

Ushpizin/ata, Sukkot 5782

by Dr. Noam Sienna with Keshet

The practice of inviting ancestral guests (*ushpizin* and *ushpizata* in Aramaic) to join the Sukkot meals emerged in the late Middle Ages. Each guest is associated with one of the *sefirot* (“spheres” of Divine emanation or attributes), corresponding to each night of the holiday in the Kabbalistic tradition. The ritual invites the Divine Presence into the sukkah, reminding us how God accompanied our ancestors on all their wanderings. It also emphasizes hospitality, encouraging us to welcome living guests as well.

In this new ritual, Dr. Noam Sienna, author of [A Rainbow Thread](#), has selected seven pairs of LGBTQ Jewish ancestors you can welcome to your *sukkah*, home, or wherever you are celebrating and reflecting. Because many of these ancestors were denied the opportunity to live a full and vibrant Jewish life, and their stories were not passed down as part of our Jewish heritage, we welcome them as an act of intergenerational healing. As we bring our history and our future together, we invite these ancestral guests to join us, and we pray that our communities may be spaces of true belonging for all.

Before beginning a meal in the *sukkah*, or after you’ve taken your first few bites, we encourage you to read some or all of these texts, and welcome the ancestors invited for that night in your own words. As you reflect on their stories, what questions would you ask this person? How do you see yourselves and our communities in relation to them? What other guests do you want to invite?

A note on content: *LGBTQ and Jewish history contain many moments of power and celebration, as well as marginalization and oppression. Some of these stories include anti-LGBTQ and antisemitic violence. We tell these stories not to perpetuate narratives of oppression or violence, but as an act of intergenerational healing and tikkun.*

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“I am crazy for the luster of
my beloved who is different

I am amazed by his beautiful
form which is different.

The rest are involved in cares
and woes which are different,

My fears and grief are about
something that is different.”

Image: Walters Art Museum

Sarmad Kashani

Sarmad Kashani (Sarmad of Kashan; also known as Muhammad Sa'id Sarmad) was a Persian Jewish poet and mystic. He was born into a well-to-do family of merchants and scholars in Kashan (Iran) around 1590. In the 1630s, his trade brought him to the port city of Thatta in present-day Pakistan. There he fell in love with a young Hindu man named Abhai Chand. This love was a mystical revelation, inspiring him to devote his life to the pursuit of spiritual unity. Together Abhai and Sarmad travelled across the Indian subcontinent, eventually reaching Delhi, where they were welcomed at the Mughal court of Dara Shikoh. Sarmad wrote hundreds of mystical *rubaiyat* poems there, and he and Abhai together translated the Torah into Persian. Like other mystical poetic traditions, Sarmad's *rubaiyat* use the metaphor of earthly love to describe longing for the Divine. Sarmad was executed by Dara Shikoh's brother, the emperor Aurangzeb, for heresy in 1660. His grave in Delhi is still a sacred site for pilgrims of all faiths to this day.

DAY ONE / Chesed / Lovingkindness
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“You were handed over
to the glaring light

to the threatening love
force of the island sun

you, almost with too
much wisdom to live.

Gods, however, desired
that you sing.”



Vera Lachmann

Vera Lachmann (1904–1985) was a German-American Jewish classicist, poet, and teacher. She studied Germanic languages and Greek philosophy at the University of Berlin. In 1933, as the German government began to impose restrictions on Jewish students, she opened a school in Berlin for Jewish children, maintaining it until it was forcibly closed in 1939. Lachmann managed to flee Germany for the US shortly afterwards, and taught Classics at several American universities until her retirement. She also founded an educational summer camp, Camp Catawba, which she directed for decades alongside her lifelong partner, visionary American composer Tui St. George Tucker (1924–2004). In 1969, Lachmann dedicated her first volume of poetry, *Golden Tanz das Licht im Glas* (*Golden Dances the Light in the Glass*), to her. In these poems, Lachmann recalls their 1967 pilgrimage to the island of Lesbos, the birthplace of Sappho, who first put into words the power of love between women.

DAY ONE / Chesed / Lovingkindness
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“People must realize that they are as they are, and whether or not they have engaged in conduct proscribed by the law at the time of arrest, they still have rights guaranteed by federal and state laws.”



