

Transforming ביתך:

A Guide to Creating LGBTQ Ritual, Spiritual, and Pastoral Homes



by Congregation Beit Simchat Torah

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Introduction

On March 6th and 7th, 2010, rabbinical and cantorial students from five different seminaries, born in four different decades, and reflecting the spectrum of sexual identities and gender identities, came together to learn at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah's first annual conference on Creating LGBTQ Ritual, Spiritual, and Pastoral Homes. Inspired by the words of Psalm 84:5, "*Ashrei yoshvei beitecha, od yehaleluhah selah*/Happy are those who dwell in your house, they will sing your praises forever," we decided to name the conference "Transforming ביתך." The Hebrew, בֵּיתְךָ ("your house") is gendered masculine. We intentionally chose to leave the word without vowels, thus opening up the possibility of the feminine reading, "*beiteich*," "your house" for a woman.

The difference is significant. Even more powerful, instead of choosing one gender or the other, we chose to leave out the vowels, thus rendering the word neither masculine nor feminine, as well as potentially both masculine and feminine. In essence, we instill the word with the *kavanah*, the intention, of queering all of "your house," the entirety of the spaces in which we dwell, as well as each one of "your houses" be they synagogues, college campuses, nursing homes, day schools, or summer camps.

In the pages that follow, you will find resources on pastoral care with elders, developing LGBTQ affirming liturgies, how to talk about both problematic and celebratory texts, innovative ritual, and more. These resources are based on the workshops that were originally intended for cantorial and rabbinical students, and are therefore appropriate resources for clergy and students, but by no means are they only for clergy. We hope that lay leaders, students, educators, or anyone curious about transformative LGBTQ Judaism will find points of entry into "Transforming ביתך."

As our identities, our desires, and our spirituality shift, unravel, and reform, so do the spaces in which we pray and live. Over the course of our 36 years as a congregation, we have seen our selves and our spaces evolve and change. It is from this ever-evolving community that we draw our wisdom. That which is captured here is far from comprehensive and is only a beginning. It is our hope that together we will continue Transforming ביתך.

Yours in Transformation,

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum

Alex Weissman

**Pastoral Care with LGBTQ Seniors:
Best Practices Derived from a Discussion on Three Case Studies**
By Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow

Spiritual assessment

In senior long term care, and in acute and rehab care, the biggest issues that come up in the context of loss of autonomy, failing health, and dependency, involve love and belonging. A major question is, “will I be accepted if this is known about me?” This can relate to the chaplain, staff in general, other residents and patients, as well as family members.

Guilt and forgiveness can also play a big role in the context of life review. “What if I really was wrong in certain decisions along the way.” “Can I forgive xxx who never accepted my identity, or how do I make peace at this time in my life.”

Case studies:

- 1. Situation where a person has been closeted their whole life, lived as a straight person in a straight marriage, and then alone in an observant community.**
 - Pastoral care focus on recognizing the emotions of regret.
 - Exploring if there is the possibility for change and growth going forward.
 - In life review, focus on the meaning of the life that was lived, identify the blessings.

- 2. Situation where a person has a deep emotional connection with another resident that is not understood by the staff to be anything out of the ordinary. This “friend” dies and there is no context for real grief. Survivor of much abuse and trauma due to gay identity.**
 - Honoring current relationships, expression, and articulation of emotions and making up for past situations where emotions were not honored. Use of prayer and ritual if accepted.
 - Listen to stories, be a witness to the fear and trauma associated with identity, model full acceptance, love, and help create a safe environment.

- 3. Situation of dementia leading to disinhibition and inappropriate advances.**
 - Review if there a way to support individual in having a fulfilling experience with the consent of another person.
 - Work with staff to respond to this as an effect of illness, rather than anything morally offensive.
 - Help staff deal gently with family members who may be learning for the first time about long held secrets.

Important to remember:

Sensitivity must be with all seniors around identity issues, because this is often a closeted population.

Instead of “were you married, do you have children”, instead ask, “Tell me about your life.” Let person determine what is important to share.

Similarly, when working on end of life care, make sure to understand who a person considers their loved ones, who should be the proxy without making assumptions.

“Who are the important people you consider family?”

Being an Ally to LGBTQI Jews: Do's and Don'ts

Adapted by Rabbi Alissa Wise from materials by Jewish Mosaic

1. Do include LGBTQI Jews as respected and trusted leaders/authorities on non-LGBTQI issues.

What is an example of a way to introduce an LGBTQ issue that is not about sex?

Example: Talk with your teens about what they think about the recent hubbub around a teen girl who wanted to wear a tux to her prom or a teen boy who likes to wear heels and wigs.

Example: When inviting guest speakers/presenters think about inviting queer Jews, Jews of color, or disabled Jews not about the issues around they are identified (ie. Queer Jew/environmental justice or disabled Jew/Talmud)

2. Do utilize the Jewish holiday cycle as an opportunity to include LGBTQ issues.

Choose a holiday and think about how to incorporate LGBTQ issues

Example: Purim is a great holiday to explore gender roles.

3. Do avoid pre-packaged projects on family, love, sex or identity.

How can you lead an activity that asks people to share/explore their families in ways that are open and safe?

Example: Don't pass out a pre-drawn family tree. Introduce that all families look different—offer models of how to explore/depict your family from the outset.

4. Don't restrict participation to traditional gender roles.

How can you model that gender roles are fluid—anyone can wear a kippah, make Kiddush, or light Shabbat candles?

Example: If you are a male teacher/educator, offer to take a girl's role in a play or reading or Unexpected gender roles – Deborah, Yael, Tamar, Ruth and Naomi.

5. Do avoid opposites in teaching lessons.

When teaching, especially Hebrew, think about how you teach and avoid opposites

Example: Try to not introduce Ima & Abba or *zachar & nakeivah* / masculine & feminine as opposites. When talking about family words, teach also Ima & Ima or Abba & Abba. This can also be reinforced with concepts—like *kodesh*/sacred

and *hol*/mundane, or *tov* /good and *rah*/bad. Use real life examples that exist in your community or bring in books/stories that introduce more diverse family structures or gender roles.

6. Do present multiple/alternative readings of problematic texts. Don't always got to problematic texts to approach LGBTQI issues.

When preparing to teach a text, consider how it might sound to marginalized folks—poor people, queer people, single people, people of color, disabled people, etc.

Example: Texts to have multiple interpretations of: Sodom and Gomorrah, Leviticus 18, Adam & Eve. Examples of other texts to use include *b'tzelem elohim*/we are made in the image of God, *v'ahavta l'rei-acha kamocho*/ love your neighbor as yourself, or the story of David and Jonathan as a story of emotional intimacy between two men, or Naomi and Ruth between two women.

7. Do integrate teaching about diverse Jews as part of teaching about Jewish history.

You can teach about many moments of Jewish and/or secular history and at the same time highlight marginalized and often invisibilized communities/people.

Example: Gay & lesbian resistance communities that existed during WWII in Eastern Europe. Highlight Judaism as multiracial and multilingual—explore ladino as well as Yiddish, and the various rituals, prayer practices, and stories of Jews around the world—the Jews of Morocco, Iraq, India, Latin America, China, and Africa as well as those of European descent.

8. Do make use of Jewish wisdom.

Judaism is rich in wisdom of marking transitions, healing from loss or disappointment, of exploring gender and sexuality, for celebrating humanity and its diversity, or for celebrating important moments of all kinds. How can you introduce using Jewish wisdom to model inclusivity?

Example: www.ritualwell.org has many ideas for innovative rituals including a blessing based on the “*asher yatzar*” blessing to celebrate trans, intersex, female, male folks, and everyone else. Others have created rituals for moments of gender transition or for having sex for the first time.

9. Don't make assumptions about someone's gender or sexual identity.

Allow folks to out themselves and make space for that to happen, but don't push too hard. Be aware of assumptions that are made about if someone has a boyfriend or girlfriend, wears skirts or pants, etc.

Example: As folks introduce themselves by name, ask them to also say their preferred gender pronoun. If using examples of couples, for example for an upcoming youth group dance, don't assume a girl is going with a boy.

10. Don't assume talking about LGBTQI issues means talking about sex.

Part of the way homophobia impacts us is by convincing us that to talk about LGBTQ issues means to talk about sex. It doesn't. Below are examples of LGBTQ non-sex related issues

Examples:

1. Love
2. Self-actualization
3. Inclusive spectra vs. binary
4. Alternative family structures
5. Histories of resistance and social change
6. Lack of access to bathrooms
7. Legal discrimination of various kinds (taxes, hospital visitation, etc)
8. Rejection from families
9. Violence
10. Invisibility in religion, media, bureaucracy etc.
11. Lack of representation in government

Psalms: Transformation as a Jewish Spiritual Path

By Dr. Joy Ladin

Trans Jews often feel estranged from traditional Jewish texts, which don't reflect or acknowledge us or our experiences. However, many Biblical Psalms describe the search for and presence of God in terms of radical transformation of fundamental categories. Mountains leap like rams, rocks flow like water, triumph tumbles into despair and despair somersaults into triumph. Those of us who live between or beyond traditional gender identities are familiar with such transformations from the inside out; for many of us, and for many of those around us, our transformation of gender identity seems to shake the foundations of existence. In this workshop, we will use such trans experiences to read the Psalms' poetry of transformation in a new light – and use the Psalms' insistence that the slipping and sliding of fundamental categories is a sign of God's presence to illuminate our own experiences of transformation.

