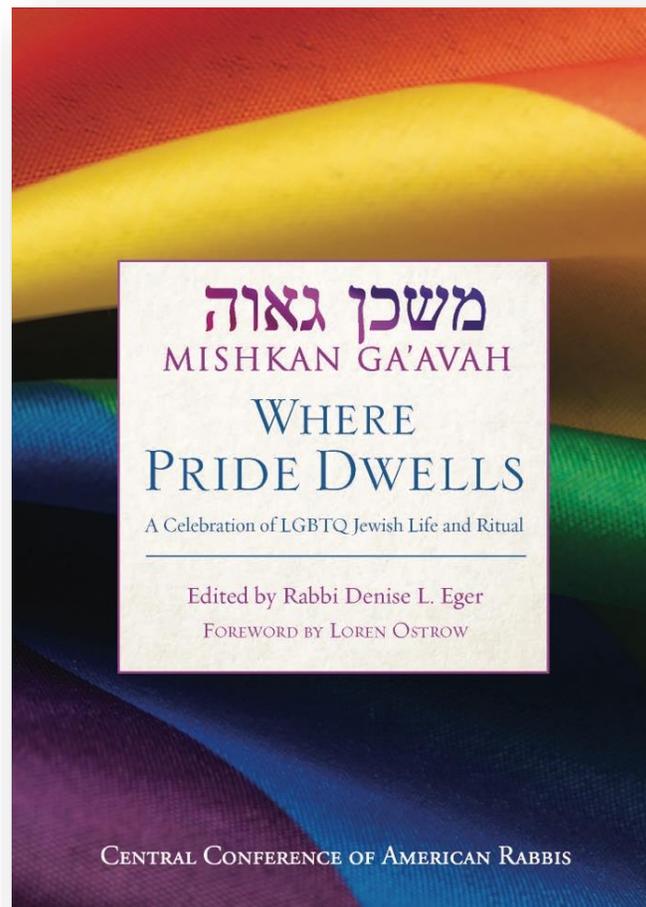


# *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells* A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life and Ritual



## Study and Discussion Guide

***Rabbi Denise L. Eger and Rabbi Eleanor B. Steinman, RJE***

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

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## Introduction

The book *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells: A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life and Ritual* centers the voice and experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews. This collection of prayers, reflections, ceremonies, rituals, and essays widens the circle of Jewish religious experience. It will help people who have found themselves outside the mainstream or who have wondered if their Jewish experience could be honored as authentic breathe a sigh of relief. Yes, LGBTQ+ Jews can pray with intentionality and authority; our experiences and worldviews can be given a voice in Jewish worship. The first book of its kind, *Mishkan Ga'avah* is not just a collection of prayers; it is the answer to many prayers.

*Mishkan Ga'avah* is an expression of queer Jewish spirituality. The book is inspired by the Jewish practice of making the mundane holy. What is the prayer for affirming a queer person's humanity each day? What is the prayer marking a transgender person's name change? How do we celebrate queer relationships with our unique perspective? *Mishkan Ga'avah* seeks to smash the binary, heteronormative aspects of Judaism. With prayers for affirming one's queer Jewish spirit, for giving a Jewish voice to LGBTQ+ sacred moments and life cycle ceremonies, *Mishkan Ga'avah* broadens the definition of Jewish practice.

*Mishkan Ga'avah* may be new terrain for those unfamiliar with the struggles and history of LGBTQ+ people. Such readers may have questions about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in Judaism. The book gives readers permission to explore new ideas about inclusion and acceptance; about how we can actually honor all of God's people and creation; and about how to ensure that Jewish LGBTQ+ voices are heard.

*Mishkan Ga'avah* breathes new life into age-old Jewish liturgical formats. It encourages readers to be playful, creative, and innovative in addressing the holy and the Divine. The book teaches about LGBTQ+ Jewish history which may be unfamiliar to many. And finally, *Mishkan Ga'avah* is a prayer book with a theological framework at its core that expresses contemporary Reform Jewish ideology and values.

To explore these questions and to provide tools for Jewish communities and communal leaders, we have created this study guide in the hopes that *Mishkan Ga'avah* can be used to teach and enrich all of our Jewish lives. The lessons are targeted to those high-school aged and up, including college students and adults. Some of the lesson plans introduce the idea of inclusion around LGBTQ+ issues. Others take a deeper dive into questions of God, prayer, and Torah. *Mishkan Ga'avah* is versatile both as a siddur for personal prayer, communal prayer, and as an educational tool. We hope this study guide will help facilitate a deeper understanding of the LGBTQ+ Jewish experience. And we hope that it will foster opportunities for communities and congregations to learn how to be fully inclusive and welcoming, by weaving in the Jewish LGBTQ+ voice into the mainstream of our Jewish world.