Image: Gerber/Hart Archives

Pearl Hart

Pearl M. Hart (1890–1975) was a pioneering American Jewish attorney, activist, and educator. Born to Russian immigrants, she was one of the first female attorneys to specialize in criminal law. Hart devoted her life to defending the legal rights of the vulnerable and oppressed, especially women, children, immigrants, and gay men and lesbians. In addition to her legal work, Hart taught at John Marshall Law School and at the Northwestern University School of Social Work. She also participated actively in local and national progressive politics. Throughout it all, she maintained a humble focus on defending civil liberties for all. Although she never publicly identified as a lesbian, she was one of the founding members of the Chicago Mattachine Society, one of the first LGBTQ organizations in the United States. Serving as a “professional advisor,” she offered free legal advice to gay men and lesbians worried about arrest and harassment, represented them in court, and passed along information about planned police raids. Her reputation as an unflinching defender of civil rights gave her the nickname “The Guardian Angel of Chicago’s Gay Community.”

DAY TWO / *Gevura* / Judgement
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“Homosexuality, per se, is neither a sickness, a defect, a disturbance, a neurosis, a psychosis, nor a malfunction of any sort... Not only is homosexuality, whether by mere inclination or by overt act, not immoral, but that homosexual acts engaged in by consenting adults are moral, in a positive and real sense, and are right, good and desirable, both for the individual participants and for the society in which they live.”



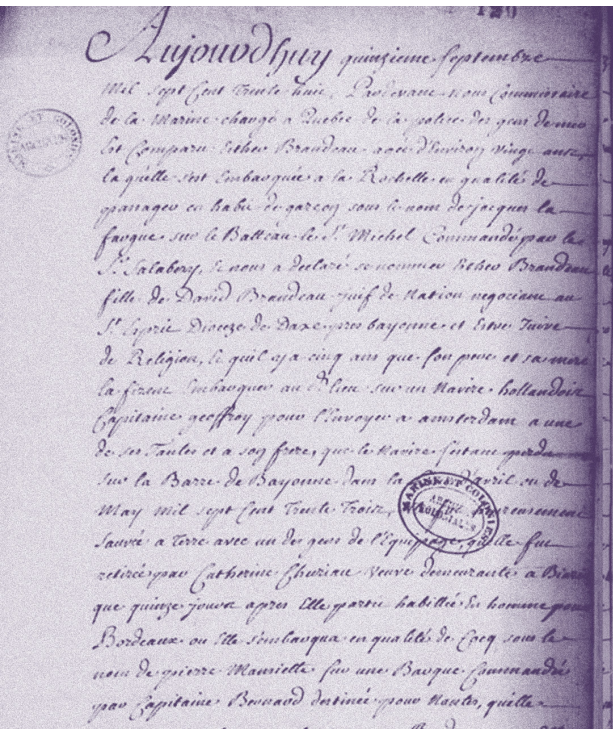
Image: New York Public Library Archives

Frank Kameny

Franklin Kameny (1925–2011) was a pioneering American Jewish gay rights activist, who coined the slogan “Gay is Good” and was one of the leaders in spurring the homophile movement into political activism. Born in New York City, Kameny served in the Army in the Second World War, and graduated from Harvard with a doctorate in astronomy in 1956. Shortly afterwards, he became one of the hundreds of Americans who lost employment during the “Lavender Scare” of the 1950s, part of the larger social panic of McCarthyism around communism. Kameny protested his unjust termination in the courts, eventually reaching the Supreme Court in 1961. His was the first civil rights claim based on sexual orientation before the Supreme Court. When his case was denied, he realized that what he called “the homophile movement” needed to advocate more vocally for its rights. Kameny co-founded the Mattachine Society of Washington that year, lobbied the American Psychological Association to remove the classification of ‘homosexuality’ as a mental disorder, and was active in LGBTQ activism until his death. Throughout his life, he argued that activists should focus on eliminating social prejudice and legal discrimination, insisting that just like race, religion, or other aspects of identity, queerness needs to be respected, not cured or treated.

DAY TWO / *Gevura* / Judgement
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“We called upon the said Esther Brandeau to state for what reason she had so concealed her sex over the course of these five years. [They stated that they had] resolved not to return any more to her father and mother, in order that she might enjoy the same liberty as the Christians.”

Image: Library and Archives Canada

Esther/Jacques Brandeau

Esther/Jacques Brandeau (ca. 1718–1744?) was a Sephardi traveller who crossed multiple boundaries of gender, religion, nationality, and identity. Born in southwestern France to a branch of the Dutch Sephardi Brandon family, Esther/Jacques ran away from home, took on the identity of a young man named Jacques, and spent several years in various French cities and on ships, eventually reaching the French colony of Québec on the land of the native Huron-Wendat Nation. There, in 1738, Brandeau was doubly “outed” as both a woman and a Jew. At the time, French law prohibited any non-Catholics from settling in its colonies. Brandeau is the first known Jewish person to have entered what is now Canada. Refusing to convert to Christianity, they were sent back to France, where they disappeared from the archival record.