At least since the cross-pollination of Greek philosophy and rabbinic thought, Jews have had a tendency to think of God in terms of absolutes – all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, and so on. Such a God, by definition, never changes. God's nature, and thus God's presence in the world, is static. Such a conception of God represents a radical change from the Torah's representations, in which God tends to seem unpredictable, inexplicable, intruding in intimate family affairs like reproduction in one passage and absent through four centuries of slavery in another. For trans Jews, the "Absolute God" idea can be particularly problematic, enforcing our sense of distance from Jewish communities and liturgy built around that conception. Our identities and presence in the world are defined by transformation rather than continuity. Sometimes we define and express ourselves in terms of one gender, sometimes in terms of another, sometimes through opposition to one or any gender. Indeed, many of us can only define and express ourselves by bending, melting, fusing or otherwise confounding the very gender categories that, like the Absolute God's omni's, underwrite the continuity of non-trans identities.

But when we read the Psalms through trans Jewish eyes, we find a God who is defined at least as much by transformation as by continuity. For example, in psalm 114, "When Israel went forth from Egypt," God's intimate relationship with the people of Israel and presence in human history is marked by radical transformation: "the Jordan ran backward, / mountains skipped like rams." God's presence unmakes the very characteristics that define rivers and mountains, that makes them what they are. God's nature is so bound up with transformation and destabilization of the basic categories that normally define existence that the psalm ends by warning the Earth to "tremble at the presence of Hashem ... who turned the rock into a pool of water."

Psalm 113 makes it clear that God's transformative quality is not limited to the natural world: "Who is like Hashem our God, / who ... raises the poor from the

dust ... / to set them with the great.” Whereas human social order tends to enforce static identities, labeling some people as “the poor” and others as “the great,” God’s uniqueness is defined by the opposite tendency, the upending of the “natural” social order. This is not just a matter of shifting seating arrangements; if “the poor” are “set with the great,” their presence undermines the exclusiveness that defines the identities of “the great.” God’s presence not only changes who we think we and others are; like trans people’s presence, God destabilizes the very categories on which human identities are based.

As trans Jews know, transformation and destabilizing identities and categories can be exhilarating, but it can also be painful and terrifying, particularly in intimate relationships. The “Absolute God” idea underplays the pain and terror that relationship with God can entail, but read through trans eyes, those qualities are evident in many psalms. For example, in psalm 27, read throughout Elul as part of our renewal of our relationships with God during the High Holidays, the speaker begins by affirming God as “my light and my help ... the stronghold of my life.” But after the speaker details God’s saving power and the speaker’s intimacy with God (“I sacrifice in God’s tent”), the relationship becomes terrifyingly uncertain: “Do not hide Your face from me; / do not thrust aside your servant in anger ... / Do not forsake me, do not abandon me.” No explanation is given for this radical shift from absolute confidence in God’s presence and protection to terror that God might at any moment abandon the speaker; the speaker, it seems, hasn’t changed, but God, or the relationship through which the speaker knows God, has, and it is only by living the truth of this terrifying uncertainty that the speaker can affirm, at the end, “O look to Hashem!”

As psalm 27 suggests, and as trans people know, relationship partly defines identity: who we are can change radically, depending on our situation and relationship. In crucial ways, we can’t fully define ourselves; we are partly defined by others. Even though my best friend once knew me as a man, she relates to me as a woman, and when I stand in relation to her, my female identity is strengthened. For my children, though, I am still “Daddy,” and when I am with them my female gender identity feels less like an identity than a distortion, an obstacle, an open wound in our relationship. In some ways, God is defined by our relationship with God – a fact acknowledged in many psalms. For example, the God defined by the beginning of psalm 27 as an unshakeable “stronghold” (“Should an army besiege me, / my heart would have no fear”), has, in psalm 116, allowed the speaker to come to the very brink of death: “The bonds of death encompassed me; / the torments of Sheol overtook me.” According to the “Absolute God” idea, which defines God as all-powerful and thus all-responsible, such a story should present a disturbing portrait of God as indifferent at best and malevolent at worst. But the speaker transforms God’s identity by crying out on the verge of death, “O Hashem, save my life”; because the speaker insists on relating to God as a deliverer even in the midst of disaster, when things get better, the speaker is able to say, “I love Hashem / for God hears my voice, my plea; / for God turns an ear to me / whenever I call.” By telling the story this way rather

than blaming God for standing by when things became dire, the speaker in effect creates God's identity as a benevolent, delivering presence.

We tend to think of identity as constant, and constancy as good – ideas which have subjected trans people to a great deal of recrimination and guilt. But as these psalms suggest, we lose a lot of insight into God and our relationships to God if we insist on seeing God's identity as absolute and constant. But the psalms go further, suggesting that the very inconstancy of God gives us an undying source of hope. If identity were constant, we would be doomed by our habits; we would always be what we have been. God's transformative presence is what makes *teshuvah*, deep spiritual transformation and renewal, possible, and it means, as psalm 126 reminds us, that no matter how hopeless our circumstances seem, “Those who sow in tears / shall reap with songs of joy.”

**Heather Has Two Mommies, Chaim Has a Daddy and an Abba,
and Sarah Lives with her Adoptive Ima:
Jewish Learning and Lesson Plans that Reflect Family Diversity**
By Rabbi Melissa B. Simon

Wondering how to educate for diverse Jewish families? Feeling like the popular Jewish books and resources don't reflect the faces in your classroom? Hoping to create a safe space for children of a LGBTQ parent or for children who might one day come out as LGBTQ?



Resource Overview:

Using the “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How” framework, this sheet focuses on how Jewish professionals can create diverse family-friendly Jewish Learning Spaces.

Use this as a personal checklist or as an institutional check-list:

1. **Why:** Why do you care about making Jewish learning spaces friendly to LGBTQ and non-traditional families?
 - **Activity:** Go through the Jewish Values Sheet and identify values that are important for you as a Jewish educator.
 - **Resource:** Jewish Values Sheet (see Appendix A)
Jewish values underpin our work and provide a rationale for making our Learning Spaces inclusive.

2. **Who:** Who are the new or marginalized Jewish families?
 - **Brainstorm:** What are examples of families from your Jewish community?
 - Recognize that Jewish families include all different family constellations including single parents, parents with adopted children, Jews by choice, adults without children, multi-generational families, interfaith families, etc. and of course heterosexual, born-Jewish parents with born-Jewish, biological kids.
 - It is important to understand the dynamics of each individual congregation- who is a part of your community? Who is missing?

3. **Where:** Where do we talk about these families?
 - **Identify:** Where are stories of families told in your institution?
 - Recognize that talking about family differences must take place not just in the classroom but also on the *bimah*, in the synagogue leadership, in bulletin articles, in the stories we tell. We need to honor and celebrate LGBTQ families and difference in all areas of Jewish life.

4. **When:** When do we talk about diversity?
- **Question:** Do you have a proactive or reactive approach to differences within your institution?
 - o **Proactive:** Talking about family diversity because it is important and reflective of institutional values. Offering images of LGBTQ families as part of the curriculum.
 - o **Reactive:** After an incident of anti-gay bullying, talk about diverse families.
 - **Ideal:** Have a proactive rather than reactive approach to talking about family diversity. Talk about difference not just when there are diverse families present. Make it clear that being an inclusive community is important because of Jewish values.
 - **Task:** Develop a learning environment that reflects your community vision and values.
 - **Reflection Question:** How can you utilize a “If you build it, they will come” framework rather than a “where are they?” attitude?
5. **What:** What can be done/should not be done in teaching around these topics?
- **Task:** Review resource “Creating Welcoming Classrooms and Inclusive Lesson Plans: 10 Dos and Don’ts.” Identify successes. Identify areas of potential improvement. Identify key people who can help you make your space more welcoming and inclusive. Set achievable goals.
 - **Resource:** “Creating Welcoming Classrooms and Inclusive Lesson Plans: 10 Dos and Don’ts” (see Appendix B)
6. **How:** Images and Resources
- **Activity:** Do an audit of the images used by your institution. What are the images currently present in your books, newsletter, website, etc that talk about who is a Jew and who is a member of your Jewish community?
 - **Resource:** Enrich your library by using texts from the “Jewish Diversity Book List” (see Appendix C). Use these texts both as proactive and reactive resources.
7. **Next Steps:** Create achievable goals
- One thing I am going to do in the place that I work to make it more affirming for LGBTQ and non-traditional families.
 - One partner I can identify to work with me on my goals.
 - One program/service/resource that I can do/use that will reflect my goal of making my space more affirming.

8. Taking a step back

- Return to this exercise mid-way through the year as a check-in and revisit each year to see what successes you have achieved and new areas of potential growth.

A Glossary of Terms

by Alex Weissman

Cisgender—Anyone who identifies with the sex and gender that were assigned to them at birth.

Biological Sex—The set of physical traits (chromosomes, hormones, gonads, internal and external sexual/reproductive organs) which are, in Western society, culturally and medically associated with a particular gender or combination of genders. It is commonly believed that there are only two ‘packages’ of these traits—one called ‘male’, and the other called ‘female’.

Biphobia—Fear or hatred of bisexuals; this is present in both gay and lesbian as well as straight communities. Biphobia is manifested in violence, harassment, and discrimination, as well as refusing to acknowledge that bisexuality exists or is anything other than “sitting on the fence.”

Bisexual—Anyone who is attracted to more than one gender/sex. Some people prefer the term **pansexual** to acknowledge that there are more than two genders and sexes.

FTM (‘female to-male’; transman)—A person who was assigned at birth to be female and was raised as a girl, who knows himself to be a man and who wishes to or does live as a man part or all of the time.

