing the seder as written (at the Queer Shabbaton in Amsterdam for example) or adapting and rewriting sections and adapting it (as at Cong. Sh’ar Zahav in San Francisco). I am certain other copies of the original Berkeley Queer Minyan inspired others as well, though I have not heard of any.

I was so impressed with how Andrew Ramer and Joss Eldredge of Sh’ar Zahav revised it, that when BJ decided to hold the seder again in 2007, I looked at their text and revised ours to include prayers and reading from their Haggadah. And because the 2007 seder was held under the auspices of the synagogue’s Marriage Equality Hevra, it was revised in other ways to focus on the story of marriage equality.

Now it seems time to share this evolution of the original work by Susie Kisber and Ray Schnitzler with other queer Jews from around the world via the web. I do this in the hope that others will recreate and take this work to a new and different level. In the hope that the seder will become a custom that takes new forms and will spread among our many communities.

How to use this document: Some caveats

This Haggadah was developed specifically for use at B’ni Jeshurun. In early versions the section on the “1990’s Through Today” it referred to some events at our synagogue. This year it was revised to focus on marriage equality in New York as well as around the world. If you want to use this Seder, please change it to suit your needs. You may want to rework the whole historical format entirely. In earlier versions we included longer sections on Harvey Milk. On the horrors of forced castration and shock therapy on men imprisoned at Atascadero. Tell the story as you need to tell it. Feel free. Be creative. After all, it’s our heritage as queer people. Other things in the text you might want to change might include:

The “Q” Word: A Language Issue — Let’s start with the use of the word “queer.” One of our more powerful rituals takes place at the beginning of the dinner: people go around the table individually, introduce themselves and explain the ways in which they are queer — regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Before this is done an explanation of the word “queer,” and its relationship to the word “Jew” is read aloud.

This encourages both reflection and debate among the participants about the ways in which all of us, no matter who we are, keep ourselves separate from community and from God. And while there are people who are unhappy with the use of the word, most people feel a greater sense of wholeness because of this discussion. I encourage you to try it out.
I will never forget the year I sat at a table with a nationally known figure who with humility and vulnerability revealed something of himself while we did this go round. It was such a moving moment there was a moment of silence at the table to take it in and share the pain that was expressed — and somewhat healed — in that moment. There is great power to this ritual if approached with an open heart, even though it can make people nervous it builds spiritual intimacy. However, if it doesn’t work for you or your community, try something else.

**How Much Do We Read?** — Yes, it’s a long text. And like another Seder in our tradition, each time we read it, we have chosen to read some parts and leave others out. For example, in an earlier version we never read the section entitled “Yom Kippur Morning at Kehilla Community Synagogue.” But we never took it out because it was powerful, and people read it on their own. You could say we included readings like this for educational purposes, if you will. And as before, add what you like, take out what you like. Read what you like, skip what you like (or don’t like!)

**Intellectual Property** — I have always read a section from Allen Ginsberg’s “Footnote to Howl” at the seder. Some years we have read excerpts from poems by Adrienne Rich and from a story by Leslea Newman. These were all used without permission. They were printed in the Haggadah in those years without permission. I acknowledge this, and the responsibility is mine alone. If you feel uncomfortable appropriating these texts in this way, don’t use them. Similarly, some art work was scanned from rights free sources, some was purchased, and some, well… as I say, some was used without permission and the responsibility is mine. By the way, the section from Ginsberg was also read in 2007, but not printed in the text. Here’s why…

**Some Other Words People Don’t Like** — Speaking of Allen Ginsberg, there are some words in his poem, the “Footnote to Howl”, that make some people very upset. Odd, isn’t it? So at B’nai Jeshurun, I have been the one to read this poem aloud. As with the word “Queer” there are words that make people uncomfortable. For the most part, I believe to reach a greater wholeness it’s important that we don’t cut these words out of our experience. This may be something you feel differently about. If so, don’t read it, cut it out entirely. For me, this poem speaks to the heart of the split between sexuality and spirituality that this ritual is designed to help heal, and so is extremely important.

**The Candle Lighting** — For many years there was no blessing on lighting the candles. That’s simply because the dinner has always started after Kabbalat Shabbat services -- and the candles were lit before we entered the dining hall. So we “meditated” on the light. If you do this in a private home as part of a Shabbat dinner, clearly you can do the blessings if you light the candles at the right time. In 2007, since we did the seder on a Saturday night, we lit the candles and said the blessing for this new Hag.
The Seder Plate — You may wish to change what’s on your plate. Add or delete. Change the text. If it isn’t already clear, you are free to use this service in any way that makes sense to you. It’s not like we’re the Rabbinic Assembly after all.

The Hebrew & Transliteration — You’ll note the Hebrew has not been word processed into this document -- everything is scanned from different sources. It’s messy. It’s inconsistent. It’s not the best way to do it. I hope you can do better so that in a few years I’ll be holding something your community has put together that looks and reads better than what you’re holding.