DAY THREE / *Tiferet* / Beauty
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“Being in this city [of Bahia] and confessing, this Jew said that in Turkey, [starting when he] was about 18 years old, he committed the nefarious sin of sodomy [many times]... Then he was in Venice for ten or twelve years, spending the nights in his bed with a young man... And he confessed further that for the last five years, more or less, while he has been in this city, [a young man] came to his house, and both laid down in the bed of the confessant [and] completed the mentioned nefarious sin.”

Image: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

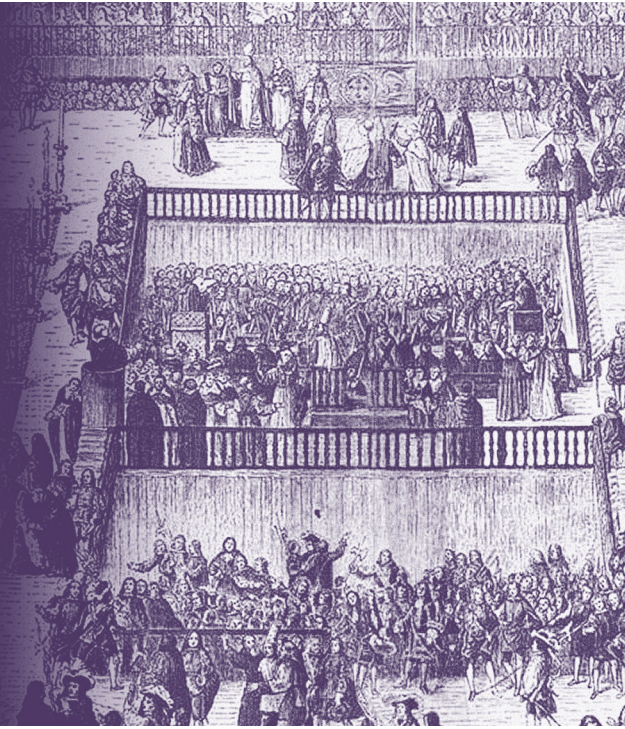
João Batista

João Batista (b. 1560) was a Portuguese Jewish merchant, born to Sephardi conversos (Jews forced to convert to Christianity) who had fled to the Ottoman Empire. In 1593, while living in Brazil, he was called before the Inspector of the Holy Office of the Portuguese Inquisition, to answer charges of “Judaizing,” returning to Jewish practice, and “sodomy,” an antiquated term and Christian legal notion of sexual “crimes,” referring in this case to sexual activity between men. Batista confessed to his many Jewish and non-Jewish lovers, including not only his current partner in Brazil, but also in Italy, the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, and the African island of São Tomé. His life story mirrors the stories of Iberian conversos who established interconnected diaspora communities throughout Western Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and the Americas. Batista was fortunate to receive a pardon, and promised that “from today forward he would not do such horrible and nefarious sins.”

DAY THREE / *Tiferet* / Beauty
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“On January 12, I paid the executioner Alfonso for cord and gloves which served to burn Issach Salamó of Calatayud, a Jew, who was convicted of the sin of sodomy. On the same day, following the order of the bailiff, I paid Joffrena de Garius for renting out her horse, which carried Issach to the place where he was burned. I paid Pere de Castres, vice-bailiff, for one *somada* of olive tree wood, which he purchased for [the purpose of burning] the said Issach.”



Issach Salamó

Issach Salamó (d. 1403) was a Spanish Jew who was tried and condemned for having sexual contact with another man in Perpignan in the winter of 1402. Originally from the Aragonese town of Calatayud, Salamó was living in the small town of Tuïr (Thuir) near Perpignan, in what was then the Catalan province of Rosselló (now Roussillon, France). In 1402, he was arrested and tried for *sodomia* — a legal notion formulated by Christian scholars in the mid-eleventh century as a sexual “crime against nature.” Punishments included beatings, confiscation of property, exile, castration, and death. In many Christian legal codes, sex between men was also closely connected to religious heresy and to improper relationships between Christians and Jews or Muslims, and Jews were frequently persecuted for perceived or real gender and sexual diversity. Salamó was burnt at the stake on the twelfth of January, 1403; according to this notarial record, the total expense of his execution came to 38 sous and 4 diners.