Gay—People who are attracted to the same gender as themselves. This term is applicable to all genders, though is often understood to refer to men only. Some women choose not to identify as gay for this reason.

Gender Expression—Outward behaviors and appearances (e.g. hair, clothing, body language) by which people manifest their gender identity or gender choices.

Gender Identity—A person’s inner understanding of what gender(s) they belong to or identify as. This is each person’s unique knowing or feeling, and is separate from a person’s physical body or appearance (though may be related.)

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC)—An umbrella term that can include anyone whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is outside of social norms of women who are ‘feminine’ and men who are ‘masculine’.

Gender-queer—Anyone who sees their gender as falling outside of mainstream understandings of “male” and “female”, this can include transgender men and women, people who identify as neither male nor female, both male and female or who claim an alternate gender identity.

Heretosexism—The social, cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the natural, normal, and superior sexual orientation. It can include the presumption that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise. This has an impact on internalized, interpersonal, and institutional levels.

Homophobia—Fear or hatred of lesbians and gays; homophobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination.

Homosexual—A term developed in the late 19th Century used to pathologize same-sex sexual behavior. Few people within LGBTQI communities use this word now to refer to themselves, in part because of the pathological connotations.

Intersex—General term used for people who are born with, or develop without intervention, anatomies, hormones, and chromosomes, that may not fit the typical definitions of female or male. A dated, pathological term is hermaphrodite, but this term has largely been rejected by intersex communities.

Lesbian—A term adapted in the 20th Century to refer to women attracted to women to differentiate the political needs of women from gay men.

MTF ('male to-female'; transwoman)—A person who was assigned at birth to be male, and was raised as a boy, who knows herself to be female, and who wishes to or does live as a woman part or all of the time.

Queer—A broad political and cultural identity that includes many (but not all) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as well as others who see their sexuality as falling outside of mainstream heterosexual norms.

Questioning—A person who thinks their sexual orientation and/or gender identity may be different from what they had previously thought.

Sexual Orientation—The aspect of a person that describes the relationship between their gender identity and the gender(s) of the people to whom they are attracted.

Transgender—Anyone who does not identify with the sex and/or gender that they were assigned at birth. This can include people who take medical steps to modify their appearance and those who do not.

Transphobia—Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination.

New Liturgies for LGBTQ Communities

By Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen

For many Jews, and certainly for people at CBST, liturgy is the first entry point into Judaism. We grow up hearing the prayers in the synagogue before we are old enough to understand what they mean; we venture into Shabbat services for the first time as adults. Whatever our first contact with the siddur and its liturgy, the words have a profound impact on defining the values of the congregation and the relationship of the community with God.

The siddur includes many references to community and to family and many metaphors about the relationship between God and Israel. Each of these is a moment where a congregant can feel embraced by the liturgy or alienated by it. The liturgical choices we make as rabbis and cantors are extremely powerful. Congregants can feel that the prayers reflect and embrace their identities and their families or they may feel invisible and unwelcome.

Many Jews mistakenly believe that the siddur is a static document. Historically we know that the siddur has evolved through generations and across different communities reflecting the different realities of Jewish life. It is our right and our inheritance to continue that process.

Looking at CBST's Friday night siddur as an example, it is possible to see some of the ways of transforming synagogue liturgy to express your deep commitment to celebrating LGBTQ individuals and families.

Of course not all rabbis and cantors, and not all synagogues, feel equally comfortable with liturgical change. Therefore we offer a range of liturgical techniques: altering the English translations, adding words or names to the traditional text, and changing the traditional text. In your context some of these changes might seem more possible to implement than others. Likewise, certain prayers in the siddur might feel like easier places to begin implementing such change.

On the following pages, you will find some selections from our community's siddur, *B'chol L'vav'cha*, With All Your Heart, that serve as examples for how you may want to adapt your own liturgy.

Mah Tov: This is the first piece of liturgy that appears in our siddur, as it is so frequently sung to begin services. Notice the note at the bottom of the page; we wanted to make sure to use the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender on the first page of the siddur:

מַה טָבוּ אֹהֲלֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.
 מַה טָבוּ אֹהֲלֵיךָ לֵאָה מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ רַחֵל.
 וְאֲנִי בָרַב חֶסֶדְךָ אָבוֹא בֵיתְךָ,
 אֲשַׁתְּחֹה אֶל הַיְכָל קֹדֶשְׁךָ בִּירְאָתְךָ.
 יְהוּה אֶהְבֵּתִי מְעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ וּמְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ.
 וְאֲנִי אֲשַׁתְּחֹה וְאֶכְרַע אֶבְרָכָה לְפָנַי יְהוּה עֹשֵׂי.
 וְאֲנִי תַפְלֵתִי לָךְ יְהוּה עֵת רְצוֹן.
 אֱלֹהִים בָּרַב חֶסֶדְךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּאֵמַת יִשְׁעֶךָ.
 במדבר כד:ה, תהלים ה:ח, צה:ו, סט:יד

How good are your tents, Ya'akov, your dwelling places, Israel.
 How good are your tents, Leah, your dwelling places, Rachel.
 And I, overwhelmed by your lovingkindness,
 Will come in to your house.
 I will bow in awe before your holy sanctuary.
 God, I have loved your home, the place where your glory rests.
 I fall down in praise and bend at the knee before the Source of my being.
 And I am but my prayer to You,
 God, may this be an acceptable time.
 God, in your tremendous love
 Answer me in the truth of your deliverance.

Based on Numbers 24:5, Psalms 5:8, 96:6, 69:14

The biblical Bil'am, overcome by the divine spirit as he looked upon the encampments of the Children of Israel, spoke the first words of *mah tovu* as a blessing on their households even though he had been commanded to curse them. We include the names of our matriarchs Leah and Rachel in our description of the households of Israel both as feminists and because we know that all kinds of families are deserving of blessing. So often families that include lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people are the objects of curses or pity and not of the blessing we deserve. Invoking our matriarchs as well as our patriarchs, we extend blessing to all of our families in all of their constellations: families of choice, households headed by two people or by one person, families that include people of color, families with children and without, Jews and non-Jews.

Hineh Mah Tov: See the additional lines in the Hebrew and the note below the line.

הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וּמַה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יַחַד.
הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וּמַה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת נָשִׁים* גַּם יַחַד.
הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וּמַה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת כָּלָנוּ יַחַד.
*יש אומרים "אָחֵיּוֹת".
תהלים קלג:א

How good and pleasant it is for all of us to dwell together in community.

Psalm 133:1

Hineh mah tov umah na'im shevet achim gam yachad.

Hineh mah tov umah na'im shevet nashim gam yachad.*

Hineh mah tov umah na'im shevet kulanu yachad.

*Some say achayot.

הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וּמַה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יַחַד, literally “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together” has been adapted in many egalitarian communities by adding a second line to include *nashim* (women) or *achayot* (sisters). In a GLBT community we know that listing women in addition to men or sisters as well as brothers still does not include all of us. Binary gender categories do not encompass all of us, and so a prayer that is meant to be a celebration of gathering in community can achieve the opposite: emphasizing how transgender and intersex people are too often left out. Therefore in our siddur we include a third line: הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וּמַה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת כָּלָנוּ יַחַד “How good and pleasant it is when all of us dwell together.”

L'chah Dodi: Two changes were made to this well-loved piece of Friday night liturgy. The change to the last stanza below makes a profound statement about the nature of love and relationships within the community, while the change to the final stanza of the whole poem challenges the traditional paradigm created by the prevailing metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel, of a dominant, powerful male lover (God) with a submissive female partner (Israel). Notice the notes below the lines.

וְהָיוּ לְמִשְׁפָּה שְׂאֵסִיךְ וְרַחֲקוּ קָל מִבְּלָעִיךְ
יִשִּׁישׁ עֲלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ כְּמִשׁוֹשׁ לֵב בְּאַהֲבָה.
לְכֵה דוּדִי לְקִרְאָת כְּלָה פָּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָהּ.

Those who plundered you will be plundered
And those who would destroy you will go far away.
Your God rejoices with you,
Like a heart rejoices in love.

Come, my love, to greet the bride
Let us welcome Shabbat.

בְּמִשְׁוֹשׁ לֵב בְּאַהֲבָה / *kimsos lev b'ahavah*. The joy of the divine relationship with the people Israel is compared to the unique happiness of the heart or the soul rejoicing in love. While the traditional text reads עַל כְּלָה כְּמִשְׁוֹשׁ חֲתָן / *kimsos chatan al kalah*, as a bridegroom rejoices with his bride, we expand the metaphor to embrace many configurations of love, knowing that our love for God—and God's love for us—encompasses the great diversity of love we may experience in our lives: romantic love regardless of sexual orientation, love between friends, between parents and children, love between other family members, and love within a community.

בואי בשלום עטרת שכינה גם בשמחה ובצחה
תוך אמוני עם סגלה בואי כלה בואי כלה.

לכה דודי לקראת כלה פני שבת נקבלה.

Come in peace, crown of God
In gladness and joy
Amid the faithful of a nation loved by God,
Come in O bride, come in O bride.

Come, my love, to greet the bride
Let us welcome Shabbat.

עטרת שכינה / *ateret sh'chinah* We celebrate the union of lovers of all sexual orientations and gender identities like the love between the Divine Presence and the People Israel. Therefore, rather than using the metaphor of God as Israel's husband (בעלה / *ba'alah*), we sing of uniting the Shabbat queen with the emanation of God known as the Shechinah, thus expanding the metaphor to include all of us.

First blessing of the *Amidah*: Note the addition of Bilhah and Zilpah among the matriarchs and the note below the line.

