

Making Liturgy Gay, Making Prayer Happy

Presented by Scott Reiter at Aleph Kallah 2018*

Background

Concepts in the essays by Rabbis Gil Steinlauf and Jay Michaelson:



It is queer to be Jewish



Queer experience can inspire changes in Jewish practice

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Washington, DC

"I'm not going to go on record as saying Moses was gay." Rabbi Gil Steinlauf says this with a laugh — he laughs often and warmly, it turns out — but he's also quite serious in response to a reporter's offhand remark that Moses could be viewed as history's first gay activist.

"But the story of Moses *is* a kind of coming out story," Steinlauf says. "He grew up as a Prince of Egypt in the house of Pharaoh, completely in the center of power. Yet, he was nursed by his Israelite mother, so he knew that he had this secret identity. He lived in inner-conflict over those two worlds, those two identities of himself, until he finally came to a head when he killed an Egyptian who was oppressing an Israelite, and ran away. He tried to hide until God called him back. And then he spoke on behalf of his people.

So I always make the argument that Moses has a kind of queer coming-out parallel in his life story, and that's a fundamental motivational factor for his ability to recognize the suffering of his people and to stand up to Pharaoh, because of his ability to overcome his own limitations and insecurities and his shame of who he was.

* * *

A lot of people who aren't Jewish have trouble grasping this, but being Jewish is only in part a religion. In Judaism, we call ourselves "a people." And our people is rich and varied and diverse and textured. There are observant Jewish people and there are secular Jews, but one of the things we all inherently understand is that we're all Jewish.

I see *tremendous* parallels between the uniquely Jewish experience in the world and in history and the experience of being queer. I believe that to be Jewish is a form of being queer. When you think about the role of the Jewish people throughout history, we have always never really fit in. We have always been kind of on the outside of mainstream civilization — on the outside, and yet interestingly, right in the middle of it at the same time. One foot in and one foot out. That's sort of what it feels like to be Jewish. It's kind of also what it feels like to be gay. We're completely a part of the world that we live in, and yet there something about us that's fundamentally "other." And to be Jewish is to be fundamentally "other," as well. Similar to being queer, to be Jewish is a source of anxiety for other people who don't understand us. To be Jewish is to be a source of persecution and attack and oppression from those who project their nightmares onto us because we *look* like them, we might even dress like them, but then we're somehow "other-fied." And so, my journey of being gay, of being closeted, and then coming out has been deeply influential on my path as a Jew, on my path as a Rabbi, on my vision of Judaism and how Judaism can evolve in the 21st century. And all of that has been deeply formed by my insight and experience of being gay.

Excerpted from: <https://www.metroweekly.com/2015/05/leap-of-faith-an-interview-with-rabbi-gil-steinlauf/>

The queerness of love:

A Jewish case for same-sex marriage

BY RABBI GIL STEINLAUF | PUBLISHED JAN 24, 2013

Last year, I officiated at the first same-sex wedding in the 145-year history of my synagogue. For a Conservative congregation, this was quite a break with tradition. Nevertheless, I was proud to stand beneath the wedding canopy with this couple, who affirmed the sacredness of their union “in accordance with the laws of Moses and the people of Israel.” Before I chose to officiate, I studied the texts, teachings, and arguments in my tradition. I didn’t make this decision lightly. Today, I am unfazed by the apparent biblical injunction against homosexuality as an “abomination.” I am confident in my stand, despite a 3,000-year-old tradition that has no precedent for such a marriage. In fact, it is from a place of humility and awe before my tradition and God that I have chosen take this stand.

The Hebrew word for wedding is “Kiddushin,” which means ‘Sanctification,’ or ‘Holiness.’ A wedding is the formal declaration of the holiness of love. All the blessings and rituals and formulae under the wedding canopy affirm one idea: when two human beings find each other and love each other, it is Godly: a taste of the World to Come, a world of perfected justice and joy. It is in our capacity to love that we are holy, and most fully in the image of God. If there’s anything that 3,000 years of Jewish history has shown us—3,000 years of so much exile and persecution—it’s that the only hope for humankind is to strive toward ever-more loving and just societies.

