

Keshet and the RAC's High Holiday Resource for Transgender Rights



Contents

Introduction	2
Cheshbon HaNefesh.....	3
A Window into Trans Experience.....	3
Sermon Sparks	7
<i>Teshuva</i>	7
<i>Hayom Harat Ha'Olam: God's gender and what it means to be created in God's Image</i>	8
Allyship/Solidarity	9
Joseph's Story Paralleling the Trans Experience.....	10
A Word on Forgiveness	13
Liturgy	14
Queer Priestly Blessing	14
Twilight People.....	14
Queer <i>Mi Shebeirach</i>	14
A gender-expansive version of <i>Avinu Malkenu</i>	15
A Queer Amidah.....	15
Social-justice inspired <i>Tashlich</i>	15
A Trans <i>Al Chet</i>	16
Complementary Ashamnu: "Ahavnu: We have Loved"	16
Yizkor.....	16
<i>Ne'ilah: Next year in Jerusalem</i>	16
<i>Neilah</i> Blessing by Rabbi Becky Silverstein (pronouns: he/him/his)	17
Text Studies.....	19
Text Study on Gender and Creation	19
Text Study on Names and Naming.....	19
Acknowledgements.....	20

Introduction

This coming November, the Jewish community in Massachusetts will be confronted with a major choice: whether or not we want to uphold protections for transgender people in public places in Massachusetts. In 2016, a supermajority in the statehouse signed these protections into law, ensuring that trans people could carry out their everyday lives in public places – parks, restaurants, even hospitals – free from discrimination. Yet a small group of Bay Staters disagreed with this legislation and put a question on the ballot that will ask voters whether or not we want to uphold protections for transgender people. As Massachusetts Jews, we must stand alongside our transgender community members and neighbors and Vote YES! to uphold fairness, human dignity, and transgender rights.

Like the *Yamim Noraim* themselves, this question should inspire awe: fear of these public protections being repealed, and a love of our transgender neighbors, friends, and community members that drives us to act. The *Yamim Noraim* is the perfect time to raise awareness about this ballot question and mobilize the Jewish community to Vote YES! to maintain these important public protections. As we read on Yom Kippur from Isaiah 58:6: *This is the fast I desire: To unlock the fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break off every yoke.*

This resource offers multiple ways to bring the ballot initiative and transgender justice more broadly into your High Holy Day programming. The first section contains “sermon sparks” about transgender justice that can help guide any of your High Holy Day sermons. The second section contains pieces of queer and trans liturgy that you could incorporate into your High Holiday Services. The third section contains text studies for interactive sermons or learning sessions.



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

Cheshbon HaNefesh

Every year we must take stock of our behavior- both our positive and more negative behavior.

One way of doing *Cheshbon Hanefesh* this year may be by taking into account the way the world is set up to accommodate male and female gender identities, but not trans identities. What privileges do I have walking through the world as a [cisgender](#) person? How have I noticed them, and how have I not noticed them? How will this noticing inform my activism for trans justice this year?

Use the following cisgender privilege checklist to guide this process:

<http://www.transfaithonline.org/fileadmin/TFteaching/Keshet%20-%20non%20trans%20cisgender%20privilege%20checklist.pdf>

As a leader in the Jewish community, in what ways have you been a good trans ally? In what ways are you hoping to be a better ally in the future? Rabbi Mike Moskowitz reflects on his role as a cis, white, straight rabbi and LGBTQ ally: <https://auburnseminary.org/rabbi-moskowitz/>

A Window into Trans Experience

We encourage you to consider the direct experiences of transgender people in the Jewish community, and to use this to aid your understanding of transgender issues in our communities. Here are the stories of transgender/gender non-conforming Jews, from excerpts of some of their works. Feel free to incorporate them into any part of your High Holy Day programming.

Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari

“As a transgender and genderqueer person, I often experience my presence in gendered spaces as somehow contaminating. I feel this in a synagogue that has gender-segregated seating. I feel this in a public bathroom. And for most of my life, I associated this with a *mikveh*. My typical response to this experience is avoidance.”