A last word

I have been very blessed to have been a part of the chain of creation. This liturgy is built on the work of many who came before me. It would not exist without them. We are all in their debt.

Mark Horn
January 2008
New York City
Song: Hineh Ma Tov

Hineh mah tov umah na’im, shevet ahim gam yahad
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity.

Lighting the holiday candles

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha’olam
asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel yom ga’avah.

Blessed is the One, Source of Light, sovereign of all worlds, who has made us holy with mitzvot, and commanded us to kindle the flames of our day of pride.

Reader:

As we bathe in the light of these candles, we remember all the candles we’ve lit as Jews and as LGBT people. Shabbat candles. Yahrtzeit candles. Candles at AIDS vigils. And at Take Back the Night Marches. As we share in the light of these candles, we rededicate the flame each of us carries within, that small reflection of the Creator’s light that is ours to use as a beacon in our work of tikkun olam. We rededicate this small spark that we can use as a match to give light to the hopes and dreams of all people.

Together we read:

Blessed is the match.
Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop beating for honor’s sake.
—Hannah Senesh, Yugoslavia, May 1944
Opening Chant of Presence and Commitment to work of Tikkun Olam

Together we read in English and then sing in Hebrew:

I hereby accept the obligation of fulfilling my Creator’s mitzvah in the Torah:
Love your neighbor as yourself.

Hareini m’kabeil (m’kabelet) alei mitzvath haborei v’ahavta l’rei’akha kamokha

Kavannah — Setting our intention

Tonight we gather to fulfill a new mitzvah by making sacred the celebration of a Jewish LGBT Pride Seder. We are not only, as Jews, celebrating pride in being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or in some other way different. Rather we are specifically celebrating our pride in being both Jewish and LGBT people. That includes looking at our Jewish heritage through the lens of our love, and at our heritage as LGBT people through our spiritual lens. It means remembering those who wore pink triangles in the death camps, and the Jews at the Stonewall Inn. And it means honoring the memory of those who fought for our full equality before the law for our relationships, and for our love. It means calling forth the words and wisdom of the ancestors and elders of our community, often ignored or forgotten by the wider world. Tonight we honor our whole heritage, by sharing stories of our predecessors, stories of our own lives, and the stories we have yet to live.

Introducing our whole selves

In order to fully observe this holiday, we seek to bring our whole selves before each other and before God. Of course, many of us here tonight were taught we couldn’t do this — that there was a part of who we are that is unacceptable. Queer.

So for just a moment, let’s look at that label — queer. There have been many words used historically to describe those who express their love physically with same-gender partners. “Homosexual” is a clinical word coined in the 19th century and focuses only on sexual behavior. In use as slang since the 1920’s, “gay” was adopted by the activists of the 60’s to communicate that something over and above the choice of sex partner was important. “Lesbian” is a reference to the island Lesbos, home of the ancient Greek poet Sappho, a woman who loved women. And of course there are many demeaning epithets used even today in public discourse.
In recent years, some members of our community have tried to reclaim one of these epithets, “queer,” for a number of reasons — among them pride in difference rather than a desire to assimilate; the desire to include both women, men and the transgendered with one word. Just as there were those in the 60s who didn’t like the word gay, and preferred what they felt was the more dignified word homosexual, today there are those who don’t like the word queer, remembering it as a hurtful taunt and preferring the more widely accepted word gay.

This is not unlike the history of the word “Jew,” which was considered an epithet by the Jewish community in the 19th century. At that time the “polite” words were Hebrew or Israelite. The poem, “I am a Jew...” was one of the steps toward reclaiming that word.

So for a few minutes, we’d like to explore the ways in which society at large defines each and every one of us as queer, and in the hope that each of us can use this in our search for connection with the Divine and with each other. What do you believe you have to leave out about yourself to be acceptable to your community, and to God? And so, as a way of focusing our individual and community intent, please take a moment for each of you at your table, to introduce yourself by name, and then in one sentence — tell us in what way you are queer (you don’t have to be gay or lesbian to be queer — it can mean any way you see yourself as different or “other”). Or if you prefer, just tell everyone in one sentence why you came this evening.

Now that we have shared what we believe has kept us separate, let us celebrate that difference, and bless it, recognizing it as one color in the rainbow of creation.
Blessing for the full Rainbow of Our Community

It is a custom of many families before the Kiddush at the Shabbat Seder to offer a blessing for the children. Tonight we’d like to offer a blessing for everyone here tonight.

You’ll notice that on the Seder plate there is a selection of rainbow ribbons.

• Please take one length of ribbon.
• Choose a neighbor at your table to share your blessing with.
• Wrap one end of the ribbon around your right forefinger. Leave a long tail for your neighbor to hold.
• Stand and face your neighbor and connect by each of you taking hold of the tail end of the other’s ribbon. Each of you will have a chance to bless the other.