We Jews are a people who have never quite fit into the same categories of peoplehood or religion that other nations do. We are a distinct people, even as we bear a message of God’s universality. We affirm that we are different from other peoples, even as we know that we are no different than any other human being. Our presence in the world has often been a source of anxiety for other nations, religions, and people. In this way, we Jews have always been a queer people. And yes, I use the term ‘queer’ deliberately. To be queer is to be troubling, unsettling, not meeting expectations of the way others might want things to be.

It is, in fact, the Jews’ queerness in the world that captures our particular Divine message to all humanity. As Rabbi David Dunn Bauer, creator of Queer Spiritual Counseling teaches, the existence of God is the queerest thing about the universe. God, too, cannot be categorized or boxed in. The inexplicable mystery of God is a source of unspeakable anxiety to so many of us who long to reduce God to our simplistic categories. Finally, we declare the love of a wedded couple to be holy because love, too, defies all classifications and can never be bounded—it’s a feeling, but not just a feeling; it’s a state of being that “have,” that we “are,” but it is larger than any one individual or relationship. Love is queer, and in recognizing this, we find its holiness, its Godliness.

It is no accident that the famous Levitical injunction concerning homosexuality appears in a section of the Torah called “Kedoshim,” meaning “Holy.” When seen in context, the homosexual act described comes amidst a series of many kinds of human couplings—all of which are abusive because they are not loving acts. When one man rapes another man simply because he does not have access to a woman, such an act is indeed an abomination, a desecration of God’s holiness, a desecration of love. Such an act is the farthest thing from the love of two human beings—of whatever gender—that we can and must sanctify whenever it arises in our human condition.

I reject the idea that the Bible declares that the only sacred love that can exist is the love between a man and a woman. Love is queer — it can never be limited to our categorizations of roles and gender. Love is commitment, presence, and kindness so awesome and mysterious that nothing in our power can contain it. We must, in our very imperfect world, celebrate, sanctify, and lift up love wherever we find it; because our loving relationships are the only way that we will bring Godliness to this world. For these reasons, I proudly stand for the evolution of Judaism, in awe of the wisdom of my Jewish people and tradition, the of holiness God and the queerness of love.

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AJS Perspectives

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES

What's Different (or not) about Same-Sex Marriage

Jay Michaelson

Published in: Spring 2013: The Marriage Issue



Photo courtesy of the author.

“**M**arriage equality” is an uninteresting issue. Marriage inequality is interesting. Consider the Conservative movement’s recent tribulations over a gay marriage liturgy. By all accounts, this particular debate has been quite civil, *l’shem shamayim*, and the sort of applied scholarship that makes academic life interesting. The question presented: should gay marriages be solemnized with a replica of a traditional Conservative Jewish wedding, or should there be a different liturgy that takes the unique circumstances of a same-sex couple into account?

The answer, as of a few months ago, was exactly what one has come to expect (for better and for worse) from the Conservative movement: both. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards offered a traditional liturgy, but without *kiddushin*, as well as an alternative liturgy with different language and different ritual forms (no *chuppah*, no rings, etc.).

This result is not particularly interesting, as it is but the latest in the movement’s (take your pick) pluralism/vibrancy, or paralysis/discord. But the debate surrounding the question, and its unintended consequences, are fascinating.

First, there were multiple—and diametrically opposed—rationales for alternatives to the traditional model. On the one hand, some LGBT advocates—myself included—favored a ritual that didn’t mimic a straight wedding but recognized that a gay wedding is importantly and productively different. On the other hand, some small-c conservatives favored a different ritual so that it wouldn’t be confused with a “real” wedding. The rabbis on the law committee were caught in the middle. Is “different from” always “less than”? Is separate inherently unequal?

And then there was the issue of *kiddushin*. For at least thirty years now, feminists have critiqued this legal form—in which the groom effectively buys the bride—as outrageous. *Kiddushin* seemed particularly out of place in a same-sex wedding. Who buys whom? And if a new ritual is being created, isn't this the perfect time to dispense with this old, offensive, and outmoded form?

The law committee, following the pioneering work of Rachel Adler, tended to agree. But then the law of unintended consequences kicked in. With *kiddushin* no longer mandatory for gay couples, some straight couples have already begun adapting the gay liturgy for their own egalitarian nuptials. After all, the reasoning goes, if the *kiddushin*-free rite is equally valid as the traditional one, why shouldn't it apply to heterosexual couples as well? Do straight people now have fewer options than gay people?

