

לְכֹל הָעוֹבְרִים עַל גְּבוּלֵי הַחַיִּים

For all who cross over the boundaries of life

Le-khol ha-ov'rim al gevulei ha-chayim

Jewish perspectives on Transgender Day of Visibility
from your friends at Hillel International & Keshet



A Little TDOV Context

Adapted from the GLAAD website

Each year on March 31, the world observes Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) to raise awareness about transgender people. It is a day to celebrate the lives and contributions of trans people, while also drawing attention to the poverty, discrimination, and violence the community disproportionately faces.

International TDOV was created in 2010 by trans advocate Rachel Crandall. Crandall, the head of Transgender Michigan, created TDOV in response to the overwhelming majority of media stories about transgender people being focused on violence. She hoped to create a day where people could celebrate the lives of transgender people, while still acknowledging that due to discrimination, not every trans person can or wants to be visible.

Given that many Americans do not directly know someone who is transgender (or are not aware that they do!), many people first learn about trans people from the media. This is a problem because the media has misrepresented, mischaracterized, and stereotyped trans people since the invention of film. These false depictions have indisputably shaped the cultural understanding of who trans people are and have modeled, often for the worse, how the average cisgender person should react to and treat trans people in their own lives.

Currently, the transgender, nonbinary, and intersex communities are experiencing a dramatic and vicious series of attacks on civil rights, through executive order, state-level legislation, and policy implementation. Attacks have targeted the ability of transgender people to participate in everyday life. While many of these incidences have already been challenged in court, the pace has been dizzying and the language and rhetoric used is deeply harmful. Additionally, anti-trans physical violence has been declared an epidemic by the American Medical Association since 2019. That's why it's still necessary for trans people to be seen through authentic, diverse, and accurate stories which reflect the actual lived experiences of trans people; both for themselves and for the people who believe they've never met a trans person.

Trans People - and Trans Jews - Have Always Been Here

by Rabbi Micah Buck, Director of Education & Training, Keshet, 2025

There have always been people whose lives and identities transcended the gender definitions, roles, and expectations of their cultures. Today, many whose gender identities differ from the gender categories they are assigned to at birth describe ourselves as *transgender*, while many whose bodies defy the narrow sex categories of “male” or “female” may describe ourselves as *intersex*. While today, these communities are often understood as distinct-yet-overlapping, many historical sources conflate these experiences.

Throughout history, our trans, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-expansive ancestors have described themselves with many different words and have thought about their identities in an infinite variety of ways. Sometimes we are able to find records of their lives written from their own perspectives, and can celebrate the ways they understood themselves. More often, however, we are left sifting through complex lives and narratives for clues in texts and artifacts made by those outside the community, or even reading about our ancestors through the words of those who condemned and persecuted them, searching for moments of recognition of people who lived in worlds vastly different than our own.

We are living in a time when those in power are trying to push us out of public life and even erase the evidence of our existence. It is more important than ever that we celebrate trans stories, histories, and contemporary voices. Trans and gender-expansive people have existed in every era, and currently exist in every region and community of the world. No government ever made trans people more or less real, and no government can ever erase us.

Transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender-expansive Jews are very much here, actively and joyfully shaping the Jewish world. We are a vastly diverse community - we exist in all types of Jewish communities, are religious, atheist, agnostic, practicing and otherwise. Trans Jews are artists, accountants, rabbis, cantors, authors, computer coders, chefs, the list goes on!

The following 3 pages contain just a small sampling of contemporary Jewish writings, music, and liturgy reflective of and produced by the Jewish trans community. I hope you find meaning in reading and reflecting on them on your own, or in good community.

Part 1: Trans Experience in Torah

Source 1: Noam Sienna, *A Rainbow Thread*, 2019, commenting on Bereishit Rabbah, a 3rd-5th century rabbinic narrative commentary.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben El'azar said, "At the moment when the Holy Blessed One created the first adam (human), God created them as an androgynous, as it is written, "male-and-female God created them" (Genesis 1:27).

... While this Midrash is an imaginative commentary rather than a literal description of any particular community or circumstance, it is clear that the rabbis were comfortable with using gender fluidity and non-conformity to imagine our Biblical ancestors. Furthermore, the opening verse that connects the creation of humanity to the divine image suggests that the unfolding of gender possibilities presented here reflects how the worlds and God are united by diversity and multiplicity rather than binary finality.

Source 2: "The Genesis of Gender," *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*, Joy Ladin, 2018

Like many transgender people, I have spent my entire life on the look-out for signs of gender. To me, gender is everywhere in the human world, stamped on every face and figure, shouting from ads, singing pop songs, starring in every show. But when I read the first chapter of Genesis, other than the gendered verbs and pronouns required by Biblical Hebrew, gender isn't there. God creates light and dark, day and night, sky and earth, sun and moon, seas and stars, animals and plants, without referring to maleness or femaleness. That's why it's so striking when we are told that God created human beings "male and female":

And God said, "Let us make [humanity] 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." So God created [humanity] in God's own image, in the image of God God created [them]; male and female God created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

But there is no sign here or in the rest of this chapter that "male and female" carry the social, psychological or other meanings we call "gender." Gender doesn't merely distinguish between male and female bodies; it gives this difference meaning, assigning different roles and characteristics to people with male and female bodies. At this point in creation, neither God nor the Torah treat males and females differently. Both are "created in the image of God," and in the verses that immediately follow, God blesses and instructs humanity without distinguishing one from another... But by specifically mentioning that humanity is created male and female – by singling out that difference among all human physical variations – Genesis I lays the foundation for the gender binary.

Discussion Questions:

- Sienna suggests an empowering narrative that not only did early thinkers who shaped Rabbinic Judaism were "comfortable" with gender possibility, but even attributed it specifically to significant ancestors. Do you find that interpretation empowering?
- What might these texts look like if they were written by the characters themselves? What would a multigendered Adam, an intersex Sarah, or a trans Joseph say about themselves?
- According to Ladin, how do each of these three paradigms show up in Genesis: 1) male and female (*zachar u'nekevah*), 2) gender, and 3) gender binary?
- Thinking about your own experiences encountering Jewish text and tradition, when do you notice gender? When do you feel it "isn't there"?

Part 2: Trans & gender-expansive folks living their truths

Source 3: Karl M. Baer, Berlin 1907, cited in Noam Sienna, *A Rainbow Thread*, 2019

I was born a boy, raised as a girl. The fabric of my life was twisted from tangled threads until, with a mighty blow, the inner nature of my masculinity tore apart the veil of half-truths that upbringing, habit, and vital necessity had spun about me. One may raise a healthy boy in as womanish a manner as one wishes, and a female creature in as mannish; never will this cause their senses to remain forever reversed ... Honest knowledge never drags one down, but rather liberates and elevates one! Where is the mother who does not wish to see her child pure and free? Therefore let us show our children the paths that lead to purity and freedom! With joyous eyes, I look to the future that lies before me like an endless landscape, filled with sunlight. May life around us rage and thunder, I shall at last enter the battle of life as a person with equal rights, a strong will, and a glad heart.

Source 4: *How This Ex-Hasidic Woman Lost And Found Her Judaism*, Abby Stein Interview, *Huffington Post*, 2016

I wanted to show [by coming out publicly as transgender] that if you claim being trans is unacceptable in traditional Judaism, well, here is a community that is not just okay with accepting me as I am, but is celebrating with me, rejoicing with me. What I'm hoping is that by sharing my story, others in the same situation will realize that you can have your name changed in a synagogue. There are so many synagogues where you can't, but there are also those where you can. Every time something like this is done, it's one step closer to acceptance for everyone.

Source 5: Ezra Furman, Facebook post, 2024

More visibility is more power, but more vulnerability.

Discussion Questions:

- Baer lived in a time of explosion of possibility for (some) intersex, transgender, and gender-expansive people in 20th century Germany. His optimism and confidence are palpable. In this memoir. What is he advocating for? What change does he hope that he can make by publishing his memoir?
- In your own words, what does Ezra Furman convey in her short estimation of coming out?
- Abby Stein talks about her reasons for telling her story. How are they similar to Baer's? How are they different?
- All of these thinkers make a connection between visibility and making change, yet they all come from very different perspectives. How might we think about advocating for trans dignity and rights while respecting the very diverse experiences of the transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive people?