Full text at <https://www.mayimhayyim.org/safe-seen-and-sanctified/>

Chav Doherty

“When I was a child, my Jewishness was a secret refuge for my sense of myself as a male person. Though I didn’t learn enough Hebrew to read and translate texts, I learned to read prayer-book Hebrew, and I prayed with men in my community. This was, for me, a source of comfort and some pride...”



In my early twenties, I asked my parents' help to seek sex reassignment surgery. My parents protested; they were convinced that, due to my small stature, I would not be perceived as convincingly male... I subsequently came out as a lesbian, an identity that undoubtedly marked me as female... Before embarking on transition, I thought very carefully about what I was doing, and why I needed to move forward. I knew that I was risking the loss of family, friends, and community over this decision. But I also knew that I needed the world around me to acknowledge, and reflect back to me, that sense of myself as a man.

...For me, however, transition further problematized my identity as a Jew... Although I experience my Jewishness on a soul level, as deeply as I experience my maleness, I have not felt at home within the Jewish community since my transition... I am aware of my need for Jewish community to support my spiritual growth, and to affirm my Jewishness."

Excerpt from his essay "The Trayf Jew" in Balancing on the Mechitza

Jill Weiss

"When I was a little boy, I prayed to God. I prayed God would make me a girl because I knew I wasn't really a boy, not inside. I didn't want to keep pretending to be a boy because it was hard to pretend all the time. I knew I couldn't go on forever pretending like that. It made me very tired and sad. I wondered why God would want me to be tired and sad every day. But I tried hard not to disappoint God.

One morning, after praying like this for many years, I woke up and God had changed me. God changed my tiredness into courage. God gave me the courage to tell the truth. God gave me the courage to tell people that I wasn't a boy, even though it made some people laugh and some people get mad.

God's courage has made me happy. God's courage has taught me to love myself. God's courage lets my outside be like my inside. God's courage gives me the gift of honesty. God is Truth.

I thank God for giving me the courage to tell the truth. I thank God for giving me the courage to be me.

Thank you God, for creating the whole infinitely complex universe and for creating infinitely complex me."

"Transgender Prayer," originally published in Siddur B'chol L'vavcha by Congregation Beth Simchat Torah

Prof. Joy Ladin

"For over two thousand years, Jews have been reading the same book. The moment we reach the end, we start over at the beginning. Though the Torah's words don't change, we do,



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

returning to the same passages older, braver, needier, stronger, wiser, more terrified or more centered than we were before. The very familiarity of the text reflects how we and our sense of life have changed.

But for many gay, lesbian, bi and trans Jews, the Torah is a bitter mirror that reflects nothing but our otherness. For example, responding to news that I would return to teach at Yeshiva University following my transition from living as a man to living as a woman, one of my colleagues, Rabbi Moshe Tendler, told the New York Post that ‘There is no niche where [a transsexual] can hide out as a female without being in massive violation of Torah law, Torah ethics and Torah morality.’ According to Tendler, the only reflection of my life the Torah offers is a condemnation of everything I am or hope to be...

...But convenient as it has been, the “male and female God created them” model doesn’t allow for the possibility of transition. I might be able to look male or female, but according to the binary template, I could only, absolutely, be one or the other. Some of us may be created according to the male and female binary; I wasn’t. Like Adam, I’m a homemade creature. God didn’t create me in relation to a category; I had to be individually imagined, assembled, animated. Like Adam, I had to confront the loneliness of that individuality before I could find my place in the world, and like Adam, I have learned that what I needed to find that place was always within me. As one study of child development points out, all of us learn to act like the gender we ‘are’ by learning to avoid behaviors that are associated with genders we ‘aren’t.’ This means that masculinity contains – indeed, is defined by – the femininity boys and men are taught not to express; all males internalize a femininity that, like Adam’s rib, can be brought out of our male identities and fashioned into new female selves. In this sense, I’m not approximating a femininity that isn’t mine; like my breasts’ ability to grow when exposed to estrogen, femininity has always been there, sleeping within me. Like Adam, I simply – simply! – had to cut myself open to give birth to the woman swaddled and smothered by my masculinity.