There are those who have complained about this unexpected, but perhaps foreseeable, development. They see it as a back-door sabotaging of *kiddushin*, and, though I have yet to read anyone saying so in print, conservatives might well point to this turn of events as evidence that same-sex marriage actually is changing marriage for everyone. In some ways, this is a nightmare come true for those who disparage gay marriage.

I have a different view, naturally. To develop it, I want to go back to my brash introductory sentences about marriage equality and inequality. From the outset, there have been multiple strands to the LGBT movement, just as there are in feminism and in anti-racism and anti-oppression work of all kinds. There are those in my community who espouse a basically assimilationist message: let us in (to rabbinical school, to the rite of marriage, etc.) because we are basically the same as you. We are not here to transform institutions, but to join them. We want only what you already have. This is the dominant argument, and the argument that is politically the most effective.

But then there are the more radical voices with a different message. Let us in, they say, not because we are the same as you, but because we are relevantly equal and importantly different as well. And know that when you do let us in, we will probably change your—now our—institutions.

This, of course, is not an LGBT-specific message. Few people advocate for the “melting pot” model, the idea that all genders, races, ethnicities, and sexualities will blur together into one majority. Multiculturalism more closely resembles the metaphor of the “gorgeous mosaic” (apparently first used by New York's mayor David Dinkins) of a diverse society. In a mosaic, the tiles are different from one another, and the celebration of that difference is what makes the overall mosaic beautiful.

Or, to choose the most proximate example, consider the effects on religious institutions once women's voices are empowered. Liturgy changes, theology changes, leadership changes—and presumably, all for the better since these changes better reflect the diversity of the population at large. These new, or newly heard, voices enrich the conversation by engaging in dialogue and often in critique of existing ones.

We are only beginning to have the conversation when it comes to LGBT people. Only in the last ten years have we begun to ask more probing questions than “Is it okay to be gay.” In Christian communities, queer theologians have been thinking and writing for several decades. In Jewish communities, with a few exceptions, we are playing catch-up. And, of course, we are still at square one in many communities, often fighting for basic legitimacy in the context of marriage.

The question of *kiddushin* is an instance in which the distinctive modalities of a same-sex relationship, in particular, the impossibility of assigning who is to be the *ba'al* (owner) and who the owned, has shed light on the tensions of such dichotomies in heterosexual contexts as well, where they are no more valid. This

is not unlike the adoption of the term “coming out,” which originated in gay experience, for all manner of self-revelations. In both cases, LGBT experience matters to everyone, not just gay people.

At the same time, it’s obvious that this tempest in a liturgical teapot won’t matter to the most Jews. Most Jewish weddings are Jewish because there’s a *chuppah*, there’s a glass, and there’s a rabbi even though none of those elements is required by halakah. Halakically speaking, the words which are recited under the wedding canopy determine the nature of the relationship. But popularly speaking, they are less important than the pomp and circumstance. Weddings are Maimonidean in nature: there’s one level of meaning for those who understand them, and another for those who do not.

In this light, the gradual transition of Conservative marriages to a non-*kiddushin* rite makes sense, and once again, LGBT experience might help point the way. It’s interesting to note that in the United Kingdom, when the Liberal movement proposed a radically different wedding rite, gay people refused to adopt it. If they were to get Jewishly married, they wanted it to be “kosher,” with all the trimmings.

I predict the experience here will be similar. I don’t think the new “alternative rite” with its *chuppah*-free forms will catch on at all. People who want a Jewish wedding want a Jewish wedding. *Ketubah*-free weddings will likely be adopted by the small minority of Conservative Jews who are Jewishly literate enough to notice and care, while most others coast on tradition.

In other words, what’s important for most people is precisely what isn’t interesting to the scholar. Ultimately, the contemporary marriage is a sacralization of love. Once upon a time, marriage was seen as primarily an economic relationship, so the terms of that relationship were of primary importance. These days, however, marriage is seen as primarily romantic, and the old legal provisions are secondary in nature. Changing them will be important for the literate minority, and it’s the right thing to do. But what matters more is the simpler stuff: this is love, and it is holy, and it is good.

