

**A KAVANAH - - Directing our Hearts and Minds**

**A DECLARATION OF INTENTION THAT WE BRING TO THE READING OF  
LEVITICUS 18 on the Afternoon of Yom Kippur**

Every human being is created in the image of God - בצלם אלקים. Honoring every person, we honor God. Of infinite value and worth, every person reflects one facet of God's nature. No person is a means to another's end. The presence of God in a human relationship depends upon the recognition by each of the image of God in the other.

This is the *kavanah*, the intention of heart and mind, and the context in which we read Leviticus 18 on the afternoon of Yom Kippur. This chapter contains the Torah's enumeration of prohibited sexual relationships. In the most intimate of human relations, the inherent worth of each partner is expressed or denied, the image of God honored or demeaned, cosmic union effected or hindered. The Jewish way is to unify body and soul, the physical and the spiritual. On this day whose essence purifies body and soul, attention is given to the realm in which body and soul are joined in relationship with another.

In power relationships there is only a joining of bodies. Each person becomes an object in relation to the other. This is the nature of relationship that is abhorrent to Torah. It is the nature of relationships condemned; incest, violation of boundaries, son with mother, brother with sister, father with daughter or daughter-in-law. Shaming and jealousy, playing off against each other a woman and her daughter, two sisters; adultery and violence. All are power relationships, of male over female, of adult over child.

We come to the verse that has caused so much hurt, "And with a male you shall not lie the lyings of a woman: it is abhorrent." All of the heterosexual relationships described are condemned as power relationships. We therefore understand this verse to refer in context to a power relationship between non-equals of the same sex. As power relationships, all of the unions described in this chapter are referred to at its end as abhorrent. Reading this verse in the same context of concern as all of the other verses, we thereby affirm loving and equal relationships between people of the same sex.

We choose to wrestle with Torah, and to proudly embrace the traditional reading of this day, with all of its pain and challenge. We refuse to give up the right of interpretation, or by abdication to give tacit agreement to an interpretation of exclusion. As every human being is created in the image of God, we affirm the presence of God in every relationship whose partners respond to the image of God in each other.

I ask forgiveness on this Day of Atonement for any hurt that I may have unwittingly caused in this process of wrestling with Torah and with life.

Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein