

As Old As Torah: The Queerness We Inherited:

*A Virtual Pride Torah Study
Exploring Queerness in
Jewish Texts*



With Saffron Mala Kaplan

Check In

Please share the following in the chat:

- Your name
- Your location
- Your pronouns, if you wish to share
- Name a queer icon
- In 1-2 words: What does representation mean to you?

Keshet works for the full equality

of all LGBTQ+ Jews and our families in Jewish life. We strengthen Jewish communities. We equip Jewish organizations with the skills and knowledge to build LGBTQ+ affirming communities; create spaces for LGBTQ+ Jewish youth and LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to feel joy and belonging; and advance LGBTQ+ rights nationwide.



QJOC Programming

Program Priorities:

- Creating spaces and resources *by, for, and in support of* LGBTQ+ Jews of Color (QJOC) that foster connection, community, and belonging across Jewish life.
- Partnering with Jewish organizations and community members (who do not identify as QJOCs) to *deepen understanding, strengthen allyship, and foster a greater appreciation for the full diversity of Jewish life*, ensuring LGBTQ+ Jews of Color are recognized, valued, and embraced.



We affirm that **racial equity and justice** - an understanding and acknowledgment of historical and ongoing racial inequities and a commitment to actions challenging those inequities - are **core to Keshet's vision of a just society.**

As Old As Torah: The Queerness We Inherited



Artist Statement

*"LGBTQ+ Jews of Color are a historic, yet long underrepresented, part of Jewish life. While our stories have often been overlooked, our existence cannot and will not be erased. Flowers for Our People affirms that every person is created **B'tzelem Elohim**, in God's image, and that uplifting the full diversity of Jewish life is holy and central to our tradition. This work rests on the belief that even within the most ancient, sacred texts, there is space for every soul to be reflected in its teachings. May this work serve as a source of representation for those too often overlooked, honoring the truth that every identity and every experience reveals the divinity among us."*

Flowers for Our People

An LGBTQ+ Jews of Color Art Showcase

Visit the digital exhibit



Keshet
קשת

For LGBTQ+
equality in
Jewish life

keshetonline.org



Kavanot - Intentions

- **These Are Interpretations, Not Absolutes:**

- The images and ideas explored today are creative interpretations of Jewish texts and figures, offered as one of many possible ways of engaging with these stories.

- **Approach with Curiosity:**

- Rather than asking whether an interpretation is right or wrong, consider what it reveals, what questions it raises, and what new possibilities it invites us to imagine.

- **Honoring Pluralism:**

- Jewish tradition is built on conversation, debate, and multiple interpretations existing side by side. We may not all see ourselves in every image or interpretation, and that's okay. Our goal is not consensus, but curiosity and deeper understanding.

- **Make Room for Multiple Truths:**

- Different experiences shape how we encounter Jewish texts and stories. As we engage with these contemporary reimaginings, we invite ourselves to listen for perspectives that may differ from our own.

- **Representation Matters:**

- The Jewish story is richer when more people can see themselves reflected in it. These interpretations invite us to expand our understanding of the diversity that has always existed within Jewish life.

- **Have Fun!**

Gender Queerness in Jewish Texts



Adam



בראשית א': כ"ו-כ"ז

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמוֹתֵנוּ... []: וַיְבָרֵא אֱלֹקִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם
בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Genesis 1:26-27

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness... []
And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image
of God—**creating them MALE and FEMALE.**

בראשית ב': כ"א-כ"ב

וַיִּפֹּל יְיָ אֱלֹהִים | תְּרִדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתוֹ וַיִּסְגֶּר בָּשָׂר
תַּחְתָּנָה: וַיִּבֶן יְיָ אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְאֶה אֶל־
הָאָדָם:

Genesis 2:21-22

So the ETERNAL God cast a deep sleep upon the Human; and, while he slept, [God] took one of his sides* and closed up the flesh at that site. And the ETERNAL God fashioned the side* that had been taken from the Human into a woman, bringing her to the Human.

Were man and woman created at the same time (*as seen in Genesis 1*) or was man created first and woman then created out of man's pre-existing body (*as depicted in Genesis 2*) ?



בראשית רבה ח'א'

בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, אֲנִדְרוּגִינוֹס בְּרָאוּ, הֵדָא הוּא דְכְתִיב
(בראשית ה, ב): זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם. אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בֶּר נַחֲמָן, בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ
בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, דִּיּוּ פְרָצוּפִים בְּרָאוּ, וְנָסְרוּ וַעֲשָׂאוּ גְבִים, גֵּב לְכָאן וְגֵב לְכָאן.

Bereshit Rabbah 8:1

When the Holy One blessed be He created Adam the first man, He created him androgynous. That is what is written: “He created them male and female” (Genesis 5:2). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: When the Holy One blessed be He created Adam the first man, He created him with two faces, and [subsequently] He sawed him in two and made [for] him two backs, a back here and a back there.

The rabbis suggested that the first human was created as both male *and* female in one. It was only after they found themselves needing companionship that the Human was split into two parts, one male and one female. The biblical narrator tells us that the Human was created in G-d's image; surely, then, all of us — men, women, and everything else — are all sacred reflections of the divine.



Please share the following in the chat:

- Name an item you cherish that also reflects a facet of who you are.

Joseph



Midrashim on the **Book of Genesis** teach that Joseph was originally conceived as female, but was physically changed to male in the womb (and vice versa for Joseph's half-sibling Dinah). Through our modern lens, the narrative of being born into a “male” body with a female soul reads exactly as we now understand the trans feminine experience. With this new understanding of Joseph, many other seemingly disparate parts of her story suddenly make perfect sense.



בראשית ל"ז:ב-ד'

: וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זִקְנִים הָוָא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים: וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֹתוֹ אֶהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבֵּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם:

Genesis 37:2-4

Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons—he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an **ornamented tunic**. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

שמואל ב י"ג:י"ח

וַעֲלֶיהָ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים כִּי כֵן תִּלְבָּשֵׁן בָּנוֹת־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַבְּתוּלָה מְעִילִים

II Samuel 13:18

[Tamar] was wearing an **ornamented tunic**, for maiden princesses were customarily dressed in such garments.

בראשית רבה פ"ד:ז'

יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה וגו' (בראשית לז, ב), ואת אמר והוא נער, אלא שהיה עושה מעשה נערו, ממשמש בעיניו, מתלה בעקבו, מתקן בשערו.

Bereshit Rabbah 84:7

“Joseph, seventeen years old...” – and you say he was a lad? It is because he would perform the actions of a lad – he would groom his eyes, lift his heels, and curl his hair.

Rather than Jacob unfairly favoring one of his children with this gift, perhaps he recognized his daughter for who she really was and attempted to provide her with gender-affirming clothing—an act tragically misunderstood by Jacob’s sons, leading them to commit horrible acts of violence against their vulnerable sister for innocently expressing her identity. Later in Egypt, Pharaoh changes Joseph’s name to Zaphenath-Paneah, meaning something like “*revealer of hidden things*”—a perfect name for a trans woman who, after years of hardship and ostracization, is finally able to live openly as her true self.



Queer Expressions of Love in Jewish Texts



Please share the following in the chat:

- Who comes to mind when you think of your favorite love story?

Ruth & Naomi



רות א': י"ד-ט"ז

וַתִּשָּׁנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשָּׁק עֲרֹפָהּ לַחֲמוּתָהּ וְרוּת
דִּבְקָה בָּהּ: וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבֻמָּתְךָ אֶל-עַמָּהּ וְאֶל-
אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבֻמָּתְךָ: וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת...

Ruth 1:14-16

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah
kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth
clung to her. So she said, “See, your sister-in-law
has returned to her people and her gods. Go
follow your sister-in-law.” But Ruth replied...





*“Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back
and not follow you. For wherever you go,
I will go.”
Ruth 1:16*



*“Wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
your people will be my people.”
Ruth 1:16*

רות א':ט"ז-י"ז

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תִּפְגַּעִי-בִי לְעֻזְבְּךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי אֶל-אִשְׁרֵי תִלְכִּי אֵלֶיךָ וּבְאִשְׁרֵי תִלְיִנִי
אֲלִין עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֶלְהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי: בְּאִשְׁרֵי תַּמּוּתַי אֲמוּת וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֵּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה
יוֹסִיף כִּי הַמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ:

Ruth 1:16-17

“Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may GOD do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”

These verses — an expression of love so powerful that it has been adopted into many modern (even heterosexual) wedding ceremonies — are spoken by Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi after the death of her husband, Naomi's son. Although the main plot of the Book of Ruth follows Ruth's search for a new husband to support her and Naomi, the underlying theme is these two women's devotion to each other. Even after Ruth remarries and bears a son, he is not called her husband's child: rather, the women in their community would say "a son is born to Naomi!" (**Ruth 4:17**) furthering the suggestion that Ruth and Naomi are wedded to each other in all but name.