The Feminist Core . . . and Out from There

Just as feminism influenced gay liberation, feminist theology, both Christian and Jewish influenced gay theology, both Christian and Jewish. A pillar for Judaism is Dr. Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again At Sinai*. She recognized that, although women's voices are not heard directly in Torah, women were there and we can discern their teaching. Similarly, queer voices are not heard, but we know they were there and we can find their share of Torah.

Merle Feld's poem "We All Stood Together" embodies the apparent silence of women in our tradition. My response "My Sister and I" expresses the humility that is needed from men if their voices are to meld with women's.

Just as the Torah is said to be black fire on white fire, liturgy is black letters on white pages. The white pages have shapes and voices that we do not usually focus on, but which are essential to understand the whole.

Traditional gender roles are arguably the root of homophobia. Therefore, one of the first changes required for liturgy to be appropriate in a LGBTQ context is to address the issue of gender – gender of people and gender of G-d. The liturgy must not be exclusively masculine in gender. Liturgy must acknowledge that women pray and are addressed in prayer. God should not be addressed as exclusively male. (English and Hebrew present different challenges in this regard.)

The difficulties of traditional gender usage in liturgy are reflected in the moving essay by Ayelet Wenger, an Orthodox Jew, which follows.

Thereafter, there are a few pages from *Shavat va-Yinafash* that acknowledge influential women in our ancient tradition, many of whom are not often given their due. In addition to the prophet Miriam, they include Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Serach.

Finally, Rabbi Jill Hammer presents a radical restating of how tradition is passed down in her "*Pirkei Imahot*."

We All Stood Together

for Rachel Adler

My brother and I were at Sinai.
He kept a journal
of what he saw,
of what he heard,
of what it all meant to him.

I wish I had such a record
of what happened to me there.

It seems like every time I want to write
I can't –
I'm always holding a baby,
one of my own,
or one for a friend,
always holding a baby
so my hands are never free
to write things down.

And then
as time passes
the particulars,
the hard data –
the who what when where why –
slip away from me
and all I'm left with is
the feeling.

But feelings are just sounds
the vowel barking of a mute.

My brother is so sure of what he heard
after all he's got a record of it
consonant after consonant after consonant.

If we remembered it together
we could recreate holy time
sparks flying.

Merle Feld

My Sister and I

My sister and I were at Sinai.
Yes, I kept a journal
of what I saw,
of what I heard,
of what I thought it all meant.

My sister has no record
of what happened to her there.

She says that every time she wanted to write
she couldn't –
She was always holding a baby,
one of her own,
or one for a friend,
always holding a baby
so her hands were never free
to write things down.

And then,
she says,
as time passed
the particulars
slipped away from her
and all she's left with is
the feeling.

I was so sure of what I wrote
in my record of
consonant after consonant after consonant.

But I was so young then
and as I read my journal now,
the missing feelings
the fear hope excitement awe
that I didn't see
or couldn't understand
glare at me
from the white spaces of the page

vowel after vowel after vowel.
Their whispers remind me to ask:
Join me, my sister.
Let's remember it together.
We'll recreate holy time
sparks flying.

Scott L Reiter

in conversation with Merle Feld's poem

Thoughts on Gender in Prayer and the Divine

I Pray In Man

Excerpts from *In the [Size 12, Men's] Footprints of My Forefathers*
by Ayelet Wenger

"Whoever is not wearing *tefillin* can just walk out," the rabbi announces from the other side of the high school *mechitzah*. I am not wearing *tefillin*. I know vaguely that there are women in schools that are not my school who wear *tefillin* as if they are Jews. I do not think the rabbi is talking to them. Nor to me. I want him to be talking to me. I want to believe that, as a person in a synagogue not wearing *tefillin*, I can exist.

I walk out.

Nobody notices.

I pray in man. In false pronouns. In the linguistic space of a foreign gender. In a collective maleness that is grammatically explainable because, well, that's how Hebrew works. ... There are the brackets, of course. Please remember to insert your brackets. ...