עֲמִידָה

שירים וכוונות: עמ' 124-127.

עומדים בתפילת לחש.

אֲדֹנָי שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ.

Adonai s'fatai tiftach ufi yagid t'hilatecha.

א. אבות ואמהות

בְּרוּךְ * אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב.
אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי רִבְקָה, אֱלֹהֵי לֵאָה, אֱלֹהֵי רָחֵל,
אֱלֹהֵי בִלְהָה, וְאֱלֹהֵי זִלְפָּה.
הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֲלִיוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים
וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל, וְזוֹכֵר חֲסָדֵי אֲבוֹת וְאִמּוֹת, וּמְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנֵי
בְּנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה.

(בשבת שובה: זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים, מְלֶךְ חַפֵּץ בְּחַיִּים, וְכַתְּבָנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים,
לְמַעַנְךָ אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים.)

מְלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמְגַן וּפּוֹקֵד. בְּרוּךְ * אַתָּה יְהוָה מְגַן אַבְרָהָם וּפּוֹקֵד שָׂרָה.

* כּוּפִים אֶת הַבְּרִכִּים ב"בְּרוּךְ" וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים ב"אַתָּה".

As a community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight Jews, we have experienced the ways in which LGBT families are excluded and erased from Jewish community and family life. Because of the way we love, some of us have lost our children or have been excised from their lives; many of us will never be legally recognized as the parents of the children we have raised. Likewise, many of us are the children of parents who are not legally recognized. Yet despite this, we know that our relationships are holy and our families are real. Therefore, we acknowledge all of our ancestors, Avraham, Yitschak, Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, her handmaiden Bilhah, Leah, and her handmaiden Zilpah. Our ancestors descended from all of them, whether their relationships were celebrated or not, whether they were regarded as equal or not.

THE AMIDAH

Alternative meditations are on pages 124–127.

We stand in silent prayer.

Open my lips, that my mouth may declare your praise.

I. AVOT V'IMAHOT / ANCESTORS

You* are our God, Adonai, Ruler of time and space
Even as You were God to our ancestors:
God to Avraham, God to Yitschak, and God to Ya'akov,
God to Sarah, God to Rivkah, God to Leah, God to Rachel,
God to Bilhah, and God to Zilpah.
Great, mighty, awesome are You,
Higher than our minds can climb,
Ancient Source of kindness,
Creator of all.

You remember the worthy deeds of
our ancient mothers and fathers,
and will lovingly bring redemption to their
children's children, for the sake of your name.

*(On Shabbat Shuvah: Remember us with life, Sovereign, who so treasures life.
Inscribe us in the Book of Life to fulfill your will, O God, whose very being is life.)*

Sovereign, our Help,
You, who are Redeemer and our Memory,
The One who strengthens Avraham and remembers Sarah,
You* are praised, Adonai.

* *We bend our knees at baruch and bow at atah.*

Below is an example of a blessing developed to mark gender transition. Note how the language draws on the *Mi Shebeirach*, using a traditional liturgical form for lifecycle moments to create a new blessing for significant moment in the lives of many transgender Jews. Also notice the inclusion of Bilhah and Zilpah, as we also saw in the *Amidah*; it is important to integrate these changes throughout the liturgy and not just leave them to a single blessing.

RENAMING BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRANSITIONING

מִי שְׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב,
 וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רִבְקָה לֵאָה רָחֵל, בְּלֵהָה וְזִלְפָּה,
 הוּא יְבָרַךְ אֶת אַחֵינוּ הָעוֹבְרִים אֶת מַעְבְּרֵינוּ לְיַחַד גּוֹפוֹ וְנַפְשׁוֹ /
 הוּא יְבָרַךְ אֶת אֲחוֹתֵנוּ הָעוֹבְרוֹת אֶת מַעְבְּרֵיהֶן לְיַחַד גּוֹפֵיהֶן וְנַפְשֵׁיהֶן
 וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ / שְׁמָהּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל _____ .
 יְהִי רְצוֹן שְׂפִילִיחַ בְּדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּרְאֶה בְּרָכָה בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו /
 יְהִי רְצוֹן שְׂתַצְלִיחַ בְּדַרְכָּהּ וְתִרְאֶה בְּרָכָה בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיהָ,
 וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

May the One who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
 Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah,
 Bless our brother/sister, who is undergoing his/her transition to unite body and soul.
 May he/she be known among the people Israel as _____.
 May it be God's will that he/she succeed in his/her way and see blessing in all the works of
 his/her hands, and let us say, Amen.

Finally, we look at the *al hanisim* for LGBTQ Pride Shabbat, a holiday celebrated as part of our community's Jewish liturgical year:

עַל הַנְּסִים וְעַל הַפְּרָקָן, וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת, וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וּלְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה

בְּיָמֵי הַתְּנוּעָה לְזִכוֹת הָאֲזָרָח בְּאֹמְרִיקָה, קָמָה קִהְלַת הַגָּאִים לְהִלָּחֵם עַל
הַכְּבוֹד וְהַצְּדָק הַמְּגִיעִים לְכָל בְּנֵי וּבָנוֹת אָנוּשׁ, כְּשִׁמְחָלְלֵי שְׂמֵךְ/שְׂמָה,
בְּטַעֲנָתָם שֶׁהֵם שׁוֹנְאִים בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה, עֲמְדוּ נֶגֶד בְּנֵיךְ/בְּנֵיךָ וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ/וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ
לְהַשְׁפִּילָם וּלְאַסְרָם, לְהַשְׁמִידָם וּלְמַחֲקָם, וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ/וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים
עֲמַדְתָּ/תְּ לָהֶם בְּעַת צָרָתָם, רַבַּת/תְּ אֶת רִיבָם, דָּגַת/תְּ אֶת דִּינָם, חִזְקַת/תְּ
אֶת לִבָם לְעַמֵּד בְּיַחַד, לְפַקֵּחַ אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וְאֶת עֵינֵי הָעוֹלָם, לְהַבִּין שֶׁחֲרוּת
וְהַזְכוּת לְאַהֲבַת שִׁיכוֹת לְכָל יַצִּירוֹתֶיךָ/יַצִּירוֹתֶיךָ. חִזְקַת/תְּ אוֹתָם וְאוֹתָנוּ כְּדֵי
שְׁנוּבֵל לְרֵאוֹת נְפִלְאוֹת וְלַעֲשׂוֹת נְסִים, לְהִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִהְיָה וּלְאַהֲבַת אֶת מִי
שֶׁנֶּאֱהָב, לֹא בְּצֵל מְגוּרֵינוּ אֲלָא בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים, לְחַיּוֹת כִּיהוּדִים בְּחִיק הַקְּהֵלָה,
לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת אַחֲוֵינוּ וְלִשְׁיֵשׁ עֲלֵינוּ וְעֲלֶיךָ/וְעֲלֶיךָ. אֲכֵן מֵאִסּוֹ הַבוֹנִים הִיָּתָה
לְרֵאשׁ פְּנֵה. וְלֹא גִבוּשׁ וְלֹא נִכְלָם לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

We thank You for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism and for the triumphs in battle of our ancestors in other days, and in our time. In the wake of the civil rights movement lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people began to organize for the dignity and justice that all of us are due as human beings on this earth. Those who profane your name, claiming that they hate us in the name of God, rose up to criminalize us, pathologize us, brutalize us, and erase us. And You in your great mercy stood with us in the time of our troubles. You fought alongside us, vindicated us, gave us the courage to stand together, to open our eyes and the eyes of the world around us, to see that the freedom and the right to love belongs to all of your creations. You have given us the strength to witness and create wonders, to be who we are and to love whom we love not only in the safety of our homes but outside in the light of the world, to live as Jews in the embrace of community, to sanctify our unions and celebrate ourselves before each other and before You. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. May we never know shame again.

Al hanisim prayers of gratitude were created for Purim and Chanukah, neither of which is mentioned in the Five Books of the Torah. Another *al hanisim* was written in the twentieth century to celebrate Israel's independence. This prayer was written in that tradition to express gratitude for the triumph of the human spirit with divine help to overcome oppression. —Ayelet S. Cohen

Transforming ביתך: A Guide to Creating LGBTQ Ritual, Spiritual, and Pastoral Homes
Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
www.cbst.org

These are just a few of the many ways that our siddur reflects and celebrates the identities, life experiences, and families of our congregation, reflecting the multiplicity of genders and sexualities that exist in *all* congregations. The siddur has always been a dynamic, living document – and one that reflects the diversity of the Jewish community and its deepest yearnings. Expanding the language of Jewish liturgy is a profound statement of the blessings that people of a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities bring to our religious communities. We welcome you to incorporate them into your own community’s spiritual practice.

Leviticus 18:22 - It Ain't Necessarily So

By Rabbi Cecelia Beyer

The things that you're liable to read in the Bible, it ain't necessarily so. Those nice Jewish boys, the Gershwins, had it right; there is more than one way to look at a piece of biblical text. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, often interpreted to forbid homosexual intimacy, can be seen and interpreted in other ways. Join us in this text study as we look at what to do with these challenging verses, and explore the tools in our "halachic toolbox" for dealing with and reinterpreting difficult biblical verses. Together we will explore how to answer "that Leviticus question" from several interesting and diverse viewpoints.

Leviticus 18:22

Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence.

Leviticus 20:13

If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrence.