Our tradition teaches us that we grow through reading Torah. But the Torah itself grows by being read, remains alive, fresh, startling and new, by becoming part of the lives blossoming and dying around it. As our Sages tell us, the Torah is our life, and the length of our days. All our days: gay, straight, male, female, trans, the days we first open our eyes to the world and the days we gaze our last upon it. The Torah’s roots stretch down to the depths of our being; its limbs stretch through us, toward the future. It is not only our right to read the Torah through our gay, lesbian, bi- and trans- lives; it is our obligation. The Torah’s life depends on ours.”

Full text at <http://transtorah.org/PDFs/Torah-In-Transition.pdf>

Beth Orens

“As an Orthodox Jew, balancing on the *mechitza* was never an option for me. There was a time when I looked over the *mechitza* from the men’s section and wondered at the strangeness of a world in which I was trapped on the wrong side. I used to wonder what it would feel like to be



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

on the women's side –the right side—but I don't think I ever thought I'd find out [...] I was married with two children, living in a bedroom community of Jerusalem, and though I'd felt the dysphoria of being physically male all my life, and a good eight years before had come to terms with the fact that my gender identity would always be female, my goal in life was portraying a male to the best of my ability. Once that switch flipped, though—once I realized that I'd been fooling myself, thinking that playing the male role was a reasonable thing to be doing with my life—I started feeling like a spy. Like a real-life Yentl, living in a man's world, with no one suspecting who I really was. It was a surreal feeling, almost dreamlike.”

Excerpt from her essay "Crossing the Mechitza" in Balancing on the Mechitza

Al Reit, on immersing in the mikveh for their conversion:

“My *Mikveh* Guide, Naomi, confirmed my pronouns with me when we met—and just like that, I had no fear that someone would slip and remove me from my own body... Naming is a sacred act. My name changes in and outside of me with the turning of the leaves. Around and around I go. Every year, a new, imperceptible shift toward something else, something true. To be nonbinary means to be malleable. My Hebrew name is Chaya Yehuda, Chaya meaning ‘life’ and Yehuda meaning ‘thanksgiving’ or ‘praise.’ Having both traditionally feminine and masculine Hebrew names also allows me to bring my gender fully into the conversation of my Judaism. But no matter what I call myself, Judaism has given me the space to realize I am more than one thing, and that is miraculous and not to be forgotten. And as I finished the *Shehecheyanu* prayer thanking God for letting me reach this moment and the singing rang out, I let my tears slip as I floated up onto my back, weightless and grateful, a Jew at last.”

Full text at <https://www.mayimhayyim.org/ode-to-spontaneous-selves/>

Sermon Sparks

Teshuva

One of the major themes of the High Holy Days is, of course, *Teshuva*. We learn from the Rambam (see *Hilkhot Teshuva* Chapter 2 in the *Mishneh Torah*) and from Chovot Halevavot (see “The Gate of Repentance”) that *Teshuva* involves three essential elements: recognizing the problem; figuring out how not to repeat the problem again; and being in the exact same situation again and not repeating the transgression. In what ways have we, individually and as a community, missed the mark in ensuring justice for transgender folks in our midst? How can this campaign to uphold public protections be an opportunity to act differently than we might have in the past?

According to the Rambam (see *Hilkhot Teshuva* Chapter 1 and 2), *Teshuva* requires a public commitment to not commit the sin again. In what way is voting YES and urging others to do so on November’s ballot an important public commitment: a commitment to turn away from apathy and perhaps even fear of the unknown, towards an active engagement with and commitment to transgender people and transgender justice?

On Rosh Hashanah, the sins of a person and of the entire world are evaluated. We learn in Rambam’s *Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:4 that one should always understand oneself as having an equal balance of merit and sin (this is called being *beynoni*), and that the world too is equally balanced between merit and sin. This means that if you do one sin or mitzvah, you tip the balance in either the direction of guilt or salvation. This means, according to the Rambam, that people ought to perform as many good deeds as possible between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to tip oneself and the world towards salvation.