Leader:

Who can look directly into the light? We can only behold a small portion — a fragment of the light. And when that One Light is fragmented, the colors of the rainbow result. So let us give thanks for all the colors that are ours. For those colors we love, and those with which we are not so comfortable, within ourselves and others. All of them are a part of the One Light we are all bathed in, the One Light that is the fountain of our life.

Each Partner Blesses The Other in Turn:

May God give you the blessings of the light of our ancestors, and may the Holy One help you find the courage to bring all the colors of your own light out into the world.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha’olam m’shaneh ha-b’ri-ot
Blessed is the One, our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has made all creatures different.

All together:

Ki imkha m’kor ha-yim b’or-kha nir-eh or
With You is the fountain of life, in Your light we are bathed in light.
Consciousness and Custom

Now that we have revealed something of ourselves to each other, and shared the blessing of our light, let us sanctify this gathering, and the fact that we are a community of free people, with our Kiddush. And unlike Shabbat, when the custom is to cover the challah during the blessing over the wine, tonight, because we reveal ourselves without shame or embarrassment, without comparison or criticism, we leave the challah uncovered.

Kiddush

N’vareykh eyn hachayim
Matzimchat p’ri hagafen
Unkadeysh et yom tov
Ba’arigat p’tiley chayeynu
L’tokh masekhet hadorot

Let us bless the Source of Life that ripens fruit on the vine, as we hallow this, our new holiday, weaving new threads into the tapestry of tradition.

Shehechiyanu

Because we are grateful to be alive at this moment, at a time when it is possible, if not yet widespread, to be celebrating a LGBT Pride Seder, an amazing time when the Governor of this State has introduced a bill to give full marriage rights to same-sex couples, please join in singing Shehechiyanu.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha’olam shehechiyanu v’key’manu v’higiyanu, laz’man hazeh.

Blessed is the One, Soul of All Creation, who has breathed life into us, who has provided us with the experiences that have made us who we are, and who has enabled us to reach this time in our lives.
Washing

Leader reads:

Water flows.
And with its flow we purify our hearts
as we wash ourselves clean of old hurts and habits,
clean of all the hindrances to being
clearly here, present in this moment.
The water of this moment flows. We cannot hold it.
We can only be open to the sacred flow that surrounds us always.

Motzi

Leader:

Tonight, before we say the traditional blessing over the bread, we stop and note again that the bread has remained uncovered as we said our blessing over the wine. We do this as a reminder to ourselves not to hide any part of our light, any part of who we are — that we are all, every one of us, every part of us, holy — and there is no shame in this.

Blessing over the bread

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam ha-motzi lekhem min ha-aretz.
ברוך אתה ה' אדון הגרים מלך העולם המזיא לך מארץ.

Blessed is the One, our God, Source of Creation who brings forth bread from the earth.
A Prayer for the End of Hiding

Together we read:

Holy One, we stand before you aware of the loss of integrity we suffer due to our fears of being cast out of the wider society. We often feel forced into a dishonest presentation of ourselves, to ourselves and others. That part of our soul which is called queer, that feels we must pretend to be something that we are not; and that part of our soul which is Jewish, yet feels we must alienate ourselves from our spirituality, our tradition and community to win wider acceptance. In our fear, we allow our identity and integrity to be fractured. Holy One, we ask that our hiding draw to an end, that we no longer feel we have to pretend, to promise falsely, to renounce ourselves, and that our fullest creative expression as Jews and as LGBT people be among the blessings You bestow upon us.

The Seder Symbols

On this night, because we are celebrating the ongoing process of our still to be fully realized liberation, this Seder is different from — and yet reminiscent of — other Seders in our tradition. We will hear echoes from the weekly Shabbat Seder as well as the Passover and Tu B’Shevat Seders. However, as we follow our community’s passage from oppression, shame and denigration to liberation, pride and celebration, the order of this Seder will necessarily be different. We are in the midst of forging our own place within the tradition of our ancestors.

On every table is a Seder plate. The foods and objects you see on this plate represent both the hardships and the joys of LGBT Jewish life. They include:

Exotic Fruit – Kumquats

Sometimes we are called the “fruit” people. And while it is meant as an insult, tonight we take it as a blessing in disguise. A recognition of the breadth of God’s creation. And we take it as an opportunity to open up to the sweet, and the tart, in all of us.

“People talk about Bible miracles because there are no miracles in their lives. Cease to gnaw that crust. There is ripe fruit over your head.”

—Thoreau
Together we read:

Tonight we honor strange fruit that is ripe with the possibility of miracles.
Tonight we recognize there is more than just one way to be fruitful and multiply.
Tonight, before we taste, we hesitate and remember the fear and hostility many feel when faced with something they think is new, strange, different — forbidden.
Tonight we open to the miracle, and begin to taste the sweet fruits born of the seeds of liberation planted by our LGBT forebears.

*Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam boray p’ri ha-eytz.*

We thank the One, Creator of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the tree.

