Rabbi Debra Kolodny

I came out as lesbian in 1981, realizing three years later that I was bisexual. Long before my career as a faith leader began, in the 1990’s I was a national coordinator of BiNet USA for five years, the editor of *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith (ContinuumInternational, 2000),* and a teacher at hundreds of venues on the topic of bisexuality and spirituality. I trained several national lesbian and gay organizations on preventing bisexual invisibility and erasure and serving bisexual constituents. I facilitated the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Religious Leadership Roundtable for six years. By the time I entered seminary in 2006 it would have been unthinkable, not to mention impossible for me to be in the closet!

I have never been a one-issue activist, though. In addition to my queer activism I was an outspoken person of faith on any number of issues-peace, economic justice, environmental protection, hunger abatement.

What a blessing, therefore, to work in the Jewish Renewal world, where my sexual orientation is matter of factly accepted as another interesting aspect of my multi-faceted life. Whether for nine years as Executive Director of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, or at my current pulpit position at P’nai Or in Portland Oregon, it seems that a critical mass of people either know bisexual people or are bisexual themselves, and my orientation has always been seen as real, valid and holy. Sadly, the great majority of bisexual people have dramatically different experiences in both religious and secular contexts. So for 30 years have I worked to elevate our unique wisdom, theology, beauty and creativity.

Theologically, it has always been abundantly clear to me that bisexuality is a spiritual blessing, a gift of abundance and a gateway to higher consciousness. A traditional midrash on Genesis redacted in the 5th century (so its origins are older) is foundational for my understanding of bisexuality as holy. Torah states in Genesis, Chapter 1 verses 26 and 27:

*And God said let us make the human in our image, after our likeness…Vayivra Elohim et ha-adam btzalmo, betzelem elohim bara oto zachar unekeva bara otam, and God created Adam betzalmo, in its image in the image of God, the One created IT, male and female the One created THEM.*

Midrash Va-Yikra Rabbah records the thought of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman, who said that "when the Holy Blessed One created the first human, God created a hermaphrodite (fully male and female)."

Rabbi Levi goes on to say: "When the Adam, (the first person) was created, God made Adam with two body-fronts, and then sawed the creature in two, so that two bodies resulted, one for the male and one for the female."

According to this provocative midrash, the original state of the human being was both male and female, fully at home as both masculine and as feminine. What a remarkable idea!

We can easily extrapolate that being in the image of G!d means we are cultivating our wholeness. In gender terms that means we are in full relationship with our maleness AND our femaleness. Expanding that notion to include the wisdom of today, we observe that G-d is not only male and female, but also everything in-between and outside of those socially constructed categories. And so are we. That is what it means to be created in the image of G!d: embracing our own integrated wholeness, not relying on a partner to ‘complete us’.

This holy androgyn take on scripture obviously speaks directly to those who identify as gender queer, but it speaks to the bisexual experience as well. You see, we each have a choice in how we relate to our glorious potential. We can cultivate our wholeness or we can fear it, be confused by it and destroy it. If we cultivate it, if we yearn towards full actualization and seek to partner with others also yearning toward inner wholeness -- each supporting the other in being the most evolved, most internally unified beings we can be, then the garment of the body is inconsequential. Every form of partnering between loving consenting adults is holy: wholeness meeting wholeness. For those of us blessed with the natural inclination towards loving beyond the garment of gender identity, this Torah truth lives in our soul. It lives in our bodies. It lives in our relationships. It lives in our lives. We are living Torah.

For we who yearn to ensure those harmed by religion can be healed by religion, for we who yearn to ensure that the grace of loving beyond gender, at the level of the soul, is seen as a beautiful reflection of the image of G-d, for we who yearn to protect, celebrate and sanctify all of G-d’s children, this guide-book is a G-d send.

Bio: Rabbi Kolodny is now the Rabbi of P’nai Or of Portland, Oregon and the Executive Director of Nehirim, a national LGBT Jewish organization.