Voting is similar to this: each vote counts, in either a good or bad direction. And the polling data on this ballot question is neck and neck: close to 50% want to uphold the law, and a bit less than 50% want it repealed. Will you Vote YES! this November on the ballot? Will you urge others to Vote YES! with Keshet’s Jewish community Vote YES! Pledge? Will you engage voters across MA through phone-banking, canvassing, and conversation with the people in your life? What will you do to tip the balance towards salvation?

We learn from *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* about the ripple effects of our repentance. Commenting on *Shir HaShirim* 5:2, it says:

Rabbi Yesa said, ‘The Holy One, Blessed be God said to Israel, “My children, Open the door of Repentance as the ‘eye of a needle,’ and I will open it for you so that wagons and carriages can pass through.” (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 24)

If we do just a little, God will take it from there and make a lot happen. It is this little bit of action that moves God to take even grander actions than we are capable of. This is one of the



ways that the *Mussar* tradition understands *bitachon* (trust): We must do everything we can, and must also trust that God will take it the rest of the way (*Chovot HaLevavot*, 425).

What small action could you do to uphold transgender rights here in Massachusetts? In what small way can you get involved in Keshet's work to uphold transgender rights here in MA? Sign onto the Vote YES! pledge? Phone-bank for an hour? Send the pledge to 10 of your friends to sign? This could make a huge difference.

Finally, we might also look at the word *Teshuvah* in Hebrew with Chassidic eyes and see "*tashuv heh*," literally "returning via the letter *heh*." What does it mean to say that repentance happens through the letter *heh*? We learn in *Menachot* 29b that the letter *heh* is open on the bottom and on one side. With the letter *chet*, which is just open on the bottom, something can only exit the way it enters. Meaning, there is no way to escape from the "door of sin" without going back through that door and committing transgression. But *heh* has another opening, another possible course of action. The little opening at the side of the *heh* allows for exiting a different way, for acting differently than you might have in the past.

We have a choice in how we act. We could act more like a *chet*, and keep living in the realm of missing the mark, or we could act like a *heh*, moving through our transgressions and learning from them to emerge into the people we want to be.

This is the opportunity of the High Holy Days this year: to note where we have missed the mark with regards to our trans friends and neighbors, and to commit to learning from our shortcomings and acting differently this year.

Hayom Harat Ha'Olam: God's gender and what it means to be created in God's Image

For centuries our tradition has privileged a male construction of God. Scripture often construes God as a "him". If we use traditional liturgy, we end up blessing God and addressing God in the second person masculine: *Baruch ATAH*. God is often construed as *melekh* or *av*, which comes up a lot in the High Holy Day liturgy in particular.

However, it is important to recognize how our tradition construes God in a variety of gendered terms. God is both "a father who has compassion on his children" (Psalm 113:13), and "a mother who comforts her child" (Isaiah 66:13). God is *avinu malkeinu*, and God is a woman in mourning (Jer. 8:1-23); a woman in labor (Isa. 42:14, 51:2); a mother lamenting her lost children (Isa. 31:19) and rejoicing in their return (49:13-15); and a midwife (Ps. 22:9-10, 71:6). In what ways can God's expansive gender enable us to see gender more expansively among us, God's creations?

Indeed, God created human beings to reflect such gender diversity. We learn in Genesis 1:26-27 that when God created the first human being, God said: "Let us make *adam* in our image, after our likeness," and then, "God created *adam* in His image, in the image of God He created him;



male and female He created them.” Taking these verses together, how can we understand “our image” and “our likeness”? It means that God created human beings containing God’s many images and likenesses, to reflect the gender diversity contained within God.

Bereshit Rabbah 8:1 elaborates on this, saying that this means God created the first human being as an androgynous person, containing both male and female characteristics simultaneously. Rabbi Margaret Wenig reads Genesis 1:27 verse as “a merism, a figure of speech in which a totality is expressed by two contrasting parts (e.g., “young and old,” “thick and thin,” “near and far,”)... God created male and female and every combination in between.”

