

Rabbi Judy Schindler

Bullied Until Broken? The Impact of Bullying on LGBT Youth

October 17, 2010

Introduction to the Program

[A memorial candle is lit.]

This candle is in memory of nine youths that we know of who died as result of bullying in last month alone.

Billy Lucas, age 15, died September 9, 2010 in Indiana.

Cody J. Barker, age 17, died September 13, 2010 in Wisconsin.

Seth Walsh, age 13, died September 19, 2010 in California.

Tyler Clementi, age 18, died September 22, 2010 in New Jersey.

Asher Brown, age 13, died September 23, 2010 in Texas.

Harrison Chase Brown, age 15, died September, 25 2010 in Colorado.

Raymond Chase, age 19, died September 29, 2010 in Rhode Island.

Felix Sacco, age 17, died September 29, 2010 in Massachusetts.

Caleb Nolt , age 14, died, September 30, 2010 in Indiana.

All but Felix Sacco were victims of anti-LGBTQ bullying. Nine deaths. This one flame reflecting nine souls, nine futures, nine dreams extinguished. Nine families devastated. How many deaths will it take?

I'd like to welcome you all to Shalom Park and thank you for taking time out of your weekend to be here. Temple Beth El and Temple Israel are two synagogues helping to sponsor this event. We are partners in this awe inspiring Shalom Park and committed to creating congregations and communities built on the foundations of justice.

If you asked any member of Temple Beth El to describe our congregation, I am confident that inclusive would be one of the top three adjectives – if not the first. We are an inclusive and welcoming congregation. We aim to practice what we preach not only within the walls of Beth El, but outside in our community. Just as I pray that those of GLBTQ community feel safe within

the sacred space of our congregation, I will work to make sure that our brothers and sisters of different sexual orientations are safe within our city, country and world.

According to the sacred scriptures that lay the foundation for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, our words have tremendous power. The text of Genesis teaches that with words the world was created. “On the first day, God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.”

Our tradition teaches that with words worlds can likewise be destroyed. That is the impact of bullying. Words and acts used to cause shame and pain based on our identity are devastating.

All differences matter – whether they be with respect to race, religion, socioeconomic differences, disability, weight, emotional challenges, I could go on and on.

While attacks on any part of one’s identity are demoralizing, I would say that today, bullying based on sexual orientation is unique. It is the only area of difference in which hurtful and hateful words have been used publicly by politicians, from the pulpit, in the hallways of our High Schools or on the walls of our Facebook pages. These words used so blatantly and boldly and callously by leaders can cause irreparable harm, especially to our youth who are struggling with their identities.

I respect the rights of my religiously conservative brothers and sisters of other faiths to differ in the religious understanding of homosexuality, but I expect them to teach respect for those who are gay, as they would teach respect for all human beings.

Not only do I see bullying based on sexual orientation as different, but I see bullying today is different. The Internet makes this painful reality relentless. Harassing words echo on not only in our kids’ ears and minds, but on their screens – searing their souls, again and again.

As human beings, as religious institutions, as leaders, as community organizers and visionaries, as teenagers, our goal is stop the cycle of pain. We thank the teenagers of Time Out Youth for being here. We thank them for speaking out not only for themselves, but for all youth, especially gay and lesbian youth, who are too fearful to stand up and speak out for themselves.

To all our Time Out Youth, we applaud your leadership and your courage. You have a partner in Temple Beth El and in Temple Israel if you should ever need us.

Pastor Niemoller, a Lutheran pastor and anti-Nazi theologian who was deported to Dachau during the Holocaust wrote the following:

First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade

unionist.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

May we listen today and may we speak out tomorrow – for others, for ourselves, but most importantly, for our future.