While Jewish tradition views Torah as having sanctity, Jewish tradition has never held that this sanctity precludes interpretation. Halachah, the Jewish legal "way," is based on multiple layers of interpretation. The rabbis of the Talmud, and indeed, Jewish scholars and students throughout the ages, have interpreted our sacred Torah text, arguing, disagreeing, and challenging each other over what every "jot and tittle" of the Torah means. The very fact that we hold not just every word, but every brushstroke of every *letter* to be infused with meaning *allows us* to dig deeper into meaning, reconsider, and reinterpret, and our tradition encourages us to do so. As Professor Jakob J. Petuchoswski writes, "Jews read Torah as one reads a love letter, eager to squeeze the last drop of meaning from every word." To find this meaning, we pay attention to details of grammar and language, and not just to the content of the Torah. This can be either fabulously engaging, or ridiculously infuriating, or both. Especially when, as in the case of the verses we are about to study, we may feel that arguing over semantics misses the point, and that it is precisely the *content* with which we take issue, it may seem unnecessary to examine every definite article and vowel. Yet it is this very attention to detail that allows commentators, both traditional and modern alike, to fashion their unique interpretations and to look beyond the seemingly literal meaning of the words to uncover meanings that reflect their own sense of logic and justice.

Imagine a toolkit. When drilling a hole, for example, one tries to use the smallest drill bit one needs, so as to take out only as much of the material being drilled as necessary. The tools of halachic change generally operate under a similar methodology; while we do, from time to time, need to make "fixes," we try to keep them as small as possible. There are several "halachic drill bits," which vary in size, and have been used in many instances in our halachic literature. Let's look at a few instances of how these tools for change have been utilized, and

then look at examples of each approach to "The Two Leviticus Verses."

1. Interpretation: implementing a law differently than its literal meaning.

Example 1 - The Rebellious Child - Interpreting narrowly

Deuteronomy 21:18-20 reads:

"If someone has a disobedient and defiant son, who does not obey his father or his mother and does not obey them even after they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders of his town in front of his community. They shall say to the elders of the town: 'Our son is disloyal and defiant. He does not listen to us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then the men of his town shall stone him to death."

The rabbis of the Talmud were not too keen on stoning a rebellious child to death. They could not, though, outright overrule the Torah, so instead, they interpreted the verse so narrowly as to render it impossible to fulfill. In this case, they said that the rebellious son had to have two parents of similar voice and appearance who agree to have the child executed, he had to be between thirteen and thirteen and three months, eat an enormous amount of meat and wine at one sitting, and have stolen his father's money to purchase the meal. In addition to this narrow definition of the case, the rabbi of the Talmud further state that this case never happened, and no rebellious son was ever executed. Here, the ancient rabbis were willing to say that a verse in the Torah can be so narrowly interpreted as to present a theoretical occurrence.

Example 2 - An Eye for an Eye - Interpreting non-literally

Deuteronomy 24:19-20 reads:

"And if a man inflicts a wound in his fellow, as he did, so shall be done to him: a break for a break, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; just as he will have inflicted a wound on a person, so shall be inflicted upon him."

Here, the rabbis were again uncomfortable with the literal reading of the verse. This time, however, rather than narrowly define the case, they interpreted the case verse to be a *figurative* statement, meaning that a person must reimburse the injured party the monetary amount worth the equivalence of their loss.

Our Verses - Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Two modern rabbinical interpretations seek to similarly narrow and redefine our Leviticus verses. Rabbi Steven Greenberg seeks to interpret the verses narrowly, focusing on the *nature* of the sexual relationship between two males. The verses prohibit an assertive, coercive sexual act where one is forcing himself on another. If the act is a loving, consenting one, however, it is *not* what is prohibited by these verses, but rather, is something holy. He writes:

"...the verse in Leviticus 18 might reasonably be prohibiting the use of penetrative sex as a tool of humiliation and domination while leaving open the acceptance of a committed, loving relationship between two men ... My proposed, albeit radical, interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 is then: "And a male you shall not sexually penetrate to humiliate; it is abhorrent."

Rabbi Greenberg draws on several sources, including the ones directly below, to demonstrate two things: first that when the word *mishkevei*, lyings, is used, it is used in a power-asserting way, and second, that penetrating a man as one would a woman, against his will, was seen as punishment.

Genesis 49:3-4

Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power; Unstable as water, you shall not excel; because you went up to *lyings of* your father's bed; then defiled you it; he went up to my couch.

Tanhuma Parshat Vaera 8

Pharaoh was one of four men (kings) who made themselves into gods and thus were *penetrated like women*, and they were Hiram, Nebuchadnezzar, Yoash, and Pharaoh.

Greenberg thus argues that the verse means to prohibit a narrowly defined act of violence and humiliation. "What is left open and unlegislated by these verses then are the sort of sexual relations that occur without violence or humiliation ... but are marked instead by intimacy and love, care and commitment ... in other words, holiness."

Rabbi David Greenstein similarly looks at the words in the verse and similar words used elsewhere to interpret the verse to mean something very different from what it may *seem* to mean, much like how "an eye for an eye" really means "monetary damages." To Rabbi Greenstein the word *et*, which can be a meaningless placeholder for the direct object sometimes, but can also mean "with," other times, here, has meaning. Thus, *v'et zachar* does not mean that a male is the direct object of the act in question; instead, he asserts, it means "*and with a man.*" Similarly, based on the verse below, he asserts that *mishkevei isha* does not mean "lying as one does with a woman," but rather, means more simply and directly, "lying *with* a woman." Therefore, taking these two parts together, Greenstein reads Leviticus 18:22 to mean, "And along with another male, you shall not lie in sexual intercourse with a woman." Thus, he concludes, "There is

no prohibition of homosexual acts of any kind. Rather, the Torah prohibits two males from joining together to force intercourse upon a woman.

Numbers 31:17-18

Now, therefore, slay every male among the children, and slay also every *woman who has known a man carnally* (had *mishkav zachar*); but spare every young woman who has not had carnal relations with a man.

Both Rabbis Greenberg and Greenstein interpret these verses to prohibit coercive sexual acts; Rabbi Greenberg's is homosexual, while Rabbi Greenstein's is heterosexual. Greenberg's interpretation narrows the case, while Greenstein's reads the case non-literally. Both, however, are doing what has been done for centuries: using the littlest drill bit - "interpretation" - to make halachic change.

2. Rendering a Law Procedurally Inoperable

Many times in the Talmud a biblical law was made inoperable by a procedural decision. While the sages were careful not to actually *uproot* the biblical law in these cases, the outcome was essentially the same: the law was no longer in effect.

Example: Capital Punishment

The rabbis were uncomfortable carrying out capital punishment. To do so was contingent upon the Sanhedrin meeting in their usual place for hearing cases. By moving their location, a procedural act, that could no longer impose capital punishment, because, as they understood it, a court could only do so when all twenty-three individuals in the Sanhedrin met on the Temple grounds. No longer meeting there, they could not hear capital cases.

Here the rabbis acted in such a way as to no longer be able to render capital cases, and explained their reasoning on ethical grounds. Concerned that there was a prevalence of murders about, they feared that they would be so inundated as to be unable to render fair decisions. Based on their moral and ethical concerns, they found a way to avoid carrying out the biblical commandment to implement capital punishment.

3. Akirah: Uprooting from the Torah

Yevamot 79a

R. Hiyya b. Abba replied in the name of R. Johanan: It is better that a letter be rooted out of the Torah than that the Divine name shall be publicly profaned.

Menachot 99a-b

Sometimes the cancellation of Torah is its foundation.
(on Exodus 34:1, when Moses smashes the tablets)

The largest tool in the kit is used the most infrequently, but used nonetheless. In Deuteronomy 17:11, the Torah gives the sages the authority to

administer the legal precepts found in it: "You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left." From this it is traditionally understood that our sages not only had the power and responsibility to *interpret* the law (as we've already seen), but also to *engage in legislative change*. This is a very powerful tool, and is not to be taken lightly. With great power comes great responsibility, and this tool of halachic change allows us - and also compels us - to use our *svara*, our own moral reasoning, to apply our own sense of right and wrong and our common sense when interpreting and even *changing* the law as received to us through tradition.

Built into the Jewish legal system is a mechanism through which a community could refrain from performing a positive commandment due to changed circumstances or a competing Torah precept, or through which one could "get up and do" something otherwise prohibited. In order to do this, though, two conditions need to be met: first, it must be shown that the damage done by not abrogating the norm (and legislating a change in the law) is greater than that done by creating the change, and second, *hora'at hasha'ah*, the exigencies and needs of the moment, must constitute an urgent need for the change. In other words, our current understanding of things and our sense of right and wrong, along with contemporary reasons and needs, can lead us to uproot something from the Torah.

There are several such examples in our tradition. For example, we are enjoined from the positive commandments of blowing shofar, reading Megillah, and shaking the lulav on Shabbat because we might carry these items; the precept of Shabbat trumps the commands to observe these practices. Similarly, the Torah states clearly that one should put a thread of *techeilet*, blue string, on one's *tzitzit*. Yet the rabbis determined at a certain point in time, because *techeilet* was difficult to come by and then costly, it was no longer required, because of the concern that people would end up with counterfeits or would go into financial hardship to acquire it. Here, the rabbis' concern for the well-being of the people and their hardship led to an abrogation of a halachic norm, making something otherwise required no longer required.