Rosh Hashanah is “*Hayom Harat Ha’Olam*” – the day the world was created. In particular, Rosh Hashanah celebrates the creation of the first human being, *Adam*. On this Rosh Hashanah, what would it look like for each of us, for our Jewish and Massachusetts community live into the gender diversity that God gifted us? What would it look like to create a world that enables every image of God to live fully into the way they reflect God’s gender?

Allyship/Solidarity

One of the most significant historical and religious questions that we ask ourselves as Jews is what our obligations are to other Jews vs. non-Jews? What is our responsibility to the Jewish community, and what is our responsibility to people outside of the Jewish community?

Our textual tradition contains many ways to think about this. One response is that we take care of Jews first and others second. For example, in *Bava Metzia* 71a, we learn that if we have to choose between helping a poor Jew and a poor non-Jew, we should help the poor Jew. The *Meiri* comments on this part of the Talmud and says that if we have to choose between lending to a Jew and a non-Jew, we should lend to the Jew.

Another response is that we have equal responsibility in helping Jews and non-Jews. For example, *Tosefta Gittin* 3:13-14 tells us that “[In] a city that has in it Jews and non-Jews, the charity-collectors collect from Jews and non-Jews [alike], for the sake of ways-of-peace. They provide food to the poor of the non-Jews with the poor of the Jews for the sake of ways-of-peace. They [i.e., Jews] eulogize and bury the dead of non-Jews because of ways-of-peace, and they console the mourners of non-Jews because of ways-of-peace.”

Yet another response is somewhere in between. We learn from the Hatam Sofer (*Yoreh Deah* 234): “If two people have equal needs, that they both need to sustain their lives with meager bread and measured water, in such a case we will say that [the Jewish person] comes before that one. But if the people of Jerusalem have their bare sustenance, they have no claim [to our *tzedakah* funds] until every single other city[’s poor] has received equal support. Then, from whatever funds remain, we will attend to the poor’s need for clothing and similar matter, and in this area we will apply our list of who comes before whom, until they are all equally provided



for in this area as well. And similarly in all matters, they never said to disregard a need [of one group], only to give priority [to one group over another within a specific area of needs].

In other words, the Hatam Sofer says that once the basic needs to the Jewish people are met, our obligation to others kicks in.

Looking at our current reality, our legal needs are met as a Jewish people. No longer do we see signs in restaurants and stores that say, “No Jews or Dogs Allowed.” No longer do we need to establish our own hospitals, universities, and other institutions because we will be turned away or face quotas from existing institutions. Our basic legal needs are met, and now it is our responsibility to help meet the legal needs of others, specifically of transgender members of our community. That is why we must fight to Vote YES! to protect the current law that gives protection to transgender folks from discrimination in public places.

Joseph’s Story Paralleling the Trans Experience

Although the story of Joseph is not one that we traditionally talk about during the High Holy Days, his story is a helpful framework for understanding the transgender experience through our tradition. Joseph challenges conceptions of gender: the phrase *כְּתִנְיָהּ פְּטוּיִם* used to describe Joseph's coat is used in Samuel II 13:18 to describe princesses' robes. This leads some to interpret Joseph as a genderqueer person or transgender woman.

One can look at Joseph’s narrative as a parallel to the experiences of a transgender person going through a transition. In Genesis Rabbah 84:7, it says that Joseph “penciled his eyes, curled his hair, and lifted his heel,” all practices associated with the feminine. Joseph is resented by Joseph’s brothers, and Joseph’s father gives Joseph a (feminine) coat as a symbol of acceptance of Joseph’s identity. Joseph’s siblings then reject Joseph through selling Joseph and faking Joseph’s death, which reflects the unfortunate reality that many trans people face rejection from their families and many are even kicked out of their homes.