Part 3: Celebrating Trans Power

Source 6: Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, 1996

My interest in this subject is not merely theoretical. You probably already know that those of us who cross the cultural boundaries of sex and gender are paying a terrible price. We face discrimination and physical violence. We are denied the right to live and work with dignity and respect. It takes so much courage to live our lives that sometimes just leaving our homes in the morning and facing the world as who we are is in itself an act of resistance. But perhaps you didn't know that we have a history of fighting against such injustice, and that today we are forging a movement for liberation ... It is time for us to write as experts in our own histories. For too long our light has been refracted through other people's prisms."

Source 7: אֶחֶנֹּךְ אֶצְמִי | *ehchenoch atzmi* | I will educate myself, Rabbi Dr Koach Baruch (KB) Frazier 2024

Ehchenoch atzmi

I will dedicate myself
to transformation

I will dedicate myself
to be brave

I will dedicate myself
to be joyous

I will dedicate

Ehchenoch atzmi

I will dedicate myself to
liberation

I will dedicate myself
to the truth

I will dedicate myself
to keep on learning

I will dedicate

Ehchenoch atzmi

I will dedicate myself to self
reflection

I will dedicate myself to
solidarity

I will dedicate myself to
resting my body

I will dedicate



Listen to
the song
here!

Source 8: Laynie Soloman, Associate Rosh Yeshivah, SVARA, *The Trans Halakha Project* and *Tefillat Trans*

What's bringing me here is that I am tired of experiencing dysphoric *halakha* [Jewish law]—the pervasive way of relating to trans folks as “issues” to be solved within *halakha*. I want to experience—and I want us all to experience—euphoric *halakha*, *halakha* that finds the places where we fit, where we learn and feel something in our tradition that clicks, that feels blissful and powerful and holy and good. Euphoric *hiddushim* (innovations) like these are at the center of the works we are celebrating today. And as I read each of these *teshuvot* and looked through the pages of *Tefillat Trans*, I felt that sense of euphoria. We do not need to be solved. We need to be free. What's bringing me here that I yearn for *halakha* that moves, that flows, that is people-driven, that takes seriously the principles that have given it shape for thousands of years, and that responds to the deeply human needs of all of us—our bodies, our intuitions, the mess and the delight of being human together.

Discussion Questions:

- Feinberg opens this history of trans resilience by making it unabashedly personal. How do you think about the importance of communities telling their own stories?
- In 1996, Feinberg believed that the average reader “probably already knows” about anti-trans discrimination and bias, but “perhaps does not know” about trans resilience. Does this resonate for you? What have you seen represented in the contemporary conversation?
- Laynie Soloman writes that “we do not need to be solved. We need to be free.” What do you think they mean by this? How do the various commentaries, rituals, blessings, and writings shared here build freedom in Jewish life?
- The lyrics of Rabbi Frazier's song are a powerful play on words. The word אֶחֶנֹּךְ comes from the root חנך which can mean both “to dedicate” and “to educate.” How might these two meanings be connected, especially in the work for trans visibility?

Prayers + Blessing for TDOV

Prayer for Transgender Justice, by Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater

Our God and God of our ancestors, we ask your blessing upon our community, the holy assembly of all transgender people, and upon all who cross over the boundaries of life. Grant us life and happiness from your abundance of blessings, and spread over us the shelter of Your peace. Grant us the strength to create and to be created, to form and to be formed, and to fulfill Your will to love all creation and to pursue peace. Teach us truth and justice, for You are a shield for all the oppressed. Send relief and righteousness to all our community, and may Your goodness be with us as it was with our ancestors. Blessed are You, God who makes justice and peace for all who cross over the boundaries of life.