Rabbi Denise L. Eger and Rabbi Eleanor B. Steinman, RJE

**Rabbi Denise L. Eger** is the founding rabbi of Congregation Kol Ami, West Hollywood's Reform Synagogue, and was the first openly LGBTQ+ person to be President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. She was a founding President of the Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Interfaith Clergy Association and the first woman to be elected President of the Southern California Board of Rabbis. She is the editor of *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells*.

**Rabbi Eleanor B. Steinman, RJE**, serves as visiting associate rabbi of Temple Beth Shalom in Austin, Texas. Rabbi Steinman has also served congregations in California and Canada. She received her rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in 2008 and her master's in Jewish education from the Rhea Hirsch School in 2012; she is currently a doctoral student at the University of Southern California.

## To the Teacher

Dear teacher,

Welcome to the study guide for *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells: A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life and Ritual*. We have crafted lessons for teenagers or adult learners that utilize this prayer book and expound upon the themes contained within it. The overarching message we seek to convey is that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) Jews are a sacred part of the Jewish people. This guide facilitates congregational/community education about LGBTQ+ Jewish life and helps students understand how new liturgy is created.

This study guide contains four lesson plans. Each one includes learning objectives, suggested timing, an activity, text study, and discussion questions. While we recommended presenting them in the order in which they appear, you may decide that something else works best for your learners. We have provided links to a variety of multimedia resources. If you know of others, feel free to share those as well. Keep in mind that each lesson imparts the enduring understanding that LGBTQ+ Jews are a sacred part of the Jewish people.

Please note that these lesson plans are not fully scripted. We anticipate you will use previous knowledge of facilitation and liturgy to create meaningful learning experiences for your students. If you do need more resources, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

*Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells* provides innumerable ways for people of faith to engage with the LGBTQ+ experience. The book gives voice to a vital part of our Jewish community, and these lessons are designed to share that voice with your entire organization/congregation.

*L'shalom,*

Rabbi Eleanor B. Steinman, RJE and Rabbi Denise L. Eger

## Lesson One: Gender in Judaism

### **Objectives**

- Learners will be able to describe Jewish views about gender.
- Learners will be able to explain the differences between gender and sexuality.
- Learners will understand that genitalia do not determine gender and how Jewish texts affirm this.

### **Agenda**

5 minutes	Set induction
20 minutes	The Gender Unicorn
45 minutes	Text study and discussion
15 minutes	Wrap-up and concluding thoughts

### **Set Induction<sup>1</sup>**

Show [this two minute video<sup>2</sup>](#) about pronouns produced by the Union for Reform Judaism.

Invite learners to introduce themselves and include their pronouns. (If learners have nametags, invite them to add their pronouns.)

### **The Gender Unicorn**

Provide each learner with a copy of [this page<sup>3</sup>](#) in color (use the interactive link to the left).

Give the learners a few minutes to quietly read it.

Facilitator leads a walkthrough of this sheet. The information below is from Trans Student Educational Resources. Please refer to that site and to the [Definitions page<sup>4</sup>](#) for more resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Set induction is an educational technique used to prepare students for a lesson.

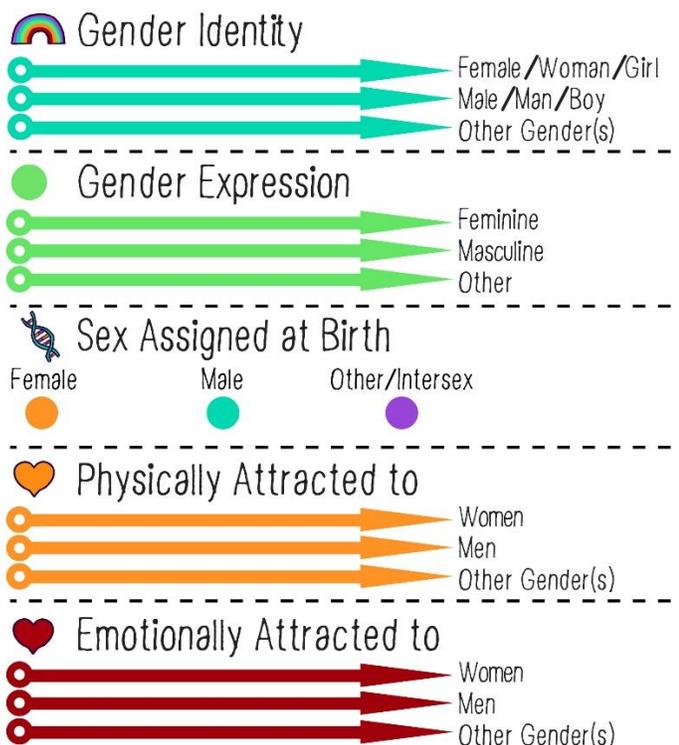
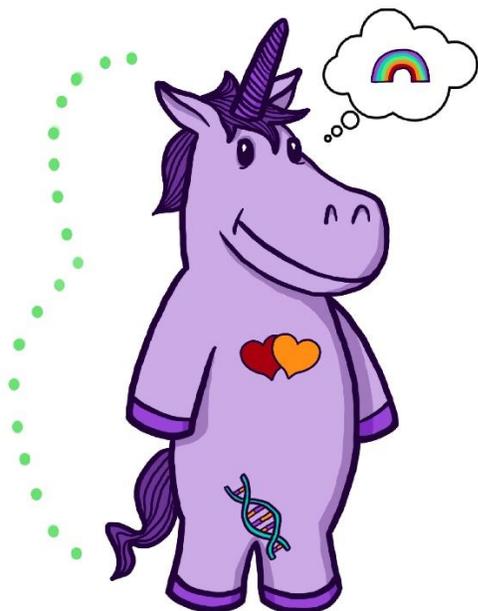
<sup>2</sup> <https://vimeo.com/429390169>