The Pink Triangle

Under the Nazis, homosexuals wore a pink triangle in the work camps, as Jews wore the yellow star. Today, gay men and lesbians wear this is a symbol of our commitment to justice for all. Rabbi Alexander Schindler has said: “A generation ago, many in this room would have been wearing the pink triangle as a badge of shame and a mark of death. Today, we wear it as a badge of honor and resistance and identity.”

Together we read:

Blessed are those who have been marked, in all times and all places.
May they always be remembered, through us and our lives.
Bricks & Stones

We remember the bricks of resistance thrown at the police the night of the Stonewall riot. We meditate on the lines from Psalm 118: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and we ask what stones have we ourselves rejected. We remember that great Stone Wall, the Western Wall of the Temple, which has stood throughout centuries of triumph and tears. And we ask ourselves: what walls must we build anew, what walls must we tear down?

Together we read:

In Egypt we made bricks as slaves. At Stonewall we used bricks to free ourselves. Blessed in the spirit of freedom and blessed is the One who moves us to free ourselves. Blessed are the bricks and stones, of Earth and from Earth, given voice by our actions.

Colored Ribbons

A symbol of the full spectrum of our Jewish community, from Orthodox to Reconstructionist, from Ethiopian Jews to Burmese Jews. A reminder of the red and pink ribbons we wear in the hopes of finding cures for AIDS and breast cancer. They evoke visions of the Names Project quilt, the tzitzit we wear, and the covenant that God made with Noah. They are all the colors of our inner lives, the common threads that bind us all together. Lastly they are a celebration of the gay love of flash and color.

Together we read:

Baruch atah Adonai elohu melech haolam, zokair ha-brit veneman brito vekayam bemaamaro.

Blessed are You, The Miraculous One, Sovereign of All Time and Space, who remembers the covenant, is faithful to and keeps the covenant.
The Bundle of Sticks: The Faggot

To remind us of the men, bound together and burned at the stake for their love, or beaten and tied to a fence to die, like Matthew Shephard — and to remind us of the burning of women, called witches, because they chose to live their lives outside the realm of the patriarchy.

Together we read:

Cursed is the flame that destroys, the flame that kills. May it be snuffed out forever.
And blessed are all of our sisters and brothers who were martyred in years past.
Holy One, remember their sacrifices, and help us bring an end to hate and oppression of every kind.

Two Challot

The uncovered challot remind us of the sacred sensuality of our own bodies; that the physical world, which includes our bodies, is holy and nothing to be ashamed of. We acknowledge the deep spiritual nourishment of physical contact.

Two Readings of Sacred Sensuality:
A poem by Miriam Senturia
An excerpt from A Footnote to Howl, by Allen Ginsberg
The Broken Ring

A reminder that the relationship between the Jewish people and God has been spoken of as a marriage — and that marriage is reaffirmed every morning as Jews sing the words of the Prophet Hosea while putting on tefillin:

And I betroth you to me everlastingly,
And I betroth you to me with righteousness and justice,
And I betroth you to me with loving and compassion,
And you shall know The One

Yet LGBT Jews have been in exile from this Divine marriage, just as our deepest loving relationships with our partners have been condemned. Thus, the ring on this table’s broken in recognition that these sacred relationships — relationships that struggled without the support of families, synagogues, and the state, which has refused to call these relationships what they truly are, marriage — by their exclusion from the full community of our people, keeps the Jewish people, and all people, from being a whole/holy community. But even though this ring is broken, our hearts and our devotion remain whole as we commit ourselves tikkun olam, the repair of creation:

Together we sing:


An Empty Cup

We recall those who did not live to see this moment, and those who are unable to celebrate openly their love and connection to God. We are angry at Jewish institutions that deny the spiritual equality of LGBT Jews. We reflect that our liberation is still incomplete — and know that we are part of a chain of generations who, while we will not complete the work, are still obligated to continue it, and thus help fill the cup, for the generations to come.

Together we read:

Blessed is the empty cup, full of potential, of possibilities. Blessed is the cup waiting to be filled. Blessed is the cup of unfolding. And blessed is the Source of Life, who creates us all in Its image, full of love, strength, wisdom and dreams.
Our Four Questions

Why are we different from all other people?

We are different from all other people because our tribe is made up of those from every tribe, our people are found among all the peoples of the world. We have been born into every family, every nation, every faith, at every time and on every part of the planet. This is a clue left by the Creator of what all people share.

What is our sacred role?

Because we come from all other peoples, we are bridge-builders and connectors; we are ambassadors and weavers between worlds. Because we live our lives in many different ways, between genders and sexes and varied ways of loving, we stand at the doorway of Possibility, and it is from this that we derive our sacred role as holy people dedicated to truth and integrity, even in the face of death.

How are we the same as all other people?

We bleed as all people bleed, and we love and laugh and cry and sing, as do all human beings. We want what everyone wants: peace and prosperity, freedom and equality. We want families and communities and we want to be part of the healing of this world. Before we are transgendered, bisexual, intersexed, lesbian, gay, we are human. Just as the Source of Life is beyond gender, the human soul too is genderless, is all genders. And this we share with everyone in the world.

