

We march despite all the Schlissels

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In 2005 I attended the Pride Parade orchestrated by the Jerusalem Open House. It was a joyous march, and, as one of the founders of the Open House, it was a proud moment for me. As we turned a corner in mid march, twenty feet from where I was standing, Yishai Schlissel started stabbing people. I heard the shouting, saw people run and scream and moments later, a haredi man was tacked to the ground by security personnel. He later claimed to have attempted murder, but succeeded only in injuring three marchers.

Ten years later, that harrowing moment was painfully repeated by the same man. Schlissel served ten years of a twelve-year prison sentence, having been released a month ago, on good behavior. Just as the marchers began to move forward this past Thursday afternoon, Schlissel began another stabbing rampage, this time wounding six people, two seriously.

Passions run high in Jerusalem. It is a city of intensities where battle lines form regularly between incommensurate certainties. Whether Moslem or Jewish, secular or religious, right or left, hawk or peace-nick, the city enflames the fantasies of every group. It is here that liberators are easily read as heretics and murderer's as martyrs.

Jerusalem's gay pride parade's meaning is likewise read in polar fashions by different segments of the Jerusalem community. For the city's beleaguered liberal secular Jews, it is a beacon of diversity and tolerance that the city desperately needs. For most of Jerusalem's religious citizens, Jewish and otherwise, it is an eyesore, a disgrace, a public profanation of God's Name. For the gay marchers and their families it is an antidote to shame, an expression of communal solidarity and a bid for a different kind of holy city, one that embraces the fullness of humanity.

Finally, for many of the religious LGBT Jews who attend, the pride march is a hopeful prayer, not without its anxieties. The very word Pride, *gaava* in Hebrew, literally means arrogance. It is no simple matter to heal gay pride events from their history of public vulgarity and nudity. Jerusalem's March is surely shaped by its organizers with the city's special character in mind. Still, many people of good will, liberal Israeli's too, ask why this sort of public display is necessary in Jerusalem.

Here's why the Pride March in Jerusalem is so very important.

All pride marches say, "We are OK." In a democracy we all have the individual rights to choose how we want to live. While public life in the holy city needs to be tolerant of diversity, the march in Jerusalem carries a much deeper meaning and accomplishes a much richer purpose, especially for those who have grown up in its religious ethos.

Jerusalem Pride means that we are OK because God's creativity produces human beings of different sizes, shapes, colors...and yes sexualities. And so we march because the One who makes all different sorts of people is blessed. We march for pride not out of arrogance, but as a healing for all the needless shame that we have had to endure. We march to show our faces proudly in the street for all those whose hearts are still filled with self-loathing.

We march with our parents, our siblings and children, with our cousins and friends, so that no one is booted out of their homes or estranged from their families for being gay. We march with our husbands and wives, our spouses, girlfriends and boyfriends, to show all of Jerusalem that the Holy does not prefer our loneliness. We march because we were all 14 once and so, we need to offer teenagers hope in their futures.

By marching we strengthen each other and show that despite the Schlissels out there, truth will win out over ignorance and hope over fear. Whether it takes another decade or two or even a dozen we will be here, marching in the Holy city in defense of its broadest and deepest values.