Eloheinu velohei avoteinu ve-imoteinu, bareikh et kehilateinu ha-trans ha-k'doshah, et kol adat ha-trans, ve-et kol ha-ov'rim al gevulei ha-hayim. Tein lanu hayim ve-sim'hah me-eit otzar bir'khotekha, u-fros aleinu sukkat shelomekha. Yehi ve-kokheinu liv'ro u-lehit'barei, litzor u-lehit'yatzeir, u-lekayeim retzon'kha le'ehov et ha-b'riyot ve-lirdof et ha-shalom. Lamdeinu emet va-tzedek, ki atah hu magein le-khol ha-d'khufim. Shelakh hatzalah u-tzedakah le-khol adateinu, vi'yehi has'dekha imanu ka'asher hayah im avoteinu ve-imoteinu. Barukh atah, ha-el ha-oseh tzedakah ve-shalom le-khol ha-ov'rim al gevulei ha-hayim.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ, בָּרַךְ אֶת קְהִלַּתֵּנוּ
הַטְּרַנְס הַקְּדוֹשָׁה, אֶת כָּל
עַדַּת הַטְּרַנְס, וְאֶת כָּל
הַעוֹבְרִים עַל גְּבוּלֵי הַחַיִּים. תֵּן
לָנוּ חַיִּים וְשִׁמְחָה מֵאֵת אוֹצַר
בְּרִכּוֹתֶךָ, וּפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת
שְׁלוֹמֶךָ. יְהִי בְּכוֹחֵנוּ לְבָרָא
וּלְהַתְּבָרָא, לִיצֵר וּלְהִתְיַצֵּר,
וּלְקַיֵּם רְצוֹנְךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת
הַבְּרִיאוֹת וּלְרַדֵּף אֶת הַשְּׁלוֹם.
לַמְּדֵנוּ אֱמֶת וְצֶדֶק, כִּי אַתָּה
הוּא מָגֵן לְכָל הַדְּכוּפִים. שְׁלַח
הַצִּלָּה וְצֶדֶקָה לְכָל עַדְתֵּנוּ,
וְיִהְיֶה חֲסִדְךָ עִמָּנוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה
עִם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ. בָּרוּךְ
אַתָּה, הָאֵל הַעוֹשֶׂה צֶדֶקָה
וְשְׁלוֹם לְכָל הַעוֹבְרִים עַל
גְּבוּלֵי הַחַיִּים

Twilight People Prayer, Rabbi Reuben Zellman

As the sun sinks and the colors of the day turn, we offer a blessing for the twilight, for twilight is neither day nor night, but in-between. We are all twilight people. We can never be fully labeled or defined. We are many identities and loves, many genders and none. We are in between roles, at the intersection of histories, or between place and place. We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination, streaks of light swirled together. We are neither day nor night. We are both, neither, and all.

May the sacred in-between of this evening suspend our certainties, soften our judgments, and widen our vision. May this in-between light illuminate our way to the God who transcends all categories and definitions. May the in-between people who have come to pray be lifted up into this twilight. We cannot always define; we can always say a blessing. Blessed are You, God of all, who brings on the twilight.

Blessing for Trans Bodies as Embodied Protest, Excerpt from Tefillat Trans, by Vivid “Viv” Young. To be said when one wishes to thank Hashem for the transgressive and subversive nature of their trans body.

Blessed are You, Adonai, the Transforming One, who grants me a body of truth with which I may create ripples in the World.

B'rukheh ateh adonai hameshaneh she'noteneh li gif shel emet la'asot itto galim ba'olam.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הַמְּשַׁנֶּה
שְׁנוֹתֵנִה לִי גִיף שֶׁל אֱמֶת
לַעֲשׂוֹת אִיתוֹ גָּלִים בְּעוֹלָם



Honoring TDOV In Your Community

As this guide has demonstrated, Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) can be an invitation to consider and celebrate trans and gender-expansive voices within the Jewish world. Additionally, TDOV is also an opportunity to **take brave risks and to stand for justice**. Jewish stories, traditions, and texts teach us about the importance of protecting the dignity and safety of each person. This is core to a Jewish vision of a just society, and each of us is empowered to do our part to make that vision a reality.

Below are a few invitations from Keshet to celebrate and take action this year as a part of your Hillel's TDOV observances. **Keshet envisions a world in which all LGBTQ+ Jews and our families can live with full equality, justice, and dignity.]**



Holding a TDOV gathering or celebration on Monday, March 31st (or the Shabbat or Havdalah immediately before or after).