Joseph is emasculated and thrown into a pit, symbolizing femininity, but ends up serving as a kind of [rebirth](#). When Joseph’s siblings later meet Joseph in Egypt, Joseph is said to have undergone a transformation and Joseph is now unrecognizable, similarly to how transgender people may “transform” after undergoing steps for gender affirmation. There is a positive conclusion as Joseph reunites with Joseph’s siblings.

In the present day, Joseph’s “coat of many colors” is reminiscent of the Pride rainbow, and Joseph’s story can be used as a lesson in acceptance of one’s identity and coming to familial love. While Joseph’s siblings mock and rebuff Joseph, Jacob embraces Joseph’s different behaviors by presenting Joseph with the coat. By the end of the story, Joseph is accepted by Joseph’s brothers and forgives them for their wrongdoing, and Joseph reconciles with the family, just as all transgender family and community members should be embraced and welcomed.



This interpretation is visited in J Mase III's poem, "Josephine," where the poet writes about his experience relating to Joseph as a trans person.

J Mase III, excerpts from "Josephine"

...Have you heard the good word about
Joseph of Genesis?
See
Joseph
Josephine
Jo of Genesis
favorite child of Jacob
Aka Israel
when asked
what you wanted
you desired one thing:
a kethoneth passim
Pastor called this a royal coat
And
Jo
I had never read the Bible before
found you and kept reading
Josephine
I got to 2nd Samuel
and realized your coat of many colors
was a princess dress
Joseph
your father must have really loved you
Because he got it for you
and you wore it with pride
Jo
when your brothers saw you
in your flowing dress
in your glory
they became enraged
I am sorry for the beating you received
Sorry they destroyed your dress
and smeared it with the red paint of your
swollen veins
Josephine
did you know they told your father you
were dead

so he'd never come looking for you
 Never knew your brothers
 sold you as a slave into Egypt
 and once you were stolen from your
 home fields

the earth dried up
 Jo
 the very ground on which you walked
 mourned the loss of its genderqueer child
 and all the plants died
 and the animals no longer had the will to
 live

...
 And for the first time
 your family saw you
 as you
 as Magnificent
 for it was your word
 that saved them from starvation
 Dear Joseph of Genesis
 aka Josephine
 aka Jo
 I am claiming your story
 for every queer kid told
 they are unholy
 for every queer told
 in order to love
 we must let our faith die
 I am going to put it in a pocket
 over my heart
 next to Ruth & Naomi
 next to David & Jonathan
 next to Hegai & Deborah
 and seat them at the last Passover

Just as Joseph was rejected by Joseph's siblings for Joseph's identity, a group of people want to discriminate against transgender people in public spaces. We must be like Jacob, giving Joseph acceptance and love, in working to maintain these important protections.

A Word on Forgiveness

The rhetoric of forgiveness on Yom Kippur can be difficult and traumatic for (queer and all) people who have been bullied, harassed, abused, discriminated against, etc. While forgiveness is a value toward which we strive in many situations, it can be problematic for survivors of abuse – under what circumstances can and should a perpetrator of harm be forgiven? When is the act of forgiveness liberatory, and when might it actually burden or further traumatize the survivor?

Consider the trans members of your community, especially the young ones, who may be experiencing bullying at school. One way to be considerate of this experience is to ensure that your language about *teshuvah* is not victim-blaming. This could look like: 1) pointing out that the bullying or discrimination was not their fault and 2) focusing on self-forgiveness, as victims often blame themselves for their own abuse.

We can engage with this theme through the story of the rape of Dinah. The episode begins in Genesis 34:1 with these words:

וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בַת־לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לְרֵאוֹת בְּכָנֹת הָאָרֶץ:

Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.

Rashi wonders why she is called the daughter of Leah, and gives this response: just like Leah, who “went out” from her home to seduce Jacob, Dinah also “went out” of her home to sleep with Shechem.

In essence, Rashi blames Dinah for her rape because she “went out,” presumably by herself. We must avoid such victim blaming, whether the issue at hand is large or small, and instead encourage people not to blame themselves and to forgive themselves instead.