Where do we come from and what is our story?

This is why we are gathered here tonight around this festive table, to tell parts of the story of our people. It is an ancient story, a long one. We cannot tell it all, cannot name all the names of the people who led us out of oppression and into freedom. But for each tale we tell, there are others that are forgotten. And for each name that we remember to name, other names call out from the past. May all who are hungry for this story come and listen. Tonight, we tell the tale of our liberation.
Telling our Stories...

The Jews are a people of stories. More than half of the Torah is story — the story of our people, Jewish people. But because we are also queer people, we search for hints of our queer stories in the tales of Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan. But we search in vain. We are left out. Unseen. Unchosen.

As the novelist of African diaspora, Andrea Hairston, once wrote, “if no one tells your story, you die twice.” So tonight we choose life, by honoring the stories of Jews throughout the ages who were queer in one way or another. We choose life with a new mitzvah — telling the stories that have been lost, censored or silenced.

Standing at Sinai — The Ongoing Revelation
(As recorded by Andrew Ramer)

“The rabbis tell us that every Jew was standing at Mount Sinai when God spoke, that all of us down through time partook of that great revelation.

And here is a verse of my Torah. It is a small verse. For when I stood at Sinai I heard God call out, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. Share your bed, your heart, your life with him, that your days may be long on the face of the earth.’ But no one wrote those words down when I heard them, all those years ago.

And then God said, ‘There are as many kinds of love in My world as there are trees in My forests and fish in My seas. There is parent love, and child love, friend love, the love of a woman for a man, and of a man for a man, the love of a woman for a woman. And there is love of country, love of people, love of books, love of making things. And finally, there is the love of a human heart for Me, which is the seed of all the other different kinds of loving.’ But I did not see anyone else write those words down either. So now I write them down. Now I write down what I heard at Sinai. I write them down for you and I write them down for me. I write them for your children also, who may not have heard. I write them down for those who come after me.”

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Guest of Honor: Lisa Kron

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Dinner
THE FIRST CUP: THE PAST

This cup is for the past, which is always with us. The water in this cup is clear, to remind us of our long historical invisibility. We drink tonight to those who were left out of the stories of our people. And we drink to those who labored to restore their memories.

Together we read:

Nevarekh et Ein ha khayim
Yotzer et ha olam
Boreit mayim chayim

Let us bless the Wellspring of Life
Creator of the Universe
Who made the living waters.

The Beginnings of A Modern Movement

In May 1897, the world’s first homosexual rights organization was formed in Berlin with the goal of repealing the laws that criminalized homosexuality in Germany. One co-founder was Magnus Hirschfeld, a prominent Jewish doctor. By 1912, more than 3000 doctors had joined in urging the repeal of these laws.

Hirschfeld’s Institute of Sexual Science offered marriage counseling, STD testing and treatment, family planning and sex education programs. The Institute library had an unparalleled collection of biological, sociological and ethnological materials.

In 1920, Hirschfeld was brutally assaulted by anti-Semites in Munich. A Nazi commentator gleefully noted: “It is not without charm to know that...Hirschfeld was so beaten that his eloquent mouth could never again be kissed by one of his disciples.” As the Nazis gained influence, their position on Hirschfeld’s organization was expressed in no uncertain terms: “Anyone who even thinks of homosexual love is our enemy.”

On May 7, 1933, trucks filled with storm troopers drove up to the Institute. A brass band played while the Institute was looted. More than 12,000 books were burned in a public ceremony.

The official SS newspaper announced that there were two million German homosexuals and called
for their internment. The actual number of those arrested, while disputed, seems to be less than 100,000. In the camps, just as the Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, homosexuals were forced to wear a pink triangle and endured punishments that did not end in 1945. Because after the war, homosexuality remained a crime in both East and West Germany as well as in Britain, the U.S., and USSR. Thus, the homosexual inmates of the camps were not considered to have been unjustly imprisoned — so they remained imprisoned and were uncompensated for their suffering.

Together we sing:

**Esa Einai** (I Will Lift Up My Eyes)

*E-sa ei-nai el he-ha-rim*
*Me-ayin me-ayin yavo ezri*
*Ez-ri me-im Adonai*
*o-sei sha-mayim va-aretz*

*I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help.*
*My help comes from Adonai, who made the heavens and the earth.*

**THE SECOND CUP: THE UPRISING**

This cup is for those who fought back — the stirring of the unchosen. The water in this cup is strong, strong enough to carve great canyons from solid rock. The water of this cup gave our people the courage to rise up at Stonewall and Compton’s Cafeteria. We drink this cup to remember them and be inspired by them. As we drink in this cup we take in its power.

Together we read:

**Nevarekh et Ein ha khayim**
**Yotzer et ha olam**
**Boreit mayim chayim**

*Let us bless the Wellspring of Life*  
*Creator of the Universe*  
*Who made the living waters.*
An Account of Stonewall

Judy Garland was buried on Friday, June 27th, 1969. That night, the energy on the street in the Village was electric. And on that night, the New York City police set out to raid a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, on the pretext they were just enforcing the New York State law that made it illegal to serve alcohol to known homosexuals. The raid did not go as planned. The patrons of the Stonewall not only occupied ground outside of mainstream American culture, but gay society itself: transvestites, effeminate men, butch women, runaways, hustlers.