DAY FOUR / *Netzach* / Eternity
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“I admit to having written a book entitled *Lesbian Love*, based on true facts and living characters of today... I believe the book is not in any way immoral, indecent, or vulgar... It was only meant to show the humorous side of life, the serious side of life, and tragedy, all in one... Had I known that by telling the truth of these so-called unfortunate people whom God chose to create different and willed them to be so, had I known I am committing a crime against a law and against this country which I love with my heart and soul... Had I known it was a crime, I would not have told the truth.”

Image: Ben Reitman Papers, University of Illinois at Chicago

Eve Adams

Eve Adams (1891-1943) was a Polish-American Jewish writer and lesbian activist. Born Khave Zloczower in Poland, she immigrated to the United States in 1912, where she sold leftist and anarchist magazines, and ran a series of tearooms in Chicago and New York City which served as community hubs for gay men and lesbians. In 1925, Adams published a remarkable collection of short stories, based on the women she had known and loved, boldly entitled *Lesbian Love*. Printed privately in 150 copies, it describes in gentle and compassionate terms the vibrant and sometimes turbulent relationships between women. It is believed that this book is the first study of the lesbian community in the United States written by a lesbian author. In 1926, Adams' tearoom was raided after she gave an autographed copy of *Lesbian Love* to an undercover policewoman. She was arrested and charged with “publishing obscene literature” and “disorderly conduct.” She was deported from the United States to Poland the following year, and settled in France. In 1943, she and her partner were arrested by Nazi agents and sent to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.

DAY FOUR / Netzach / Eternity
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“As we journeyed on in the dawn of the evening, an awe fell upon me, as when one enters upon a new and unknown way, and all the air about teemed with the echoes of things past and the vague intimations of things to come.”



Simeon Solomon

Simeon Solomon (1840–1905) was an Anglo-Jewish artist and writer. Born in London, Solomon excelled as an artist from a young age, and joined a circle of Pre-Raphaelite artists, poets, and writers who questioned Victorian conventions of art and literature and defied expectations of gender and sexuality. Solomon’s art, which portrayed both Jewish and classical subjects and especially the beauty of androgynous youth, was well regarded, and sought out by galleries and collectors including Oscar Wilde. In 1871 he published his only literary work, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, a surreal fantasy which draws on the biblical language of Sinai and the erotic poetry of Song of Songs to imagine a mystical journey with his Soul to discover the secrets of true love. Solomon’s promising career was interrupted by his arrest in 1873 for “indecent exposure” and “attempted buggery” with a man in a public restroom. Abandoned by many of his friends and relatives, he sank into depression, poverty, and alcoholism. He was admitted to St. Giles Workhouse in 1885 and died in 1905.

DAY FIVE / *Hod* / Glory
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“She decided not to get married, because she had risen above the world of the flesh... The glory of the “Maiden of Ludmir” spread throughout all the nearby shtetls and settlements, and many people, women and men, went to her on pilgrimage as to a holy person.”



Maiden of Ludmir

Khane-Rokhl Verbermakher (c. 1805–1888) was a 19th-century Hasidic leader from Ukraine, who was described by some as possessing the soul of a man in a woman’s body. Pious from an early age, Verbermakher refused to marry, and declared as a teenager that they had received the “new and lofty soul” of a *tzaddik*/saint from an earlier generation. Verbermakher, who directed a *beys-medrash*/House of Study with their own disciples, became known as *di Ludmirer moid*, the Maiden of Ludmir, and was said to have prayed daily with *tallit* and *tefillin*. Considered by some a female rebbe, taking on what was then a male-only role, Verbermakher is seen by others as drawing on models of female leadership in the shtetl, like the *firzogerin*/women’s prayer leader or *opshprekherke*/folk healer. Towards the end of their life, Verbermakher emigrated to Ottoman Palestine, where they gained a reputation as a holy woman and a kabbalist.

DAY FIVE / Hod / Glory
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“All the pain and confusion that I suffered and that made my life bitter came from a false sense of shame that seeks to veil all things sexual as being unclean... If you lack courage to speak openly to your children, see to it that it becomes the duty of schools to do so. Think of the dark hours and confusion that you once met with in your own youth. How much suffering and how many battles would I have been spared if, either at home or at school, one single person had spoken earnestly and honestly to me about my sex... With joyous eyes, I look to the future that lies before me like an endless landscape, filled with sunlight.”