Lighting a candle and offering one of the prayers or blessings in this guide.



Holding a text study to celebrate the creativity of transgender Jews using the sources in this guide.



Sharing, in your spaces or online, information about transgender Jews.



Bringing in trans artists, speakers, or musicians.



Taking action for transgender rights. See below!

The most important way to honor TDOV is to take action for transgender rights. Here are a few concrete and simple ways you can get started:

Use this resource to check the current pro and anti-trans+ laws in your state through the **Movement Advancement Project's Equality Map**



Take action by **contacting your representatives** for trans+ rights at the national and state level.



Track current anti-LGBTQ+ Bills in your state through ACLU's 2025 Map.



Be your Hillel's representative for **Keshet's Thrive Coalition**: These are monthly meetings to learn about the current legislative landscape. Coalition members receive the tools to take action in their communities and support their LGBTQ+ community.



Visibility Matters

The queer/trans & Jewish voices in this guide



Rabbi Micah Buck is Keshet's Director of Education & Training, where he supports organizations across the spectrum of Jewish life to build communities in which LGBTQ+ Jews and our families can thrive. He is also the co-author of this very guide!



Noam Sienna is a scholar of Jewish culture and history, focusing on the medieval and early modern periods, and with a particular interest in Jewish communities in the Islamic world.



Joy Ladin is an American scholar and professor at Stern College for Women at Yeshiva University, and she is the first openly transgender professor at an Orthodox Jewish institution.



Karl M. Baer was a German-Israeli author, social worker, reformer, suffragist and Zionist. Born intersex and assigned female at birth, he came out as a trans man in 1904 at the age of 19. In 1906, and worked closely with the famous Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld (also Jewish) to medically affirm his gender and fought the German government to update all of his records.



Abby Stein is an Israeli-American transgender author, rabbi, activist, blogger, model, and speaker. She is the first openly transgender woman raised in a Hasidic community, and is a direct descendant of Hasidic Judaism's founder, the Baal Shem Tov.



Ezra Furman is a transgender, Jewish American musician and songwriter. Her incendiary music has soundtracked the Netflix show *Sex Education*, and has for years woven together stories of queer discontent and unlikely, fragile intimacies.



Visibility Matters (cont.)



Leslie Feinberg was a Jewish-American butch lesbian, transgender activist, communist, and author. Her[a] writing, notably *Stone Butch Blues* and her pioneering non-fiction book *Transgender Warriors*, laid the groundwork for much of the terminology and awareness around gender studies and was instrumental in bringing these issues to a more mainstream audience.



Rabbi Dr Koach Baruch (KB) Frazier is a transformer, heartbeat of movements, healer, musician, founder of the Black Trans Torah Club, co-founder of the Tzedek Lab, and co-founder of Black Folks Beit Midrash. A collaborative leader, rooted in tradition, curiosity and love, Koach strives to dismantle racism, actualize liberation and transform lives both sonically and spiritually.



Laynie Soloman is a passionate teacher of Jewish text and thought, and they believe deeply in the power of Talmud study as a healing and liberatory spiritual practice. They love facilitating Jewish learning that uplifts the piously irreverent, queer, and subversive spirit of rabbinic text and theology.



Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater is a radical transfeminist rabbi and activist. Her rabbinic work focuses on creating innovative yet traditional Jewish law, liturgy, and ritual, in order to celebrate and affirm trans identities and experiences. Rabbi Kapor-Mater also works for acceptance and accessibility for people with visible and invisible disabilities.



Rabbi Reuben Zellman is an American teacher, author, rabbi, and musician. He became the first openly transgender person accepted to the Reform Jewish seminary Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 2003. This “Twilight People Prayer” draws on the parallel between God’s creation of day and night and the creation of male and female (both within chapter 1 of Genesis).



Vivid “Viv” Young, one of the authors of *Tefillat Trans*, is a teacher, sister, daughter, auntie, friend, singer, and trans Jewish woman who makes a home in so-called Western Massachusetts.