These were the people the police felt they could beat with impunity. As they were led to the waiting police wagons a crowd gathered and began to boo the cops. How the riot really started depends on who you talk to, but the crucial part is this: bottles, beer cans and rocks began sailing out of the crowd, aimed at the police. The onslaught was so ferocious that the cops took shelter in the bar and called for help.

Few knew it then, but it was the start of a new chapter in the modern movement for human rights. The very word Stonewall has become a part of the LGBT vocabulary and means, quite simply, uprising. The uprising at Stonewall was a message to the world that queers fight back. To quote a poster plastered on the boarded up bar later that week: “Think faggots are revolting? You bet we are!”

The 1970s—Decade of Ferment

The Stonewall riots changed the consciousness of gay and lesbian people in America. But almost from the very start there was a split in this new movement between those who celebrated the outsider status of queerness and those who were more assimilationist. There were those who celebrated sexuality unbound by tradition and those who from the very start were demanding same-sex marriage. Yes, in 1971, the Gay Activists Alliance of New York took on marriage.

That summer, Herman Katz, the City Clerk of New York, learned that a clergyman was performing “holy unions” for same-sex couples at a Manhattan church. In an interview with The New York Post, Katz made unpleasant remarks about gay people and threatened criminal prosecution of the clergyman.
A few weeks later, about a dozen GAA members, led by Marc Rubin and Pete Fisher, walked into Katz’s office with a coffee wagon and a large wedding cake. It was topped by a male couple and a female couple. Members schmoozed with people waiting in line for licenses and gave them printed invitations for a gay wedding reception, about to be held in the City Clerk’s office.

Once inside the office, GAA member Arthur Evans took over the switchboard and started answering the telephone. He advised the callers that the City Clerk’s office was only issuing same-sex marriage licenses that day, telling them that if they weren’t gay or lesbian, they couldn’t get married.

The police eventually arrived with guns and clubs. GAA was ordered to leave, cake and all. But while the GAA members left, they didn’t lose. GAA called this kind of action a “zap:” nonviolent, but militant, face-to-face confrontations with homophobes in positions of authority. GAA zaps often used humor and a theatrical sensibility to get wider attention while building up gay morale and identity. And they worked.

That zap of the City Clerk also delivered a longer-term payoff. One local politician, David Dinkins, heard of it and loved it. When he was elected Mayor of New York City, with strong support from gay and lesbian voters, Mayor Dinkins signed an executive order enabling same-sex couples to register as unmarried “domestic partners” with the City Clerk’s office. His order enabled gays and lesbians to enjoy a few of the benefits that straight people take for granted. The GAA zap was the first step in the long road to winning full marriage equality, a victory we have yet to see realized.

[Adapted from an essay by Arthur Evans]
THE THIRD CUP: THE PLAGUE

This is the third cup. This cup is for those who fell, and for those who tended the sick in our years of plague. Life began in water, and this cup contains the gift of life. We take this water into our own bodies to remember and honor and become them, to preserve and perpetuate their names and their journeys.

Together we read:

Nevarekh et Ein ha khayim
Yotzer et ha olam
Boreit mayim chayim

Let us bless the Wellspring of Life
Creator of the Universe
Who made the living waters.

“The dead should not be excluded from any celebration.”

—Tony Kushner, The Dybbuk

In July of 1981, the New York Times noted that 12 gay men in the San Francisco area had all died of a mysterious illness, and that others were experiencing symptoms doctors couldn’t explain. Within months people were calling it GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency).

In those first few months, a man named Larry Kramer emerged as a prophet of the gay community. He spoke out. And founded Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC). And when he felt GMHC wasn’t doing enough to stop the epidemic, he founded ACT UP. And in April of 2007, he helped lead a new generation of activists in founding the Queer Justice League. Like many prophets, his words have often been harsh, they’ve been unwelcome by many who prefer a more conciliatory way. But conciliation is not Larry Kramer’s way, who has said of his role, “I wanted to be Moses, but I could only be Cassandra.” Because even after all he has said and done, he is painfully aware that today more than 925,000 Americans have died, and continue to die of AIDS. And that there are 40 million people worldwide living with HIV today. These are some of his words:
ONE BILLION PEOPLE ARE GOING TO DIE FROM AIDS. Do you, as a member of a community of liberal and caring and thinking people, accept that a plague can be going on and you are doing nothing to stop it?

Where, among you, are the equivalent of the Gentiles who risked their lives in Nazi-occupied Germany and Holland and Denmark and Sweden to save the lives of Jews, not to bury them?

Where, among you, are the students of Tiananmen Square?

Where, among you, are our heroes?

Where, among you, are those who are willing to fight fights when you don’t want to fight fights?