<sup>3</sup> <https://transstudent.org/gender/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://transstudent.org/about/definitions/>

# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

**Gender identity:** One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). Everyone has a gender identity, including you. For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their own internal sense of gender identity are not the same. Female, woman, and girl and male, man, and boy are also not necessarily linked to each other but are just six common gender identities.

Pointing to the heart two hearts, we see Physically Attracted To and Emotionally Attracted To.

**Physically Attracted To:** Sexual orientation. It is important to note that sexual and romantic/emotional attraction can be from a variety of factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth.

**Emotionally Attracted To:** Romantic/emotional orientation. It is important to note that sexual and romantic/emotional attraction can be from a variety of factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth. There are other types of attraction related to gender such as aesthetical or platonic. These are simply two common forms of attraction.

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" because of the vagueness of the definition of sex and its place in transphobia.<sup>5</sup> Chromosomes are frequently used to determine sex from prenatal karyotyping (although not as often as genitalia). Chromosomes do not always determine genitalia, sex, or gender.

**Gender Expression/Presentation:** The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.

Many people were curious if agender and asexual people were included in this graphic. In short, they are. For example, identifying on the left of the sexuality spectra would indicate no attraction. Each arrow is a sliding scale, not a checkbox.

**Facilitator takes questions from learners.**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.autostraddle.com/its-time-for-people-to-stop-using-the-social-construct-of-biological-sex-to-defend-their-transmisogyny-240284/>

## Text Study and Discussion

(This dialogue<sup>6</sup> between Dr. Judith Plaskow and Rabbi Elliot Rose Kukla serves as one source of background information for this conversation about gender from the classical texts of Jewish tradition.)

### GENESIS 1:26–27

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרַדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה  
וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And God created the *adam* in God's own image, in the image of God, God created him; male through female God created them.

"The midrash, classical Jewish exegesis, adds that the *adam harishon*, the first human being formed in God's likeness, was an androgynous, an intersex person. Hence, our tradition teaches that all bodies and genders are created in God's image whether we identify as men, women, intersex, or something else."—Rabbi Elliot Kukla, 2007<sup>7</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. How many genders do you observe in these verses?
2. What does it mean to be created in God's image? What does it say about human beings? What does it say about God?
3. How does it change the creation narrative to understand that the first being was androgynous? Why does this matter?

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<sup>6</sup> <http://shma.com/remapping-the-road-from-sinai/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://forward.com/news/11403/reform-devises-sex-change-blessings-00319/>

## EXODUS 3:13-14

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הֲיֵה אֲנֹכִי בְּאֵל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי מַה־שְּׁמוֹ מַה אֶמַּר אֲלֵהֶם:

Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is God's name?' what shall I say to them?"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" [I will be what I will be]. God continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"

### Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, how does God identify Godself to Moses?
2. If we are created in God's image, what does "I will be what I will be" mean in how we understand ourselves and how we come to know others?

משנה ביכורים ד'א'-ג'

(א) אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס יֵשׁ בּוֹ דְרָכִים שְׁוֶה לְאֲנָשִׁים, וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ דְרָכִים שְׁוֶה לְנָשִׁים, וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ דְרָכִים שְׁוֶה לְאֲנָשִׁים וְנָשִׁים, וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ דְרָכִים אִינוֹ שְׁוֶה לֹא לְאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא לְנָשִׁים:

(ב) כִּיצַד שְׁוֶה לְאֲנָשִׁים: מְטִמָּא בְּלֶבֶן כְּאֲנָשִׁים, וְזוֹקֵק לִיבּוֹם כְּאֲנָשִׁים, וּמִתְעַטֵּף וּמִסְתַּפֵּר כְּאֲנָשִׁים, וְנוֹשֵׂא אֶבֶל לֹא נִשְׂא כְּאֲנָשִׁים, וְחָיֵב בְּכָל מִצְוֹת הָאֲמּוּרוֹת בְּתוֹרַה כְּאֲנָשִׁים:

(ג) כִּיצַד שְׁוֶה לְנָשִׁים: מְטִמָּא בְּאֶדָם כְּנָשִׁים, וְאִינוֹ מִתְיַחַד עִם הָאֲנָשִׁים כְּנָשִׁים, וְאִינוֹ עוֹבֵר עַל "בֵּל תִּקְרֶי" וְלֹא עַל "בֵּל תִּשְׁחִית" וְלֹא עַל "בֵּל תִּטְמֵא לַמִּתִּים" כְּנָשִׁים, וּפְסוּל מִן הָעֲדוּת כְּנָשִׁים, וְאִינוֹ גִבְעַל בְּעֵבֶרָה כְּנָשִׁים, וְנִפְסַל מִן הַכְּהֵנָה כְּנָשִׁים:

*Mishnah Bikurim 4:1–3*<sup>8</sup>

(1) An *Androginus* [an intersex person, who has both male and female reproductive organs] is similar to men in some ways and to women in other ways, in some ways to both, and in some ways to neither.