Karl M. Baer

Karl M. Baer (1885–1956) was a German Jewish journalist, activist, and Zionist leader. Originally from the small town of Arolsen, he was born intersex but mistakenly assigned female at birth. While living as a woman, Baer met a young Jewish woman from Bukovina, Beyla Hanna Heilpern, and fell in love; after Heilpern and Baer began living together, Baer decided to live as a man. In 1906, at the age of 21, Baer began consulting with German Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld to begin the process of transition; a year later, he completed the process, and had all official records (including his birth certificate) amended. That same year, with the help of Hirschfeld, he published a memoir under the pseudonym “N.O. Body,” which was enthusiastically received. Baer and Heilpern married in 1907. After his wife’s untimely death, Baer remarried, and immigrated to British Palestine in 1938, where he died in 1956.

DAY SIX / Yesod / Foundation
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Keshet
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“I feel in myself so much strength... But as long as I have this tension inside myself, I cannot do anything! My only hope is that society might take upon itself responsibility for my situation, and help me at last by medical means to tip the balance.”



Image: Ha'olam Hazeh

Rina Natan

Rina Natan (1923–1979) was a German Jew who became the first transgender woman known to have undergone medical transition in Israel. Born in Siegen, Germany, she immigrated to British Palestine in 1946 and fought in the 1948 war. In 1953, Natan was arrested in Tiberias while dressed as a woman and she explained to the police that she was a woman “in my soul and in my feelings, but through a physiological mistake I was born as a boy.” Inspired by the news of Christine Jorgensen, the American trans woman who had made international headlines in 1952 after her sex affirmation surgery in Denmark, Rina Natan began advocating for surgical intervention for her own case. In 1956, following an attempt at self-surgery, she successfully underwent surgical transition, and received a new *te'udat zehut* (identity card) affirming her name and gender. The Israeli media continued to treat her with suspicion and derision, and she struggled to find work and stable housing. In 1958 she left Israel for Switzerland, and eventually returned to Germany, where she married a German businessman in 1961, and died in Saarbrücken in 1979.

DAY SIX / Yesod / Foundation
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Keshet
קשת
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“Your naked feet more
tender than a tulip,

A rose less handsome than
your ruddy cheeks,

In no other’s eyes did
I read more fully

for friendship such a
boundless longing.”

Jacob Israël De Haan

Jacob Israël De Haan (1881–1924) was a Dutch Jewish novelist, poet, and journalist. The open depiction of gay love in his first novel, *Pijpelijntjes* (*Pipelines*), provoked a scandal when it was first published in 1904, and he was fired from his job as a schoolteacher. At the end of the First World War, De Haan became involved in the Zionist movement, and moved to Mandate Palestine in 1919. He was disappointed, however, by what he perceived to be an unwillingness on the Zionist side to integrate into Arab society. He began to spend time both with local Arabs and with the Hasidic communities opposed to Zionism, in particular the *Eda Haredit* (Orthodox Council of Jerusalem) and its leader, Rabbi Yosef Hayyim Sonnenfeld (1848–1932). De Haan’s poetry demonstrates his attempts to integrate his Jewish identity with his romantic and erotic attractions. In 1924, a month after publishing his second book of poems, De Haan was murdered by an agent of the Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization, which attempted to frame his death as caused by a jealous Arab lover. This is considered the first political assassination in Israeli history.

DAY SEVEN / *Malkhut* / Majesty
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“It was always only half: a child that was not born to me, love without domesticity, walks from which one had to drive home, and independence with strings on it. And yet, as I figure up the account, it seems to have been all valid. Every kind of life is life if one lives it.”



Image: Givat Brenner Archives

Jessie Sampter

Jessie Sampter (1883–1938) was an American Jewish writer and Zionist thinker. Born in New York City to an assimilated, middle-class family, she contracted polio at 13, and lived for the rest of her life with chronic pain, muscle weakness, and limited mobility. As a young woman, Sampter developed her own sense of Jewish peoplehood through reading literature and poetry, and was inspired by her friendships and discussions with Mary Antin, Mordechai Kaplan, Henrietta Szold, and Josephine Lazarus, Emma Lazarus’ sister. Increasingly drawn to Zionism, Sampter moved to British Palestine in 1919, living in the kibbutz of Giv’at Brenner, and publishing dozens of Zionist books, essays, and educational materials. Soon after her arrival she met a Russian immigrant named Leah Berlin, and the two of them lived together, along with a Yemenite orphan that they adopted, for almost all the remainder of Sampter’s life. Her personal recollections connect her disability and her own romantic and erotic desires through the complexity of her embodied experience.

DAY SEVEN / *Malkhut* / Majesty
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