May God bless maleyou [and femaleyou*] and safeguard maleyou [and femaleyou] and shine His countenance upon maleyou [and femaleyou] and place upon maleyou peace [and femaleyou (if you're still there)].*

Yedid Nefesh / *Father, the merciful / draw your manservant /* in the sense of, you know, *maidservant*.

Somehow I rely on these meandering approximations, these words outside of words, to articulate myself within a tradition in which Creation is a matter of words, in which letters are worth crowns. Somehow I pray in sort of's.

... I walk into synagogue to see nine disappointed faces pointed past me, waiting for someone who counts.

Waiting for the coming of someone man enough to look God in His *tefillin* knot and cry:

"Your texts trapped me in the voice of a man!"

And our Father shall reach with outstretched arm
and with a flare of anthropomorphic nostrils.

Manly tears will stream down the Divine face –
that Maimonides never did manage to erase from the Bible –

and my God will speak from the depths of the metaphor to mankind in which He dwells,
saying:

"Me too."

* In Hebrew, "you" is marked as either masculine or feminine. Many forms of verbs also indicate the gender of the subject.

6. Be not ashamed and be not confounded;
Forget your distress, lift up your spirits!
In your city the poor will find shelter,
The city rebuilt on its ancient site.
7. Those who despoiled you shall be your spoil,
All who would destroy you shall be sent far off.
God will rejoice in you
As lovers rejoice in each other.
8. The knowledge and awe of God
Shall spread forth among the nations.
With joy and gladness we will welcome
Mashi-ach, descendant of Peretz.*
9. Enter in peace, crown of God,
Enter in gladness, enter in joy,
Among the faithful, God's treasured people.
Welcome O Bride! Welcome Shabbat!

Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (1505-1584, Tzfat)

*Many Biblical and Rabbinic texts refer to King David as a descendant of Peretz. The Messiah will be a descendant of David and therefore of Peretz and his parents, Judah (son of Jacob and head of the tribe of Judah) and Tamar, a Canaanite woman.

As an LGBTQ and feminist community of diverse origins, we welcome the stories in the Bible in which foreign women, and women who engaged in "transgressive" sexual behavior, acted to ensure the survival of the Jewish people.

Tamar was married, in sequence, to Judah's first two sons, who died, leaving her childless. After Judah failed to fulfill his obligation to have his third son marry Tamar, she covered her face and disguised herself as a prostitute to trick Judah. Thus was Peretz conceived. Learning of her ruse, Judah said, "She is more right than I." (*Genesis ch. 38*)

King David's other female ancestors include Rahab and Ruth. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute in Jericho who saved the Israelite spies. (*Joshua ch. 2*) Ruth was a Moabite who returned to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi after the deaths of their Judahite husbands. ("Wherever you go, I will go. ... Your God shall be my God and your people shall be my people." *Ruth 1:16*). Ruth seduced and married Boaz, a powerful Israelite relative of Naomi's late husband, ensuring the continuation of the family's lineage. (*Ruth ch. 2*)

Rahab and Ruth are traditionally understood to be Jews by choice. In contemporary midrash Ruth and Naomi have been portrayed as lovers.

Mi Chamòcha

U-malchuto b'ratzon kiblu aleihem.

Miryam u-Mosheh u-v'nei u-v'not Yisrael

l'cha anu shira b'simcha raba,

v'amru chulam:

✧ *"Mi chamòcha ba-eilim, Adonai?*

Mi kamòcha ne-dar ba-kòdesh,

Nora t'hilot, òsei fèleh?"

Malchut'cha ra-u vanècha u-v'notècha,

bokèi-a yam lifnei Mosheh u-Miryam;

"Zeh Eili," anu v'amru:

"Adonai yimloch l'olam va-ed!"

V'ne-emar: "Ki fada Adonai et Ya-akov,

u-g'alo mi-yad chazak mimènu."

Baruch ata, Adonai, • ga-al Yisrael. •

מי כמכה

וּמְלִכּוּתוֹ בְּרָצוֹן קִבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם.
מִרְיָם וּמֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי וּבָנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
לָךְ עָנוּ שִׁירָה בְּשִׂמְחָה רַבָּה,
וְאָמְרוּ כֻלָּם:

✧ "מִי־כִמְכָה בָּאֵלִים, יְהוָה?

מִי כִמְכָה נֶאֱדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ,

נֹרָא תְהִלָּתְךָ, עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא?"

