

BitterSweet New Year

By Hayden Cohen

I knew I didn't want to wear a skirt, I wanted to wear pants and a shirt so I did.

I added extra eyeliner and a pair of earrings for some flair and I was ready to go

I looked like the definition of gender confusion and envy mixed into a queer Jew

I got into shul and couldn't figure out what I had done was wrong

Some people recognized me and said hi and had quick small talk

Some new people thought I was a man or just couldn't figure it out

Some people who had known me since I was 2, wearing a dress in a stroller didn't recognize me at all.

The greeting "chag sameach" spoken from the mouth of other men no longer meant "happy holidays". "Shana Tova" no longer meant "have a sweet new year". It now all meant "I perceive you as a man".

The mothers chatting to me no longer meant they were being friendly and nice. It now meant "I perceive you as a woman".

But I was there to listen to the Shofar
I stood outside the doors of the sanctuary
frozen.
I knew my way to the women's side but what
about all the people who thought I was a man.
Do I go the men's side? Of course not
I was paralyzed with fear outside of the doors
of the shul, unable to decide where to go from
here
I stood there as they blew the shofar because
it was a way I could listen to it but I wasn't on
one side or the other



Hayden is a student at Houston Community College. They were a steering committee member for the Virtual Shabbaton in 2021, co-chair for the Midwest Shabbaton in 2022 and has led several other Keshet youth programs. Hayden has led their school's Gender-Sexuality Alliance for 3 years and founded a coalition of GSAs in the region that work to educate, advocate, and support LGBTQ+ students. In their spare time, they either prepare for upcoming political/queer events, hang out with their dog, Fozzie, or try out new coffee shops.