(2) In what ways are they similar to men? Like a man, they are considered unclean through secretions; are required to perform *yibum* [levirate marriage] like a man; dress and cut hair like a man; marry others and are not married off, like a man; and are obliged to perform all the commandments in the Torah, like a man.

(3) In what ways are they like women? They cause impurity with red discharge, like women; and they must not be secluded with men, like women; and they don't make their brother's wife liable for *yibum*, like women; and they do not share [in the inheritance] with the sons, like women; and they cannot eat most holy sacrifices, like women. At their birth their mother counts the blood of her impurity like [they do when they give birth to a] girl; and they are disqualified from being a witness, like women. If they had illicit intercourse, they are disqualified from eating *t'rumah* [an offering], like women.

The following are terms for gender diversity as used in classical Jewish texts as taught by Rabbi Elliot Kukla on TransTorah:<sup>9</sup>

- **Zachar / זָכָר**: This term is derived from the word for a pointy sword and refers to a phallus. It is usually translated as “male” in English.
- **N'keivah / נְקִיבָה**: This term is derived from the word for a crevice and probably refers to a vaginal opening. It is usually translated as “female” in English.
- **Androgynous / אַנְדְּרוֹגִינּוּס**: A person who has both “male” and “female” sexual characteristics. 149 references in Mishnah and Talmud (1<sup>st</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE); 350 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes (2<sup>nd</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries CE).
- **Tumtum / תּוּמְטוּם**: A person whose sexual characteristics are indeterminate or obscured. 181 references in Mishnah and Talmud; 335 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.
- **Ay'lonit / אַיִלּוֹנִית**: A person who is identified as “female” at birth but develops “male” characteristics at puberty and is infertile. 80 references in Mishnah and Talmud; 40 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.
- **Saris / סָרִיס**: A person who is identified as “male” at birth but develops “female” characteristics at puberty and/or is lacking a penis. A *saris* can be “naturally” a *saris* (*saris*

<sup>8</sup> Translation adapted from [https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah\\_Bikkurim.4?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Bikkurim.4?lang=bi)

<sup>9</sup> [http://transtorah.org/PDFs/Classical\\_Jewish\\_Terms\\_for\\_Gender\\_Diversity.pdf](http://transtorah.org/PDFs/Classical_Jewish_Terms_for_Gender_Diversity.pdf)

*hamah*) or become one through human intervention (*saris adam*). 156 references in Mishnah and Talmud; 379 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. What are the six genders found in the Mishnah?
2. How does this multiplicity of genders support the understanding of Genesis 1:26–27?
3. How does learning about the multiplicity of genders in our tradition support non-binary and trans acceptance in Jewish life today?

### ***Wrap-up and Concluding Thoughts***

Provide learners with private writing time to reflect on one thing they learned today, one thing that surprised them, and one thing they want to know more about. After five minutes of writing time, ask for a volunteer to share any of their responses; no one is required to share!

## Lesson 2: Reform Jewish History

### **Objectives**

- Students will be able to understand the evolution of the Reform Jewish Movement's organizational approach to LGBTQ+ people.
- Students will be able to identify key moments in LGBTQ+ Reform Jewish history.
- Students will understand an interpretation of Genesis 1:27 that affirms the humanity of LGBTQ+ people.

### **Timeline**

15 minutes	Set induction
30 minutes	Activity
30 minutes	Share-out and discussion
15 minutes	Wrap-up, questions, and concluding thoughts

### **Set Induction**

Present the text below to learners. As a group, identify the years that the institutions of Reform Judaism made statements about issues that matter to LGBTQ+ people [1965, 1973, 1977, 2000]. As a group, recall other events that happened those years to understand the wider cultural context.