מְלִכּוּתְךָ רָאוּ בְּנֵיךָ וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ,

בּוֹקֵעַ יָם לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּמִרְיָם;

"זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ" עָנוּ וְאָמְרוּ:

"יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד!"

וְנֹאמַר: "כִּי פָדָה יְהוָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב,

וּגְאָלוֹ מִיַּד חֲזַק מִמֶּנּוּ."

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה, • גֹּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל. •

Va-tikach Miryam ha-n'vi-a achot Aharon

et ha-tof b'yadah

va-teitzèna chol ha-nashim acharèha

b'tupim u-vi-m'cholot.

Va-tà-an lahem Miryam:

Shìru l-Adonai ki ga-o ga-a

sus v-rochvo rama va-yam!

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָת אַהֲרֹן

אֶת־הַתּוֹף בְּיָדָהּ

וַתֵּצֵאנָּה כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ

בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֹת:

וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם

שִׁירוֹ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָאָה

סוּס וְרוֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

Then Miriam the Prophet, sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and in dance. And Miriam chanted for them:

"Sing to the Eternal, for God has triumphed gloriously;
horse and charioteer God hurled into the sea!"

Sh'mot (Exodus) 15:20-21

ערבית לשבת וליום טוב • שמע וברכותיה

Serach bat Asher

There are other traditions from Rabbinic literature about women's roles in the redemption that are not reflected in traditional liturgy. Among Jacob's many grandchildren, the Torah mentions only one granddaughter by name: Serach, daughter of Asher, son of Zilpa. *B'reishit (Genesis) 46:17*. As with Miriam and Dina, and rare in the Torah, there is no mention that she had a husband or children. Forty years later, Serach bat Asher is named among the almost entirely male list in the census as the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land. *B'midbar (Numbers) 26:46*. Based only on two brief genealogical mentions in the Torah, Jewish tradition endows Serach with secret knowledge, redemptive power, and possibly immortality. *Derekh Eretz Zuta, ch. 1*.

When Joseph, as viceroy of Egypt, sends his brothers back to Canaan to bring the whole family down and to inform Jacob that Joseph was still alive, the brothers fear Jacob's reaction against them for their deception. They also fear for Jacob's frail health. So they ask his granddaughter Serach, whose beautiful singing Jacob loved, to break the news. She sings him a rhyme: "Joseph is alive in *Mitzrayim*, and has two sons on his knees, Menashe and Ephraim." So Jacob blesses Serach: "The mouth that spoke the news of Joseph's life shall never taste death." *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen. 46:17; Sefer ha-Yashar 54*.

Later, on his deathbed, Joseph instructs his brothers to bring his bones back to Canaan for burial. Joseph also asks them to take Bilha's bones since she had raised him after his mother Rachel's early death. *Ginzburg, Legends of the Jews*. Centuries later, when the Hebrews are finally able to leave Egypt, no one knows where the Egyptians had hidden Joseph's bones so many years before. The Exodus is stopped until Serach, still alive, shares the secret of where to find Joseph's bones. *Mechilta Beshallah*. Much later still, Serach is said to be the "wise woman" who helped King David and his general Yoav in a battle. *II Samuel 20*.

Centuries later, in the Talmudic academy, Rabbi Yochanan is teaching that the waters at the splitting of the Sea looked like latticework. Serach appears and corrects him, saying that the waters looked like a glass wall. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana 11:13*. Like Enoch and Elijah, Serach never died, but entered heaven alive. *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Yechezkel 367)*. Some even say that Serach has her own yeshiva in Heaven where she teaches the depths of Torah.

Serach is venerated among Persian Jews. They believed she had lived among them from when the ten tribes, including the tribe of Asher, were exiled by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Some say she died in a fire in the synagogue in Isfahan named for her. A tombstone with her name could be found in the Jewish cemetery there at least until the end of the nineteenth century.

Pirkei Imahot (Sayings of the Mothers) 1:1

Moses received Torah from God at Sinai. He transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly. They formulated three precepts: Be cautious in rendering a judgment, rear many students, build a fence to protect Torah.