There are even examples of allowing acts that were otherwise forbidden; generally, a woman's testimony was not to be accepted. However, in the case of her testimony that her husband had died, which impacted her ability to remarry and thus take care of herself, the rabbis legislated that her testimony could be accepted. In 1952, the Conservative movement determined that a Kohen could marry a divorced woman, despite the biblical prohibition, because of the *exigencies of the moment*, mainly that intermarriage was thought to be such a threat, that it was necessary to allow these two Jews, who were *biblically* forbidden to each other, to marry. In our very era, a generation ago, legislative change was enacted, using the *svara* of those with halachic decision-making power, because the damage done by not enacting such legislation was perceived to be greater than that which would occur if the norm was let stand (that preventing two Jews from marrying each other was more harmful than allowing a kohen to marry a divorced woman), due to the exigencies of the hour (that the

threat of intermarriage was looming overhead).

This halachic took is not used without grave consideration, and not many have been brave enough to call for it. However, as the Talmud states in Menachot, "Sometimes the cancellation of Torah is its foundation." Even the fragments of the tablets Moses smashed were holy; upon their broken pieces a stronger, more committed people came even closer to God.

Conclusion

There are many ways that commentators and interpreters, from the ancient to the contemporary, address these two verses. The interpretations range from a complete ban on same-sex relationships, to a ban only on anal intercourse, to interpretations like Rabbi Greenstein's that the verse has nothing to do with homosexuality at all, but rather, an act of sexual assault on a woman involving two men. Many of these voices, including the contemporary ones, seek to use the smallest halachic drill bit, and *interpret* the verse narrowly, like in the case of the rebellious child, or interpret it differently than its literal meaning, like the case of "an eye for an eye." These interpretations use the time-tested techniques of grammatical study to suggest that the word *et* can signify a hidden word that allows for interpreting the verse to be about something other than same-sex loving intimacy; Rabbi Steven Greenberg suggests it adds a power imbalance to the act, while Rabbi David Greenstein suggests that it adds the word "with."

These attempts are significant and do attempt to make sense of the Torah verses without rejecting them outright; they are attempts to use the smallest drill bit possible. However, this may in fact be a case where we *do* need to rip it out entirely, because to otherwise - to drill the tiniest of holes - would be morally damaging. Perhaps here, simply *interpreting* these verses leaves space for other interpreters to still say, "No - the *peshat*, the contextual meaning of this verse actually does forbid anal intercourse." The interpretations of *et* and the game of reinterpreting the verse is not necessarily comforting from a non-orthodox queer perspective. Similarly, interpretations that say "keep it in the bedroom - we won't ask if you have anal intercourse or not," perpetuate shaming of the individuals in a same-sex relationship. Here, we are dealing with not just a theoretical legal case, but people's lives, and implications on the very essence of their souls that makes each of them who they are. Here, perhaps, more than anywhere else, is the right place to do *akirah*, and uproot this verse from the Torah. When the damage done for not abrogating a halachic norm is greater than that done by creating the change, it is a halachic imperative to implement the change. Here, too, the exigencies of the moment demand that we take this step. "It is better that a letter be rooted out of the Torah than that the Divine Name shall be publicly profaned," the Talmud teaches. Each of us is created in the Image of the Divine. To continue to shame any of us based on this verse profanes The Name of the One in Whose Image we were created. Now is the time to uproot that letter.

Sources Consulted

- The "Toolbox of Halachic Change" concept comes from a responsa, *Mamzerut*, written by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz in 2000.
- I am also grateful to the *Hineini Curriculum Resource Guide* lesson plan on these Leviticus verses, for providing excerpts of various contemporary interpretations.
- Lastly, thank you to Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen for suggesting that this may be a case where the largest, rather than the smallest, halachic drill bit is preferable, and to challenging me to engage in the halachic process and advocate for such change.

**“Behold, You are Made Holy to Me...”:
Alternative Birkat Erusin, Kiddushin & Sheva Brachot
Compiled by Rabbi Jo Hirschmann**

Birkat Erusin

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.</p> | <p>ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.</p> |
| <p>Blessed are You, Adonai Our God, King of the Universe, Who makes us holy with his mitzvot and commands us concerning forbidden relationships, and forbids us those who are betrothed, and permits us those who are married to us through chuppah and kiddushin.</p> | <p>ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על העריות, ואסר לנו את הארוסות, והתיר לנו את הנשואות לנו על ידי חופה וקידושין.</p> |
| <p>Blessed are you, Adonai, who sanctifies the people Israel through chuppah and kiddushin.</p> | <p>ברוך אתה ה' מקדש עמו ישראל על ידי חופה וקידושין.</p> |

A Different way of understanding permitted and forbidden sexual relationships

This is taken from the wedding booklet of Rabbi Jill Jacobs and Guy Austrian:

Erusin

The wedding ceremony begins with *erusin*, the formal betrothal. Shira will begin by reciting a blessing over a cup of wine, as a means of marking the sanctity of the moment.

The next blessing, *birkat erusin*, distinguishes between permitted and forbidden sexual relationships. The version of the *berakhah* that we are using reads:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו והבדילנו מן העריות והתיר זה לזו וזו לזה על ידי חופה וקידושין. ברוך אתה ה' מקדש ישראל.
 Blessed are you, Adonai our God, sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments and has separated us from unethical sexual behavior and has permitted each of these partners to the other by means of *huppah* and *kiddushin*. Blessed are you, God, who sanctifies Israel.¹

The traditional blessing refers only to a man's obligation to avoid sex with a woman to whom he is not married. In our version, we affirm a monogamous bond to each other, while understanding permitted sexual relations as those that are ethical, consensual, and loving.

A blessing for caring, consensual relationships

Rabbi Elliot Kukla created a Trans/ Gender Queer Jewish Wedding Service that can be found on the Ritualwell website. Here is his Birkat Erusin:

In a traditional wedding service birkat erusin, the blessing of betrothal, indicates that the couple is entering into a "permitted" as opposed to a "prohibited" relationship. The definition of "prohibited" relationships in traditional Jewish law includes LGBTIQ expressions of love and identity. However, I think the idea of a blessing for commitment that asserts the idea that the relationship we are celebrating is worth sanctifying is important. I wrote this alternative birkat erusin (Rabbi Justin Lewis helped me formulate the Hebrew of this blessing) to reflect the idea that lovers of all genders and sexual identities can be holy, but only caring consensual relationships are sanctified within Jewish sacred tradition.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, borey p'ri ha-gafen

Blessed are You, O Eternal our God, and Ruler of the World, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu al mitzvot beyn adam l'chaveyro, v'asar lanu nitsul v'hit'al'lut, v'hitir lanu britot ahuvim. Baruch Atah Adonai, m'kadesh amo Yisra'el al y'dey chupah.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, and Ruler of the World, who has set us apart through sacred obligations, and commanded us about the responsibilities of all humans for each other. You have forbidden exploitation and abuse, and permitted covenants of love. Blessed are You, Eternal One, who makes your people Israel (all those who struggle with God), holy with a chuppah (a canopy of love and protection.)

Partners share the wine.

See: <http://www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/intimacypartnering/Jewishweddingscommitmentceremonies/sitefolder.2005-06-07.7123390896/primaryobject.2008-02-11.6051078310>

Kiddushin

| | |
|---|---|
| The groom puts the ring on the bride's finger and says: Behold, you are made holy to me/set aside for me/betrothed to me with this ring, according to the law of Moses and Israel. | החתן שם את הטבעת על אצבע הכלה ואומר: הרי את מקודשת לי בטבעת זו כדת משה וישראל. |
|---|---|

Danya Ruttenberg has compiled a summary of possible variations on Kiddushin. This very helpful document is at:

www.danyaruttenberg.net/2006/08/04/the-kiddushin-variations

<http://alternativestokiddushin.wordpress.com/about/>

A formula for avoiding objectification/ acquisition

This is taken from Elliot Kukla's service:

Kiddushin, which literally means holiness or "setting apart", is the heart of the Jewish wedding service and signifies the sanctity of this moment. However, in traditional Jewish law the words of kiddushin lead to the legal acquisition of the bride by the groom. Modern egalitarian communities have tried to redefine these words, however I feel like the formula itself is inherently problematic. I have changed the liturgy to reflect the idea that no acquisition is taking place in an egalitarian wedding. Instead of saying: "Behold I am making you holy/set apart!" I suggest that couples say: "Behold, you are holy/set apart for me." This change in the language shifts the beloved from the object to the subject of the sentence, hence avoiding any implication of objectification!

Partners exchange an item of value and each says to the other:

To a groom: *Harai atah kudash li!*

To a bride: *Harai at kudeshet li!*

To an individual who does not wish to identify as either a bride or a groom: *Harai at kudash li!*

Translation: Behold, you are holy to me!

Some couples may choose to add the traditional words: *K'dat Moshe v'Yisrael* (according to the religion of Moses and Israel)

Kinyan as acceptance

The following is excerpted from Orrin Wolpert's wedding ceremony:

See:

<http://www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/intimacypartnering/Jewishweddingscommittmentceremonies/sitefolder.2005-06-07.7123390896/primaryobject.2009-07-13.2312998565/view?searchterm=orriin>

Kinyan is the central act of the wedding ceremony. It is also the part of the ceremony most problematic for same-sex (or egalitarian) couples, as it involves one partner acquiring the second for the price of the ring. An exchange of rings is problematic as it is commonly perceived as undoing any transfer of value and thus voiding the acquisition.

Rabbi Eyal Levinson, in his book *Same-Sex Kidushin v-Nisu'in*, proposes a different method of achieving *kinyan* based on writings in the *Tanakh*. Levinson finds numerous instances where *koneh* (the verb form of the noun *kinyan*) is used to mean things other than acquisition through purchase. The most well known case occurs in Genesis 14:19 as Moses uses the word *koneh* to describe *HaShem* as *creator* of heaven and earth. For us, the most interesting usage appears in Proverbs 4:5-7, where *koneh* describes the acquisition of wisdom through a process of acceptance. It is similarly used in Proverbs 16:16 and 23:23.