Liturgy

Below are pieces of trans or trans-friendly liturgy that you can incorporate into your service.

Queer Priestly Blessing

Written by Participants of Keshet Teen Shabbatonim

May God make you like David, like Jonathan,
like Reish Lakish, like Rav Yochanan, like Naomi,
like Ruth, and like Deborah.

May God bless you and protect you.
May God's face shine on you and be gracious to you.
May God's face be turned toward you, and may God give you peace.

*Yesimchem elokim keDavid, keYehonatan,
keResh Lakish, keRav Yochanan, keNaomi,
keRut, uChidvorah*

*Yavarechem hashem veyishmerechem
Yaeir hashem panav eleichem vchuinechem
Yisa hashem panav eleichem vyasem lechem shalom.*

Twilight People

<https://www.twilightpeople.com/twilight-people-prayer/>

A prayer to bring into Mariv for the various prayers on light and darkness. It talks about twilight as a time and as an experience of gender, as a liminal space ripe with the possibility of transformation and rebirth.

Queer Mi Shebeirach

In community with our queer ancestors
Most of whose names are lost to us,
Forgotten
Or even deliberately obliterated,
May we be blessed and healed
In free and open ways
Not always granted
To those
Who went before us



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

May we come to know a time of complete healing
 And may we share this healing with all the world
 In the name of all who have been forgotten
 As a blessing for all queer folk who are here
 And for all of those who are yet to come.
 Now let us say: Amen.

A gender-expansive version of *Avinu Malkenu*

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/avinu-malkeinu-our-parent-our-sovereign>

This version of Avinu Malkenu notes God's many genders and natures in conceptualizing God as a parent. In what ways can God's inclusion of many genders within Godself move us to fight for that inclusivity within our larger community here in Massachusetts?

A Queer Amidah

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/queer-amidah>

This could either be used as a kavannah for the Amidah or in lieu of the traditional Amidah. It emphasizes our interconnectedness as beings all created by God, and God's queerness. This is an opportunity to emphasize our connection to each other and trans folks in the fight for trans rights.

Social-justice inspired *Tashlich*

As you do Tashlich, allow yourself a moment of self-reflection. Did you support causes that you care about? What opportunities did you miss in the past year? How can you be a better ally to members of the transgender community?

Say together:

Let us cast away the sin of indifference to injustice

Let us cast away the sins of times we did not reach out to help others

Let us cast away sins of being not being better allies because of our own privileges

Let us cast away the sins of times we did not help our transgender siblings and community members

Let us cast away the sins of the times we did not have the courage to speak up about injustice

Let us cast away the sins of times that we did not help others because we were happy with our own lives

Let us cast away the times we witnessed prejudice or discrimination but did nothing

Let us cast away the sin of ignoring those in need

Let us cast away the sins of not having time to be part of activism in our communities

Let us cast away the sins of not giving tzedakah to causes



Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

Let us cast away the sin complacency in oppression

- Rachel Silverman

A Trans Al Chet

<https://plantingrainbows.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/al-heyt-for-transgender-day-of-remembrance/>

Produced for Trans Day of Remembrance.

Complementary Ashamnu: "Ahavnu: We have Loved"

<http://opensiddur.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ahavnu-ViduiHaMashlimYK-Binyamin-Holtzman.pdf>

We say Ashamnu in the plural, because one of the ways we hold our sins is as a community. Now we as a community must act to end injustice and act for transgender lives. We love and respect our transgender neighbors and community members, which is why we act. Let us take a moment not only to repent today, but celebrate the progress that our community has made on transgender inclusion and liberation and reaffirming our commitment to standing with our transgender siblings with an alternative Ashamnu.

Yizkor

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/memorial-prayer-transgender-day-remembrance>

2017 was the [deadliest year on record](#) for the transgender community. Today we remember the many trans lives lost due to violence, especially trans people of color. We also remember those lost to suicide. [Almost half](#) of transgender people will attempt suicide, the majority of them in their youth. Those who are suffering – you are not alone, our doors are open and you are safe and welcome in our community. Others — please reach out and support those who may be in need.