The Reform Movement has been an advocate of gay and lesbian rights since 1965, when the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) passed a resolution calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality. In 1977, the then UAHC (now URJ) and the CCAR passed their first resolutions dealing with this issue, calling for human rights for homosexuals. Since then, the URJ, CCAR, WRJ, CSA, RAC, and NFTY have passed resolutions dealing with issues specific to Reform Judaism, such as inclusion of gays and lesbians in the rabbinate and cantorates, as well as national issues, such as support for civil marriage, elimination of discrimination within the Armed Forces and the Boy Scouts, and support for explicit workplace non-discrimination and civil rights legislation. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual and Transgender outreach and inclusion has been of great importance to the Reform Movement. The UAHC admitted its first special outreach congregation to gays and lesbians in 1973. In the year 2000, the CCAR issued a resolution of support on officiating at same gender marriage and created materials for rabbis. The URJ and CCAR and the RAC filed amicus briefs for marriage equality in the Supreme Court and most recently has lobbied Congress on including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in legislation at the federal level for protecting jobs and housing. The RAC currently is doing major work on protecting transgender rights in the military. And Reform congregations have gathered together in states to fight statewide anti-LGBTQ legislation.

—Rabbi Denise L. Eger

***For context, here are some other things that were happening in the world at the same time:***

**1965**—Dr. King leads the march from Selma to Montgomery, the Saint Louis Arch is completed, the first miniskirt is introduced in London, *Dr. Zhivago* premieres

**1973**—Aerosmith releases their debut album, *Roe v. Wade* is overturned by the Supreme Court, Pink Floyd releases *Dark Side of the Moon*, *The Godfather* wins best picture at the Academy Awards, a peace accord is reached in Vietnam and the last American soldier departs, the Watergate scandal begins.

**1977**—Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* is released, the rings of Uranus are discovered, the Likud party led by Menachem Begin wins Israel's election, the first Apple II series and the first Atari go on sale, *Saturday Night Fever* is released.

**2000**—The state of Vermont legalizes same-sex unions, the Sony PlayStation 2 is released, the summer Olympics take place in Sydney, the first crew to live on the International Space Station arrives, the U.S. Supreme Court determines the outcome of the presidential election, mad cow disease causes alarm throughout Europe.

Note: This part of the lesson can alternatively be done with the [GLSEN LGBTQ History Timeline](#).<sup>10</sup>

### **Activity**

Break the class into small groups. Each group will spend time studying a text (either UAHC Resolution on Gay and Lesbian Jews, CCAR Resolution on Gay and Lesbian Marriage, CCAR Resolution on Same-Gender Officiation, or joint CCAR/URJ Resolution on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-conforming People) and discussing the three questions below. Each group then presents a summary of the text and their responses to their peers.

1. What issue with regard to people who are LGBTQ+ does the text address? Why do you think each was a pressing issue at the time?
2. What text(s) from tradition (Torah, Midrash, Jewish values) form the basis for this statement by the Reform Jewish Movement? If no texts are directly cited, what texts do you think are inferred?
3. What institutional changes are recommended by the text? Do you observe results of any of these changes in our setting (camp, congregation, or school) today?

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBTQ-History-Timeline-References.pdf>

## Resolution on Gay and Lesbian Jews Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1989

In North America today, it is estimated that 100,000 Reform Jews—and 500,000 members of the larger Jewish community—are gay or lesbian.

Over the last fifteen years, the UAHC has admitted to membership four synagogues with an outreach to gay and lesbian Jews. Hundreds of men and women who once felt themselves alienated from Judaism and unwelcome in mainstream congregations have joined these synagogues, adding their strength and commitment to our religious community.

In 1977, the UAHC General Assembly called for an end to discrimination against homosexuals, and expanded upon this in 1987 by calling for full inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews in all aspects of synagogue life.

While that resolution urged that congregations not discriminate in employment, it did not address rabbinic employment, pending the report of the CCAR *ad hoc* Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate. The CCAR Committee continues its work, and we eagerly await its report.

Within the larger context of UAHC congregational life, however, we have yet to shed the destructive anti-gay and anti-lesbian prejudices and stereotypes that preclude a genuine embrace of the heart.

Our union of congregations must be a place where loneliness and suffering and exile end, where gay and lesbian Jews can know that they are accepted on terms of visibility, not invisibility; that we place no limits on their communal or spiritual aspirations.

THEREFORE, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations resolves to:

1. Reaffirm its 1987 resolution and call upon all departments of the UAHC and our member congregations to fully implement its provisions.
2. Embark upon a movement-wide program of heightened awareness and education to achieve the fuller acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews in our midst.
3. Urge our member congregations to welcome gay and lesbian Jews to membership, as singles, couples, and families.
4. Commend the CCAR for its sensitive and thorough efforts to raise the consciousness of the rabbinate regarding homosexuality. We urge the CCAR to pursue its own mandate with vigor and complete its tasks as soon as possible in order to respond to the communal and spiritual aspirations of gay and lesbian Jews.

## **Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on Gay and Lesbian Marriage Adopted at the 107th Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, March 1996**

### **Background:**

Consistent with our Jewish commitment to the fundamental principle that we are all created in the divine image, the Reform Movement has “been in the vanguard of the support for the full recognition of equality for lesbians and gays in society.” In 1977, the CCAR adopted a resolution encouraging legislation which decriminalizes homosexual acts between consenting adults, and prohibits discrimination against them as persons, followed by its adoption in 1990 of a substantial position paper on homosexuality and the rabbinate. Then, in 1993, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations observed that “committed lesbian and gay couples are denied the benefits routinely accorded to married heterosexual couples.” The UAHC resolved that full equality under the law for lesbian and gay people requires legal recognition of lesbian and gay relationships.