This notion of "*kinyan* through acceptance" provides an ideal model for same-sex couples, as it fulfills the requirements for marriage outlined in the *Mishneh*, while allowing each partner to acquire the other without voiding the *kinyan*. Indeed, "*kinyan* through acceptance" is about accepting the other person as he is, with all his strengths and shortcomings – and it is an act that is only strengthened when reciprocated.

[The ceremony retains the traditional liturgy.]

Sheva Berachot

a. Alternative language for *kallah* and *chatan*

Reim ha'ahuvim / reot ha'ahuvot

See the CCAR's ceremony for same-sex couples in *Kulanu: All of Us, a Program and Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Inclusion* (URJ Press)

b. From Elliot Kukla's service

The only language that I have changed is using "ahuv v'yedid" (gender neutral terms for "lover and beloved") in the place of the words "chatan v'kalah" (bride and groom). In the seventh blessing I have also changed the word "narim" (servant boys) to "chaverim" (friends/community) to reflect a queer sense of chosen family.

Adding an 8th Blessing to acknowledge incompleteness

This is taken from the Ritualwell website:

Deborah Eisenbach-Budner and her husband, in preparing for their wedding, were disturbed by the inherent heterosexism in the ceremony. They felt that they could not properly drink a full cup of wine until the union of all lovers is celebrated, until same-sex couples enjoy the legal, social, and religious privileges extended to heterosexual couples on their wedding day. They chose to add an eighth blessing to the traditional seven and to spill some wine on the ground before drinking from the cup.

You are blessed, Adonai our God, Source of Life, who enables us to strive toward the devotion of Jonathan and David, the life-sharing of Ruth and Naomi, and the commitment of Jacob and Rachel. May the time come soon when the voices of all lovers, the music of all friendships, will rise up to be heard and celebrated in the gates of our cities. May the time come soon when we can all drink a full cup of joy. Blessed are You, Source of Love.

See:

<http://www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/intimacypartnering/Jewishweddingscommitmentceremonies/sitefolder.2005-06-07.6188218104/primaryobject.2005-09-14.8227785097/view?searchterm=spilling%20out%20the%20wine>

¹ This version, which we composed, is based on the Rambam's text of *birkat erusin* (*Mishneh Torah Hilkhoh Ishut 3:24*), in which he substitutes the phrase "והבדילנו מן העריות" presumably to counter the strangeness, notes by many commentators, of making a blessing on what is forbidden. Like a number of early authorities, he also acknowledges that the Jewish people are sanctified through many means, not only *huppah* and *kiddushin*. We also drew inspiration from an egalitarian version of *birkat erusin* written by our friends Rabbis Claudia Kreiman and Ebn Leader.

Some useful background reading

Nancy H. Wiener, "Jewish Marriage Innovations and Alterations: From Commercial/Legal Transaction to Spiritual Transformation." In *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 2001, 34-50.

Dov Linzer, "Ani Li'Dodi vi'Dodi Li: Towards a More Balanced Wedding Ceremony." In *JOFA Journal*, Summer 2003, 4-7.

Appendix A

Jewish Diversity Books and GLBTQ Family Books to Have in Your Library



- I Love Jewish Faces, Debra B. Darvick
- Rebecca's Journey Home, Brynn Olenberg Sugarman
- Chloe Leiberman (Sometimes Wong), Carrie Rosten
- Always an Olivia, Carolivia Herron
- Abuelita's Secret Matzahs, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
- Jalepeno Bagels, Natasha Wing
- What Makes Someone a Jew? Lauren Siedman
- Dim Sum, Bagels and Grits: A Sourcebook for Multicultural Families, Myra Alperson
- Jewish Issues in Multiculturalism: A Handbook for Educators and Clinicians, Peter F Langman
- Mosaic of Israel's Traditions, Esther Shkalim
- In Every Tongue: The Racial & Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People, Diane Tobin, Gary A. Tobin, Scott Rubin
- One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads, Jonny Valentine
- Heather Has Two Mommies, Leslea Newman
- King and King and Family and King and King, Linda deHaan, Stern Nijland
- And Tango Makes Three, Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell



Compiled by Melissa B. Simon

Books & Articles for Adults (based on resource list from Keshet)

- Albert, Rebecca. Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition (Columbia University Press, 1997)
- Alpert, Rebecca T., Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, & Shirley Idelson (eds). Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation (Rutgers University Press, 2001)
- Beck, Evelyn Torton (ed). Mentsch: On Being Jewish and Queer (Alyson Press, 2004)
- Beck, Evelyn Torton (ed). Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology (Beacon Press, 1989)
- Beck, Gad. An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin (University of Wisconsin Press, 1999)
- Boyarin, Daniel. Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man (University of California Press, 1997)
- Boyarin, Daniel, Daniel Itzkovits, & Ann Pellegrini. Queer Theory and the Jewish Question (Columbia University Press, 2003)

Devorah, *Orthodox Lesbians: Not A Contradiction in Terms in Sappho in the Holy Land: Lesbian Existence and Dilemmas in Contemporary Israel*, Chava Frankfort-Nachmias & Erella Shadmi (State University of New York Press, 2005)

Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues* (Alyson Publications, 2004)

Felman, Jyl Lynn. *Hot Chicken Wings* (Aunt Lute Books, 1992)

Felman, Jyl Lynn. *Cravings: A Sensual Memoir* (Beacon Press, 1997)

Fink, Amir Sumakai. *Independence Park: The Lives of Gay Men in Israel* (Stanford University Press, 1999)

Fink, Amir Sumakai *Conversations: Jews and Other Differences* (Stanford University Press, 2000)

Greenberg, Steve. *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005)

Heger, Heinz. *Men with the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-And-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps* (Alyson Publications, 1994)

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie. *The Tribe of Dina* (Beacon Press, 2001)

Koren, Irit & Yedioth Ahronoth. *Aron Betokh Aron (A Closet Within a Closet)*

Lowenthal, Michael. *The Same Embrace: A Novel* (Plume, 1999)

Moore, Tracy. *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk About Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism, and Their Lives* (Cassell, 1999)

Raphael, Lev. *Dancing on Tisha B'Av* (St Martins Press, 1991)

Raphael, Lev. *Journeys & Arrivals: On Being Gay and Jewish* (Faber & Faber, 1996)

Rapoport, Rabbi Chaim. *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View* (Valentine Mitchell, 2004)

Rose, Avi & Christie Balka (eds). *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish* (Beacon Press, 1991)

Ruttenberg, Danya (ed). *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*

Schimel, Lawrence (ed). *Found Tribe: Jewish Coming Out Stories* (Sherman Asher Publishing, 2002)

Schimel, Lawrence (ed). *Kosher Meat* (Sherman Asher Publishing, 2000)

Schimel, Lawrence & Rachel Kramer Bussel. *The Burning Bush: Jewish Women Write about Sexuality*

Shneer, David & Caryn Aviv. *Queer Jews* (Routledge, 2002)

Shokeid, Moshe. *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)

Stollman, Aryeh Lev. *The Far Euphrates* (Riverhead Trade, 1998)

Walzer, Lee. *Between Sodom and Eden: A Gay Journey Through's Changing Israel* (Columbia University Press, 2000)

Appendix B

Seven Jewish Values: Guidelines for Inclusive Jewish Community From *Keshet*

***Kavod* - RESPECT** - Judaism teaches us to treat ourselves and others with respect; even the stranger is to be treated with respect. *Kavod* is a feeling of regard for the rights, dignity, feelings, wishes, and abilities of others. Teasing and name-calling disrespect and hurt everyone, so learn to respect people's differences.

***Shalom Bayit* - PEACE IN THE HOME** - Our community centers, synagogues, youth groups, and camps are often our second homes. Everyone needs to feel comfortable, safe, welcome, and respected at home. Don't ostracize those who seem different. Strive to settle disagreements in peaceful and respectful ways that allow all community members to maintain their dignity.

***B'tzelem Elohim* - IN GOD'S IMAGE** - The Torah tells us that we are all created "*b'tzelem Elohim*" (*Bereshit* 1:26), in the image of God. This is a simple and profound idea that should guide our interactions with all people. We do not know the "image of God" except as it is reflected in the different types of people we encounter in the world. If we can remember that each of us, no matter how different, is created in God's image, this idea can lead us to find the connection we have with one another and help create truly inclusive communities.

***Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Baze* - COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY** - The Jewish principle that "All Israel is responsible for one another" (*Shavuot* 39a) means that it is our responsibility to stand up for each other, especially for those who are vulnerable and cannot speak up for themselves.

***Shmirat Halashon* - GUARDING ONE'S USE OF LANGUAGE** - The Talmud warns us that we must take care in how we use language. Talking about others behind their backs, even if what we are saying is true, is prohibited. The guidelines for "*shmirat halashon*" remind us that what we say about others affects them in ways we can never predict. Words can hurt or heal depending on how we use them.

***V'ahavtah L'Reiecha Kamocha* - "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF"** - Commenting on *Leviticus* 19:18, Rabbi Hillel once stated that this was the foundational value of the Torah. It begins with loving ourselves. We must love and accept our whole selves, and in doing so create the capacity for extending that love and acceptance to others.

***Al Tifrosh Min Hatsibur* - SOLIDARITY** - "Don't separate yourself from the community" (*Pirke Avot* 2:5). When you feel different from others in your

community, don't isolate yourself. Find allies and supporters who you can talk to. If you know someone who is feeling isolated, reach out; be an ally and a friend.