David & Jonathan

*Through their short time knowing each other,
David and Jonathan make three covenants
declaring and affirming their relationship,
bookended by intense expressions of love.*





*“Jonathan’s soul became bound up with the
soul of David; Jonathan loved David as
himself.”
1 Samuel 18:1*

שמואל א י"ח:א-ד'

וַיְהִי כְּכֹלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל-שָׁאוּל וְנִפְשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנִפְשׁ דָּוִד (וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ) [וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ] יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנִפְשׁוֹ: ... [] וַיִּכְרַת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנִפְשׁוֹ: וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת-הַמָּעִיל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנֶהוּ לְדָוִד וּמִלּוֹ וְעַד-חֶרְבּוֹ וְעַד-קִשְׁתּוֹ וְעַד-חֲגָרוֹ:

I Samuel 18:1-4

When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself... []

Jonathan and David made a pact, because [Jonathan] loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt.

שמואל א כ':מ"א-מ"ב

(מא) וַיִּפֹּל לְאַפָּיו אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פַּעַמִּים וַיִּשְׁקֹן | אִישׁ אֶת־יָרְעֵהוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ אִישׁ אֶת־יָרְעֵהוּ עַד־דָּוֶד הִגְדִּיל: (מב) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁלִינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ בְּשֵׁם יי לֵאמֹר יי יְהִיָּה | בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זָרְעִי וּבֵין זָרְעֶךָ עַד־עוֹלָם:

I Samuel 20:41-42

(41) [David] flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer. (42) Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of GOD: ‘May GOD be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!’”

שמואל א כג:ט"ז-י"ח

וַיָּקָם יְהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־שָׁאוּל וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־דָּוִד חֲרָשָׁה וַיַּחַזֵּק אֶת־יָדוֹ בְּאֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶל־תִּירָא
כִּי לֹא תִמָּצֵאךָ יָד שָׁאוּל אָבִי וְאַתָּה תִּמְלֹךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה־לְךָ לְמִשְׁנָה וְגַם־שָׁאוּל
אָבִי יֵדַע כֵּן: וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיָּשָׁב דָּוִד בְּחֲרָשָׁה וַיְהוֹנָתָן הֵלֵךְ לְבֵיתוֹ:

I Samuel 23:16-18

And Saul's son Jonathan came to David at Horesh and encouraged him in [the name of] God. He said to him, "Do not be afraid: the hand of my father Saul will never touch you. You are going to be king over Israel and I shall be second to you; and even my father Saul knows this is so." And the two of them entered into a pact before GOD. David remained in Horesh, and Jonathan went home.



“I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, more than the love of women.”

2 Samuel 1:26

Further Reading Recommendations

- *A Rainbow Thread: An Anthology of Queer Jewish Texts From the First Century to 1969* – edited by Dr. Noam Sienna
- *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective* – Dr. Joy Ladin
- *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* – by Rabbi Steven Greenberg
- *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible* – edited by Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer
- *Sources of Pride* – by Rabbi Abby Chava Stein

Keshet Programs + Resources:

Threads of Identity

LGBTQ+ Jews of Color
in the Fabric
of Jewish Life

Keshet
קשת

For LGBTQ+
equality in
Jewish life

Analysis and report prepared by
Sage Cassell-Rosenberg and
Gage Gorsky, PhD

Flowers for Our People

An LGBTQ+ Jews of Color
Art Showcase

Visit the digital exhibit



Keshet
קשת

For LGBTQ+
equality in
Jewish life

keshetonline.org



QJOC Kinship

A Virtual Gathering for
LGBTQ+ Jews of Color

Keshet
קשת

June 30, 7pm ET

keshetonline.org/qjoc-kinship-rsvp

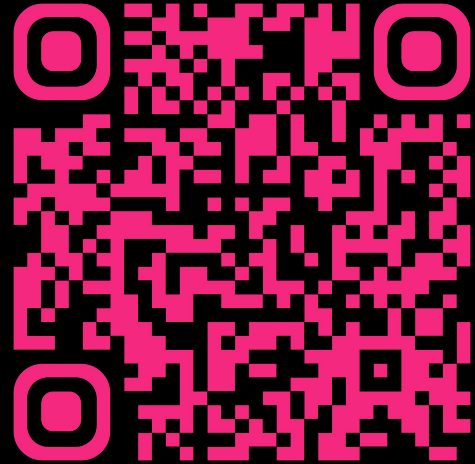


Thank you!



For LGBTQ
equality in
Jewish life

We Want Your Feedback!



Saffron Mala Kaplan: SaffronKaplan@gmail.com

Sage Cassell-Rosenberg: Sage.C.Rosenberg@keshetonline.org