In light of this background,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis support the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the CCAR oppose governmental efforts to ban gay and lesbian marriage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this is a matter of civil law, and is separate from the question of rabbinic officiation at such marriages.

## Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on Same-Gender Officiation Adopted at the 111th Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, March 2000

### Background:

Over the years, the Central Conference of American Rabbis has adopted a number of positions on the rights of homosexuals, on homosexuality in the rabbinate, and advocating changes in civil law pertaining to same-gender relationships. In 1977, the CCAR adopted a resolution calling for legislation decriminalizing homosexual acts between consenting adults, and calling for an end to discrimination against gays and lesbians. The resolution called on Reform Jewish organizations to develop programs to implement this stand.

In 1990, the CCAR endorsed the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate. This position paper urged that “all rabbis, regardless of sexual orientation, be accorded the opportunity to fulfill the sacred vocation that they have chosen.” The committee endorsed the view that “all Jews are religiously equal regardless of their sexual orientation.” The committee expressed its agreement with changes in the admissions policies of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, which stated that the “sexual orientation of an applicant [be considered] only within the context of a candidate’s overall suitability for the rabbinate,” and reaffirmed that all rabbinic graduates of the HUC-JIR would be admitted into CCAR membership upon application. The report described differing views within the committee as to the nature of *kiddushin*, and deferred the matter of rabbinic officiation.

A 1996 resolution resolved that the CCAR “support the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage,” and voiced opposition to governmental efforts to ban gay and lesbian marriages. In addition to these resolutions, two CCAR committees have addressed the question of same-gender officiation. The CCAR Committee on Responsa addressed the question of whether homosexual relationships can qualify as *kiddushin* (which it defined as “Jewish marriage”). By a committee majority of 7 to 2, the committee concluded that “homosexual relationships, however exclusive and committed they may be, do not fit within this legal category; they cannot be called *kiddushin*. We do not understand Jewish marriage apart from the concept of *kiddushin*.” The committee acknowledged its lack of consensus on this question.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality issued a report in 1998 which included its conclusion, by a committee majority of 11 with 1 abstention, that “*k’dushah* may be present in committed same-gender relationships between two Jews and that these relationships can serve as the foundation of stable Jewish families, thus adding strength to the Jewish community.” The report called upon the CCAR to support all colleagues in their choices in this matter, and to develop educational programs.

### RESOLUTION

WHEREAS justice and human dignity are cherished Jewish values, and

WHEREAS, in March of 1999 the Women's Rabbinic Network passed a resolution urging the Central Conference of American Rabbis to bring the issue of honoring ceremonies between two Jews of the same-gender to the floor of the convention plenum, and

WHEREAS, the institutions of Reform Judaism have a long history of support for civil and equal rights for gays and lesbians, and WHEREAS, North American organizations of the Reform Movement have passed resolutions in support of civil marriage for gays and lesbians, therefore

WE DO HEREBY RESOLVE, that the relationship of a Jewish, same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual, and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we recognize the diversity of opinions within our ranks on this issue. We support the decision of those who choose to officiate at rituals of union for same-gender couples, and we support the decision of those who do not, and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon the CCAR to support all colleagues in their choices in this matter, and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that we also call upon the CCAR to develop both educational and liturgical resources in this area.

## **Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-conforming People**

**Submitted by the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism  
Central Conference of American Rabbis/Union for Reform Judaism,  
2015**

### **Background**

Throughout the Reform Movement's history, we have worked tirelessly to fight discrimination, support equality, and strengthen the rights of minorities and women. In 1977, both the Union for Reform Judaism and the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed resolutions affirming "the rights of homosexuals." We welcome and celebrate people of all sexual orientations in our congregations and oppose laws that fail to uphold principles of equality for all. North American culture and society have, in general, become increasingly accepting of people who are gay, lesbian, and bisexual, yet too often transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are forced to live as second-class citizens.

"Transgender" is a term for people whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Gender non-conforming is a term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

Although much work remains to be done to fully overcome discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people, members of the transgender and gender non-conforming communities face particular ongoing legal and cultural bigotry and discrimination. Transgender individuals are often unable to easily update their government documents, such as passports and birth certificates, in order to reflect their correct gender and name. As a result, transgender individuals can be denied the right to vote because their documents do not match their gender. In Canada, six provinces (Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland) and one territory (Northwest Territories) offer protections based on gender identity yet a federal bill has long been stalled in Parliament. In both the U.S. and Canada, transgender individuals experience frequent incidents of hate crimes and harassment, and often face discrimination in employment, healthcare, and housing. Simply choosing their preferred pronoun or accessing facilities based on their gender identity without facing others' objections or fearing violence can be a challenge for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The combined impact of all of these factors has contributed to higher than average poverty, homelessness, and suicide rates among transgender people.