Appendix C

Creating Welcoming Classrooms and Inclusive Lesson Plans: *10 Dos and Don'ts*

by Dr. David Shneer, co-founder
Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity

1. ***DO NOT assume that talking about inclusion and LGBT issues means talking about sex.*** LGBT issues come up naturally when talking about such issues as family, love, text, creation, justice, etc. Talking about the sexual aspect of what makes LGBT people or relationships different from heterosexual people and relationships *is* appropriate for students emotionally mature enough to talk about sex, and for teachers emotionally equipped to handle such open conversations. For most students, we recommend starting discussions of sexuality sometime around bar/bat mitzvah age, and always with the support and inclusion of your students' parents (either by sending letters and lesson plans home for parents to review, or, preferably, through family education programs).

2. ***DO NOT make assumptions about your students' family structures or backgrounds.*** Don't assume that all of your students were born Jewish or that their parents were born Jewish. Don't assume that all of your students have two parents (let alone just a mother and a father). Don't assume that all of your students are Ashkenazi. Let the students tell you their family narratives. You'll be surprised just how diverse the Jewish community and your classrooms have become.

3. ***DO avoid "opposites," especially in teaching Hebrew.*** Focusing on opposites, such as Hebrew learning games emphasizing "abba" and "ima" or using flash cards that show a picture of a mother and then one of a father, encourage students to think in binaries rather than in inclusive spectra. Binaries are almost always exclusive rather than inclusive and make presumptions about language and society that do not generally work in pluralistic classrooms. If you do use an "abba-ima" game, you as the teacher should be the one to break the binary by offering an example involving an "abba-abba."

4. ***DO avoid pre-packaged projects on issues of family, love, sex, or identity.*** Pre-created family trees, identity questionnaires, or other classroom materials almost always make presumptions about our students. Family trees usually presume a single mother and single father, each of whom had a single mother and a single father. Identity questionnaires about Jewishness generally presume a heterosexual family structure and/or a Jew-at-birth life narrative. Be sure to breakdown these assumptions built into many existing curricular materials. If necessary, make your own project templates that allow for more flexibility and student creativity.

5. DO teach both of the Creation stories from Genesis: the first where man and woman are created simultaneously and perhaps even in the same body (Genesis 1:27), and then the more well-known story of Eve emerging from Adam's rib. Teaching both stories, and the rabbinic commentary surrounding them, serves several functions: 1) shows that the Torah encourages interpretation rather than regulation (i.e. people not texts, regulate), 2) shows a more gender-inclusive vision of creation, 3) offers the potential of the first human being as neither male nor female, breaking down the binaries of gender.

6. DO encourage the uncomfortable laughter that can come from posing examples involving same-sex issues or gender crossing. But it is very important that the teacher be the one to offer up the uncomfortable example, not the shy student with same-sex parents, or the child who is silently questioning her or his sexuality. Examples: For a Purim play a male teacher can offer to play the role of Esther. If students respond with statements like “But boys can’t play Esther,” the teacher should acknowledge and address the discomfort of the students and ask them what it is that makes them feel uncomfortable. The students are then forced to examine inclusion and consider a range of alternatives.

7. DO include alternative interpretations for stories like Sodom and Gomorrah and the Leviticus ban on same-sex male sex. Jewish Mosaic can provide you with entire lesson plans focused on re-reading the texts that form the halachic basis for traditional Jewish understandings of homosexuality. Do not avoid these texts. Confront them directly and openly!

8. DO explore the same-gender relationships found in Jewish texts. For example, teach the David character as one who had many loves, including love for his fallen friend, Jonathan. Although David is a classic character in “heroes” curricula, his deep love for Jonathan, sexual or not, is rarely discussed. We also recommend including Ruth and Naomi in your list of heroes, and discussing the possibility of their relationship as an intimate one.

9. DO respond to seemingly homophobic, transphobic or hetero-normative comments at all times, not just when a particular kid is targeted or when the example is particularly egregious. This means inviting a discussion about disparaging comments that hurt people (talking about “*derech erez*” is a good way to frame it), not simply shutting down discussion by saying “that’s not allowed.”

10. DO include visual representations of LGBT people or families and diverse Jewish people and families in general when doing units on family, communities, or history.

11. ***DO include LGBT issues in your Israel curriculum, because it is easy to do so!*** For example, examine the role of gay and lesbian people in the military in Israel, or compare and contrast the legal rights same-sex couples have in Israel, versus the rights that same-sex couples have in the United States.

12. ***DO utilize holidays as wonderful opportunities to include LGBT issues in your curriculum.*** Hanukkah can be about different kinds of family celebrations; Purim about gender roles; Shavuot about everyone being at Sinai, etc.

OK, so our list of 10 "dos" and "don'ts" became 12, which is appropriate since being inclusive and welcoming is about avoiding assumptions, breaking down binaries, and including all visions of what it means to be and do Jewish.

About the Contributors

Rabbi Cecelia Beyer (JTS '10) serves as the Assistant Rabbi at Temple Beth Sholom in Roslyn Heights, NY and previously served as a Social Justice Rabbinical Intern and a Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. She has served as a gabbai in the Women's League Seminary Synagogue at JTS and has worked with the JTS Office of Student Life, programming events such as Israel Day, the Tu Bishvat seder, and countless Purim shpiels. She also served as co-coordinator for the JTS Women's center, and is an active member of Keshet JTS. Cecelia is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the George Washington University Law School.

Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen (Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern 2000-2002) serves as a Rabbi of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), the world's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender synagogue serving people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Prior to her ordination by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America ('02), Rabbi Cohen served communities in France, England, and her native Montreal. Rabbi Cohen worked as a translator for Dr. Yossi Beilin when he served as Israel's Minister of Justice and in his office in the Knesset. Passionately committed to progressive and feminist Judaism, she is an activist and an advocate for full inclusion and celebration of LGBT Jews in the Conservative movement and the larger Jewish world and an advocate for LGBT civil rights. Rabbi Cohen has been profiled in the New York Times and was named one of the "Heeb Hundred," *Heeb Magazine's* "hundred people you need to know about." She was honored at the 2005 Ma'yan Seder as a leading young Jewish feminist activist.

Rabbi Jo Hirschmann was ordained by Hebrew Union College in 2009. Currently, she is a chaplain resident at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, NY. She and her family are active members of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah.

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum (RRC '90), spiritual leader of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah since 1992, has been ranked by *Newsweek* as among the top 50 rabbis in America for the last four years. She has worked, organized, protested, lectured and published widely and received numerous awards for her leadership. Rabbi Kleinbaum served on the board of GMHC and was a pioneer in pastoral work with PWAs. She was the National Co-Chair of Rabbis for Human Rights – North America and International Co-Chair for World Pride in Jerusalem. Rabbi Kleinbaum has introduced the widely acclaimed music program at CBST, and led the transformation of liturgy resulting in CBST's recent trans-inclusive, LGBT-positive and even straight-friendly Prayer Book. Rabbi Kleinbaum also started the program for children at CBST, and a collection of her sermons has been published. Rabbi Kleinbaum now sits on Mayor Bloomberg's Commission for LGBTQ Runaway and Homeless Youth and is on the New York City Police Department's LGBT Advisory Committee. As an advocate for people of color,

women, gays and lesbians, immigrants and Palestinians, she has been jailed, arrested, vilified, and lauded, all with equal aplomb.

Joy Ladin is the David and Ruth Gottesman Professor English at Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University, and (as far as she knows) the first openly transgendered employee of a modern Orthodox Jewish institution. Her collection of original psalms has just been published by Wipf & Stock; her other books of poetry include *Transmigration*, *The Book of Anna* and *Alternatives to History*.

Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow (Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern 1995-96, JTS '96) serves as the Director of Religious and Chaplaincy Services at Hebrew SeniorLife in Boston. In this position she established the first ACPE accredited Jewish geriatric CPE program and also helped launch a palliative care team serving Hebrew Rehabilitation Center, a 750 bed chronic care and acute care hospital.

Rabbi Melissa B. Simon previously served as the Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern, The Director of Children's Education, and a Social Justice Rabbinic Intern at CBST. Melissa was ordained at HUC-JIR ('10) in New York City where she received her Masters in Jewish Education and a Masters in Hebrew Literature. Melissa served as the Student Rabbi at Denison University in Granville, Ohio and at Temple Beth Sholom in Ishpeming, Michigan and as a Chaplain at New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA, she is a passionate advocate for social justice, particularly concerning Israel, AIDS education, Queer rights and Women's rights. Melissa lives in New York City with her partner, Molly. Melissa now serves as the Director of Lifelong Learning at Shir Tikvah in Minneapolis.

Alex Weissman is the Social Justice Coordinator at CBST where he works with members on congregational-based community organizing to develop and run campaigns. His work also includes transforming Judaism and Jewish institutions to recognize, affirm, and celebrate trans and queer Jewish communities.

Rabbi Alissa Wise (RRC '09) is the Program Director at Ma'yan, a non-profit think tank focused on the cultural challenges and identity issues that Jewish teen girls face. Rabbi Wise graduated from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in June 2009. Before training for the rabbinate, Alissa worked as a tenant organizer with the Fifth Avenue Committee in Brooklyn and was a participant in AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps. As a rabbinical student she worked as a chaplain at Planned Parenthood, authored a pastoral counseling curriculum on queer reproductive rights and loss, and was the Education Director at both String of Pearls Hebrew School in Princeton, New Jersey, and Jews for Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ) in New York City. Alissa is currently also the Coordinator of Mussar and Social Justice with the Mussar Leadership Program in Philadelphia.

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