

Keshet Pride Shabbat Sermon Guide

Developed for Keshet by Leora Spitzer

The goal of this guide is to provide some suggestions, themes, and resources for clergy planning to give a sermon about or related to Pride Month.

“Queer joy is revolutionary. Protect every spark and feed it until it catches and ignites. Having a moment of delight or pleasure doesn’t make your fury less real, it makes it more sustainable.”

~S. Bear Bergman

- Questions and Themes by Parsha / Weekly Torah Portion:
 - *Shlach L’kha.*
 - In this portion, the spies report that “we looked like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we must have seemed to them.” How can we avoid making anyone feel like “grasshoppers?” How do we ensure that everyone in our communities feels seen and valued? (Num:13:3)
 - We repeat Numbers 14:18 and 14:20 over and over throughout the Yom Kippur liturgy. How can we think about this model of accountability, forgiveness, and relationship in the context of reckoning with institutional homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia?
 - *Korach*
 - Korach frames his rebellion as an act of solidarity and allyship with regular Israelites, but many commentators understand it as motivated by his own personal desire for power. What can we learn from this story about how to be a good ally and truly stand in solidarity with marginalized people?
 - God plans to punish the whole community for Korach’s rebellion, but Moses and Aaron argue that it’s unfair to hold everyone accountable for one person’s actions. God gives the people an opportunity to distance themselves from Korach before everyone in his vicinity is swallowed by the earth. What responsibility do we as community members have to intervene with individuals or communities who are causing harm? What lesson does God teach us here about collective responsibility? How might this translate into a narrative of allyship?

- *Chukat*
 - Discuss Miriam's life and death, and the immediate impact felt by her loss. Miriam leaves Egypt with musical instruments in anticipation of joy. What does it mean to be intentional about creating space for celebration? What can we learn from Miriam about the life-giving power of making space for joy amidst ongoing trauma and difficulty?
 - One explanation for why Moses hit the rock instead of speaking to it as instructed is that hitting it worked the last time, in Exodus 17. How can we be intentional about breaking patterns of violence and anger?
- *Balak*
 - Balak beats his donkey for not obeying his rules when she is responding to a larger truth that he cannot see. In many ways, this is a queer experience, of being punished for "failing" to obey societal rules that put individual and communal wellbeing in jeopardy. How can we, like the donkey, use the power of speech and visibility to shape the world for the better?
 - Discuss the theme of "mah tovu." What does it take to build an expansive, welcoming, and nurturing tent, in order to fulfill the promise of that blessing?
- Other Helpful Resources

These are only a small selection of the phenomenal resources that exist, and more are being created every day!

 - Torah Commentaries
 - *Torah Queeries*, for parasha-by-parasha queer readings of texts. Chapters can be found at the Keshet website by running a search on the parasha name.
 - *The Soul of a Stranger* by Joy Ladin, for a trans perspective of God and Torah
 - *TransTorah*, for a collection of sermons, liturgy, articles, and educational materials by and for trans, genderqueer, and nonbinary Jews: <http://transtorah.org/index.html>
 - SVARA's Hot of the Shtender series, for personal essays and divrei Torah by and about the queer Jewish experience: <https://svara.org/hot-off-the-shtender/>

- Queer (Jewish) History
 - *The Rainbow Thread*, edited by Noam Sienna, an anthology of primary source queer Jewish texts from the first century to 1968
 - *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* by Lillian Faderman, a history of lesbian life in twentieth-century America
 - *When Brooklyn Was Queer: A History* by Hugh Ryan, a recovered history of Brooklyn's queer community that had been systemically erased from standard stories and histories
 - *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* by Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman, for essays, commentary, comic art, and conversations from a diverse group of trans-spectrum people

- Queer Jewish Practice and Ritual
 - *A Blessing Over Progesterone* by Joy Ladin, about shehechyanu, queer Jewish joy, and becoming herself:
<https://zeek.forward.com/articles/117507/>
 - *The Nonbinary Hebrew Project*, for expanding inclusiveness for nonbinary Jews through a third-gender grammar systematics for Hebrew, including applied uses for liturgy
 - *Blessings for Gender Transition*, via Ritual Well:
<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/blessings-gender-transitioning>
 - *Mishkan Ga'avah*, edited by Rabbi Denise L. Eger, a collection of LGBTQ prayers, poems, liturgy, and rituals
 - *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*, available online at
<https://www.shaarzahav.org/siddur/>