Efforts within the Reform Movement over the past decade reflect our commitment to greater inclusivity of transgender and gender non-conforming people. In 2003, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion admitted its first openly transgender rabbinical student. Recently, both NFTY and URJ camps have taken steps to become more inclusive of transgender participants in their material, application forms, facilities and programs. In 2015, the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Rabbinical Placement Commission updated its policies to require that congregations and other organizations seeking a rabbi commit to including in their search all candidates regardless of gender identity. The Reform Movement has also built partnerships with organizations like Keshet ([www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org)), to create and improve resources for our

congregations, institutions, affiliates, and programs. Despite this important progress, there is more work to be done to make our Movement and our society fully inclusive of transgender and gender non-conforming people.

Two key Reform responsa highlight the imperative toward full inclusion of transgender people in accordance with Jewish tradition. A 1990 responsum (CCAR 5750.8) affirmed that being transgender alone is not a basis to deny someone conversion to Judaism. A 1978 responsum affirmed that a rabbi may officiate at the wedding of two Jews if one partner has transitioned to the gender with which they identify, as opposed to the one they were assigned at birth ("Marriage After a Sex-change Operation" in *American Reform Responsa*, Vol. LXXXVIII, 1978, pp. 52–54). These responsa reflect biblical tradition that teaches us that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim*—in the Divine image. As it says in Genesis 1:27, "And God created humans in God's image, in the image of God, God created them." From this bedrock principle stems our commitment to defend any individual from the discrimination that arises from ignorance, fear, insensitivity, or hatred. Knowing that members of the transgender and gender non-conforming communities are often singled out for discrimination and even violence, we are reminded of the Torah's injunction, "do not stand idly while your neighbor bleeds" (Leviticus 19:16).

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Union for Reform Judaism:**

1. Affirms its commitment to the full equality, inclusion and acceptance of people of all gender identities and gender expressions;
2. Affirms the right of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to be referred to by their name, gender, and pronoun of preference in our congregations, camps, schools, and other Reform affiliated organizations;
3. Encourages Reform congregations, congregants, clergy, camps, institutions and affiliates, including NFTY, to continue to advocate for the rights of people of all gender identities and gender expressions;
4. Urges the adoption and implementation of legislation and policies that prevent discrimination based on gender identity and expression, and that require individuals to be treated equally under the law as the gender by which they identify. This includes establishing the right to change without undue burden their identification documents to reflect their gender and name and ensuring equal access to medical and social services;
5. Calls on the U.S. and Canadian governments at all levels to review and revise all laws and policies to ensure full equality and protections for people of all gender identities and expressions;
6. Urges Reform Movement institutions to begin or continue to work with local and national Jewish transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual organizations to create inclusive and welcoming communities for people of all gender identities and expressions and to spread awareness and increase knowledge of issues related to gender identity and expression. These activities may include cultural competency trainings for religious school staff, the new congregational resource guide on transgender inclusion being created by the Religious

Action Center, education programs on gender identity and expression, and sermons on the topic of gender identity and gender expression;

7. Recommends URJ congregations and Reform Movement institutions, facilities, and events ensure, to the extent feasible, the availability of gender-neutral restrooms and other physical site needs that ensure dignity and safety for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals;
8. Urges Reform Movement institutions to review their use of language in prayers, forms, and policies in an effort to ensure people of all gender identities and gender expressions are welcomed, included, accepted and respected. This includes developing statements of inclusion and/or non-discrimination policies pertaining to gender identity and gender expression, the use when feasible of gender-neutral language, and offering more than two gender options or eliminating the need to select a gender on forms; and
9. Will work in collaboration with other Reform Movement institutions to create ritual, programmatic and educational materials that will empower such institutions to be more inclusive and welcoming of people of all gender identities and expressions.

### **Share-out and Discussion**

Invite each group to share their answers to the questions and encourage other groups to ask clarification questions.

Some questions for group discussion (you are of course encouraged to ask your own!):

1. After hearing our group presentations what do you notice about these statements from our Reform Jewish Movement?
2. How do these statements reflect what you know about our values as Jews?
3. Why is it important that the Reform Movement vote on resolutions and issue statements like these?

### **Wrap-up, Questions, and Concluding Thoughts**

Today in our time together we reviewed a few of the major statements from the Reform Jewish Movement about LGBTQ+ inclusion in Jewish life. Let's take a look now at the first mention of the human being from Genesis and see what we notice:

#### **GENESIS 1:27**

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

So God created the human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What do you notice about this text?
2. How would you characterize the first human being on earth based upon this verse?
3. How might your interpretation support LGBTQ+ people in our Jewish community?