Who, among you, are those who will force yourself to hear?

—Larry Kramer, Reports From the Holocaust

THE FOURTH CUP: THE TIME OF CHANGE

This is the fourth cup. This cup is for those who refused to stand still. Labor organizers, civil rights activists of all races, feminists and queers. Like rain, like streams, like rivers flowing toward the sea, the water of this cup is about change, about movement, about transformation. We take it into ourselves and merge with its fluid creativity, we who are mostly water ourselves.

Together we read:

Nevarekh et Ein ha khayim
Yotzer et ha olam
Boreit mayim chayim

Let us bless the Wellspring of Life
Creator of the Universe
Who made the living waters.
The 1990s through Today

We come, in our story, to the present time. Up to now, the story has been history, even if it is a history that some of us have lived through. Now, the story continues in the present tense. It is our story, happening as we speak. And because we’re closer to it, it is sometimes harder to see clearly. But one thing is clear — this very celebration, this new ritual, is now part of the story.

It’s a story with many strands. Tonight the story we focus on is the struggle for marriage equality. It’s a story that still surprises us in that we’ve come so far so fast. And it’s a story that divides us in that it scares many by the opposition it raises.

It’s a story that began in unexpected places like Georgia. In 1991 Robin Shahar married Francine Greenfield in a ceremony led by Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum of New York’s Congregation Beth Simchat Torah. As a result, Shahar lost her job as a staff attorney at Georgia’s Dept. of Law. The problem was that Shahar had married — in the eyes of her religion, not the law — another woman.

Later that year Shahar filed a lawsuit claiming Georgia Attorney General Michael Bowers had violated her right to exercise her religion, her right to intimate and expressive association, her right to equal protection on the basis of sexual orientation, and her right to due process.

In court, Attorney General Bowers contended that the couple had flaunted their homosexuality by engaging in a commitment ceremony, by changing their names, by living together, and by holding insurance jointly. He viewed this conduct as “activist.” Bowers asserted that employing Shahar would hurt the department’s credibility, making it harder to deny same-sex marriage licenses or to enforce sodomy statutes, even though Shahar had not sought to marry Greenfield legally, nor did she agitate for the legalization of same sex marriage. The court decided in favor of Bowers.

This year, Shahar celebrated her 15th anniversary with Greenfield. She works as an attorney for the city of Atlanta. Bowers, who sought to run for Governor as a favorite of the so-called Moral Majority, withdrew from the race when his adulterous relationship with a colleague was exposed.

[sourced from Covering, by Kenji Yoshino]
Even though the LGBT movement was still fighting for simple anti-discrimination laws, suddenly marriage became a hot issue. Lots of couples wanted marriage rights and were willing to fight for it in the courts. Gay rights organizations, taking a conservative strategy, actually advised against it, worrying it was too much, too soon. But couples in long-term relationships, no longer willing to accept second-class status for their love went to court anyway. And in 1996, the Supreme Court in Hawaii said same-sex couples had the right to marry. The decision was a lightening rod igniting a national debate and giving the right a new cause: the Defense of Marriage Act.

Cynical lawmakers and the so-called religious right used the Defense of Marriage Act as a wedge to create fear and divide their opponents. They claimed that churches would be forced to marry same-sex couples, when the question was, and is, solely civil marriage rights. Nevertheless, very few legislators had the courage to stand up against it — the Republican Congress passed it, and President Clinton signed it into law.

The battle was joined, and there is no backing down now. Today, there continue to be those in the LGBT community who warn that this fight only strengthens those who would deny us all rights. And it is true that in the years since the Hawaii decision 18 states have passed anti gay marriage amendments to their constitutions. This means that state courts cannot rule that marriage discrimination is unconstitutional because the right to discriminate has been written into their constitutional law. These bans cannot be undone by a vote of the people in favor of marriage equality or a policy change by the legislature. Only the U.S. Supreme Court could strike down these bans. There is no question there have been losses. But there have been victories as well. Victories that will continue because we believe in the power of love.

In Massachusetts today marriage equality is a reality, though opponents still seek to overturn the law. Just across the state line, the Connecticut Supreme Court is facing the question of whether their civil union law is discriminatory. They need only consider what the Massachusetts Supreme Court said so eloquently “the dissimilitude between the terms “civil marriage” and “civil union” is not innocuous; it is a considered choice of language that reflects a demonstrable assigning of same-sex, largely homosexual, couples to second-class status”; and also that “The history of our nation has demonstrated that separate is seldom, if ever, equal.” The three other states that offer civil union, Vermont, New Hampshire and New Jersey are watching closely. We believe in the power of love.

Around the world, full marriage equality is recognized in six countries, some of which may surprise you. The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, South Africa and Spain. The Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said that the dry language of the new law masks “an immense change in the lives of thousands of citizens. We are not legislating for remote, unknown people. We are ex-
panding opportunities for the happiness of our neighbors, our work colleagues, our friends, our relatives.” Yes, even in Spain and South Africa, they believe in the power of love.