Ne'ilah: Next year in Jerusalem

At this point in the service we say "next year in Jerusalem" waiting for the Moshiach---we are imagining our ideal world. I invite you to close your eyes and picture a perfect, righteous world--where there is no bigotry or oppression, where all queer and transgender people can live with dignity, respect, and peace. And as you imagine this world, think of the steps that you will take to make it happen, what commitments can you make right now for this upcoming year, and how can your community--friends, family, hold you accountable? This is a world that we are not just hoping and praying for, but striving and working for.



Neilah Blessing by Rabbi Becky Silverstein (pronouns: he/him/his)

Our liturgy tells us that the gates of teshuva, of return, are closing. This sacred moment in our communal calendar is coming to an end. My head says to reflect, to process, to ask what we have learned and where we are headed, my heart is panicking that I forgot something or someone, and my gut wants you to know that I will hold the gates open for you. Given that Yom Kippur is as much about embodied experience as it is prayer, I am going with my gut.

So let me be clear -

I will hold the gates open for you. I will jump between the clanging metal and put my body in between the meeting point of the two sides. I will put my hands out and push, throwing my body weight against them if necessary. I will put my hand in front of the closing elevator or subway doors. I will hold the gates open for you.

But wait. Hold up. Which of the gates are closing?

My mind is racing through the rabbinic sources that I've learned - maybe the gates are open through Shmini Atzeret?! I'm certain that the Talmud teaches that the gates of tears never close, which is good because I've been doing a lot of crying. And what is it that it says about the gates of prayer?

The truth is that I don't believe in gates anyway. Or at least I don't believe that they lock.

So let me ask you -

Is your heart softer?

Do you feel lighter?

Are you ready to move forward into the world with vulnerability and love, boldly building the world that you want to live in?

The gates are closing. They are closing because we can not stay in this iteration of sacred community forever. Or even for a minute longer than the sun allows. They are closing because the world outside needs our prayer, because the world outside needs Us.

I will hold other gates open for you.

I will hold the gates of my heart open.

I will hold the gates of my soul open.

I will be ready to give and to receive.

It is through these gates that I will walk boldly and take action.

It is through these gates that overflowing love and righteousness will flow, Gd willing, to inspire me to seek justice.



Chevre. Friends. Community. All of you.

I will hold these gates open for you. And trust that you will do the same for me -- though let me tell you this latter work is so much more difficult.
But I am ready.

The world has taught me that I have no other choice.

Today has shown me that I am up to the challenge.

Adonai, my God, and God of my ancestors. Help us keep these gates open to each other. Remind us that the gates to you are always unlocked. Show us that you are always willing, and that love and righteousness and justice are always available.

Adonai do this for the sake of the world, for the sake of your holy creation.

Adonai, do this for me, for us, and for all who suffer.

Ana Adonai. Please, my Gd. *Hatzlicha nah*. May we be successful.

Ana Adonai. *Hazlicha nah*.



Text Studies

Text Study on Gender and Creation

[Facilitator Guide](#)

[Participant Guide](#)

This Text Study explores the creation of gender in the first human being during the Creation of the world.

Text Study on Gender and Clothing

[Facilitator Guide](#)

[Participant Guide](#)

This Text Study unpacks the prohibition on wearing clothing that does not match one's sex assigned at birth.

Text Study on Names and Naming

[Facilitator Guide](#)

[Participant Guide](#)

[God's Names](#)

This Text Study explores the importance of names in our tradition and of using a person's chosen name.

Acknowledgements

This resource was created by Keshet and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life. Learn more at <https://www.keshetonline.org/>.

For more than 50 years, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism ("the RAC") has been the hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in Washington, D.C. Learn more at <https://rac.org/>.

Keshet and the RAC would like to thank the following people for their contributions and time put into this resource:

Mimi Micner
Rabbi Mike Moskowitz
Rachel Silverman
Rabbi Becky Silverstein