## Lesson Three: An LGBTQ+ History Lesson: Understanding the Evolution of a Movement

### **Objectives**

- Students will be able to articulate the key moments of twentieth and twenty-first century LGBTQ+ history
- Students will be able to name three LGBTQ+ historical figures that played a role in advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights

### **Agenda**

10 minutes	Set induction
15 minutes	Timeline activity
30 minutes	Small group work
20 minutes	Share-out
15 minutes	Wrap-up, questions, and concluding thoughts

### **Set Induction**

Show video clip: [Troy Perry, The Lavender Effect](#)<sup>11</sup>

This is a five-minute clip of Rev. Troy Perry, the founder of the Metropolitan Community Churches and the first Gay Pride parade. Rev. Perry discusses his pioneering work in LGBTQ+ religious inclusion.

### **Discussion questions following clip**

1. Did anything surprise you about what Rev. Perry said?
2. What is the conflict that Rev. Perry describes between his church and his identity? How does he initially try to resolve this dilemma?
3. Why do you think Rev. Perry couldn't find gay people who wanted to go to church at first?
4. Why might Rev. Perry be seen as a modern day prophet?

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<sup>11</sup> <https://vimeo.com/101765865>

5. Rev. Perry refers to “praying with our feet.” This is a well-known quote by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in describing why he marched in the civil rights protests with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Why do you think Rev. Perry mentions this as a message to his parishoners?

### ***Timeline Activity***

Invite learners to individually look over the [GLSEN LGBTQ History Timeline](#)<sup>12</sup> and consider these questions:

1. At what point on the timeline do you notice a cultural shift in the way that LGBTQ+ people are welcomed?
2. In US history, when did LGBTQ+ people begin to gain legal protections? Were these protections available to all LGBTQ+ people?

### Meet LGBTQ+ Jewish Leaders

#### ***Small Group Work***

Invite learners to break into groups and learn about these Jewish leaders. Learners are invited to use the [linked resources](#)<sup>13</sup> below and any others they find online to prepare to introduce these leaders to the group.

- [Rabbi Deborah Waxman](#)
- [Lillian Faderman](#)
- [Harvey Milk](#)
- [Edie Windsor](#)
- [Larry Kramer](#)
- [Lowell Selvin](#)
- [Rabbi Denise Eger](#)
- [Rabbi Allen Bennett](#)
- [Dr. Judith Plaskow](#)
- [Abby Stein](#)

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBTQ-History-Timeline-References.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://lgbthistorymonth.com/>

- Jared Polis
- Ze'evi Berman

### ***Share-out***

To set the tone for the presentations, recite “An *Ushpizin* Ritual for National Coming Out Day on Sukkot” (*Mishkan Ga'avah*, pages 153–155) to welcome these people to the community. Each group then presents their individual to fellow learners.

### ***Wrap-up, Questions, and Concluding Thoughts***

To conclude the session, have the learners discuss the following questions:

- What have you learned from the biographies of these LGBTQ+ leaders?
- Who are the LGBTQ+ Jews that you know? Have you ever heard their stories?
- In our organization/congregation, how do we honor the stories of LGBTQ+ people?

## Lesson Four: Creative Liturgy

### **Objective**

- Learners will be able to write their own prayers.
- Learners will identify moments of blessing
- Learners will identify significant prayers in Jewish worship.

### **Agenda**

5 minutes	Set induction
40 minutes	Prayer comparison
25 minutes	Moments for LGBTQ+ blessing
20 minutes	Concluding activity

### **Set Induction**

Ask learners at what moments they have offered words of blessing. Generate a list as a group. Tell learners we will return to this list at the end of the session.

### **Prayer Comparison**

Compare these blessings for different moments from *Mishkan Ga'avah* and *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (page numbers refer to the complete edition of the siddur; they are the numbers in brackets in the Shabbat edition). You can determine the best approach for your group of learners: small groups, full-class discussion, or a combination of the two.

“A Prayer before Candle Lighting,” MG (*Mishkan Ga'avah*) p. 4

vs.

“Blessings for Shabbat,” MT (*Mishkan T'filah*) pp. 120–121

“Addition to *Ahavat Olam*,” MG p. 5

vs.

*Ahavat Olam*, MT pp. 150–151

“The *Sh'ma*,” MG p. 24

vs.

*Sh'ma*, MT pp. 152–153

“A Blessing for My LGBTQ Ancestors,” MG p. 29

vs.

*Avot v’Imahot*, MT pp. 166–167

### ***Discussion Questions***

- What is the same in each prayer? What is different?
- How are the themes/intents of traditional prayers used creatively in *Mishkan Ga’avah*?
- Should we recite innovative prayers connected to these traditional prayers? Why or why not?

### ***Moments for LGBTQ+ Blessing***

Review selected prayers from pages 47 to 83 of *Mishkan Ga’avah*. Lead a discussion with learners about why they think we need prayers for special occasions and moments.

### ***Concluding Activity***

Using the list generated together at the start of the session, ask each learner to pick one moment and craft a unique blessing for this moment. Ask for volunteers to share their blessings.

### ***Reference for the Teacher***

There is an emerging area of linguistics known as non-binary Hebrew that may be useful to your learners in crafting prayers and blessings: <https://www.nonbinaryhebrew.com/>