Meanwhile, right here at home, echoing the 1971 GAA Zap, courageous civil servants like Mayor Jason West in New Paltz and Mayor Gavin Newsom in San Francisco added civil disobedience to their resumes as they officiated in marriage ceremonies for hundreds of same-sex couples. They believe in the power of love.

Probably even the visionaries of GAA would never have imagined the reality we live in today. And yet, they helped birth it. Here in New York State last month, the governor introduced a law mandating full marriage equality — the first state ever to do so without a court order. And yet...

**In call and response we read:**

Lo Dayenu – It is not enough

4 states where we have civil union but where we do not have the guarantee of equal rights...

Lo Dayenu – It is not enough

Domestic partnership in New York City without real legal protection....

Lo Dayenu – It is not enough

Full marriage equality in only one state...

Lo Dayenu – It is not enough

Anything less than full marriage equality for all Americans is not enough.

Do not be silent. Silence equals death. This dinner is more than a ritual — it is sacred action to heal the world. And that means taking action in the world. It means writing your legislators identifying yourself as a member of a faith community who supports Governor Spitzer’s bill. It means speaking out against prejudice of any kind wherever it raises its head. If you’re a member here at BJ, join the ME Hevra. Add your voice. Believe in the power of love. Take action.
This is the fifth cup. This cup is for those yet to come. The water in this cup is clear, but this isn’t the cup of invisibility. It’s a cup that holds clarity of sight, clear hearts, clear minds, and clear action. This cup flows out from Stonewall and all of our attempts at liberation. It flows out from the deepest springs of our own hearts’ yearnings. It flows out from what we are doing here tonight, and it celebrates those who will follow us in this journey, our children, and their children, physical and spiritual. This cup we drink with certainty, knowing that our journey is right, our path is given, our purpose is strong, and our fulfillment is inevitable because it springs from the power of love.

Together we read:

*Nevarekh et Ein ha khayim*

*Yotzer et ha olam*

*Boreit mayim chayim*

Let us bless the Wellspring of Life

Creator of the Universe

Who made the living waters.
A Queer Pride Hallel

Together we sing:

O’d’kah ki anitani vat’hi-li li-shu-ah
Eh-ven ma-asu habonim hai-ta l’rosh pinah
May-ayt Adonai hai-ta zot hi nila’t b’aynaynu
Zeh ha’yom asah Adonai nagilah v’nishm’cha vo

Together we read:

I praise You for having answered me;
You have become my deliverance.
The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.
This is the doing of the One; it is marvelous in our sight.
This is the day the Creator has made; let us exult and rejoice in it.

Blessing after the Meal—the “shorter” Birkat HaMazon

Together we sing:

Brich Rachamana Malka D’alma Mare D’hai Pita.
You are the source of life for all that is, and your blessing flows through me.
The Seal of Completion

Though neither the work nor the remembering will ever be finished in our lifespan we have completed this seder.

May our words here tonight have meaning throughout the coming year; may all of us — of every gender and sexual orientation — feel a more thoughtful, more intense sense of pride when the calendar next swings to the end of June.

May we recognize that liberation is not a destination, but an on-going labor of love and that no one is free until all the bonds are cut,

may it be so, speedily and soon, and let us say, Next year in...

Not next year: Now. Not anywhere else, but here and now, everywhere and always.
Closing Song

**Somewhere Over the Rainbow**
Lyrics by E.Y. Harburg, Music by Harold Arlen

**Together we sing:**

Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high
There’s a land that I heard of, once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.
Someday I’ll wish upon a star and wake up where the clouds are far behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops, away above the chimney tops,
that’s where you’ll find me.
Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow, why then oh why can’t I?
If happy little bluebirds fly, beyond the rainbow, why, oh why, can’t I?

**HAPPY PRIDE WEEK**
CREDITS
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Please feel free to adapt this seder to create your own service.

SOURCES INCLUDE
The work of Andrew Ramer
The Lesbian Haggadah, by Judith Stein
Like Bread on a Seder Plate by Rebecca Alpert
The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, by James D. Steakley
The Aquarian Minyan Siddur
Hannah Senesh: Her Life & Diary. Poem translated by Marie Syrkin
Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian Gay and Jewish, eds: Christie Balka & Andy Rose
Journeys and Arrivals, by Lev Raphael
Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology, ed: Evelyn Torton Beck
Howl, by Allen Ginsberg
Your Native Land, Your Life by Adrienne Rich
Is It A Choice, by Eric Marcus
Gay American History, by Jonathan Ned Katz
The Gay Militants, by Don Teal
Hidden From History, by Martin Duberman
Out in All Directions, Eds. Lynn Witt, Sherry Thomas, Eric Marcus
Zap! You’re Alive, an essay by Arthur Evans
Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights by Kenji Yoshino

Original Illustrations by Rachel Segall. Stonewall artwork from a poster by Ralph Hall. Scanned artwork from the Aquarian Minyan Siddur and other sources.
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