Pirkei Avot (Sayings of the Fathers) 1:1

1. Miriam received Torah from God at Sinai and she transmitted it to her daughter. Her daughter transmitted it to the judges, Devorah and Yael, and Yael transmitted it to the daughter of Jephthah, and from them it passed to Naomi and to Ruth, and all the prophets who followed, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, who learned it from them and transmitted it to the women of the great gathering. They formulated three precepts: Consider the consequences of your words. Speak your Torah to many. Protect what is holy.

2. Miriam did not receive Torah from God at Sinai, and she did not transmit it to her daughter. Her daughter imagined a Torah from God at Sinai, and sat by her well, singing, dribbling water through her fingers. Her daughter did not transmit her Torah to Devorah and Yael. At night, they arranged black letters beneath a terebinth and breathed life into them. They felt like witches. Jephthah's daughter did not receive Torah from Devorah and Yael, but as she burned she saw the letters flying free of parchment. Samson's mother heard angels. Hannah talked back to holy men. Ruth gleaned in the fields of others. They formulated three precepts: Choose your battles carefully. Find each other quickly. Do not let yourselves be robbed of wisdom.

3. Miriam stole Torah from God at Sinai and gave it to a poet. The poet threw it out her window and conked a madwoman on the head, making her inexplicably sane. The madwoman left the Torah in a shopping cart, where it was snatched by a desperate housewife. The housewife slipped it to her raging daughter who brought it to her rabbi as a gift. The rabbi lent it to a thief who left it in an office along with a Bible. A secretary made copies and delivered them to a midwife and a pair of jazz musicians. The midwife gave it to doctors, professors, teachers. The musicians played it at a concert, a great assembly of hunger. They formulated three precepts: What if I'm not you? Why are those your questions? Who will transmit *my* Torah?

Rabbi Jill Hammer

A Bit of What the Rabbis Say

On love, on gender, and on finding new meanings ...

* "... the single first human created on the sixth day ..."

refers to *B'reishit* (Genesis) 1:27:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצִלְמוֹ בְּעֵלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה
בָּרָא אֹתָם:

"And God created the human in God's image. God created it in the image of God; God created them male and female."

According to rabbinic teaching, the first human being was androgynous, with both male and female body parts. *B'reishit Rabba* 8:1. The human's two sides were later separated. *B'reishit* (Genesis) 2:21-22. (The word often translated as "rib" actually means "side.")

This reference by the rabbis to the first human as androgynous is one of the thousands of uses of the word in rabbinic literature.* As an LGBTQ congregation, we welcome the presence of trans and gender queer individuals in our tradition and in our communities.

*The Rabbis of the Talmud recognized and wrote about six genders:

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| male | <i>zachar</i> | זָכָר |
| female | <i>n'keiva</i> | נְקֵבָה |
| a person with both male & female sexual characteristics | <i>androgynos</i> | אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס |
| a person with indeterminate or obscured sexual characteristics | <i>tumtum</i> | טוּמְטוּם |
| a person identified as female at birth who develops male characteristics at puberty | <i>aylonit</i> | אַיִלוֹנִית |
| a person identified as male at birth who develops female characteristics at puberty | <i>saris</i> | סָרִיס |

Rabbi Elliot Kukla

*Kol ahava she-hi t'luya v'davar,
bateil davar, b'teila ahava.
V'she-einah t'luya v'davar,
eina b'teila l'olam.*

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר,
בִּטּוּל דָּבָר, בִּטּוּלָהּ אֲהָבָה.
וְשֵׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר,
אִינָהּ בִּטּוּלָהּ לְעוֹלָם.

*Eizo hi ahava ha-t'luya v'davar?
Zo ahavat Amnon v'Tamar.*

אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה הַתְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר?
זוֹ אֲהָבַת אֲמֹנוֹן וְתָמָר.

*V'she-eina t'luya v'davar?
Zo ahavat David viYhonatan.*

וְשֵׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר?
זוֹ אֲהָבַת דָּוִד וַיהוֹנָתָן.

When love depends on achieving a certain goal,
love vanishes when the goal is achieved.
But a love that is not dependent on any goal
never vanishes.

What is an example of a love that was conditional [and vanished]?
The love of Amnon for Tamar. [2 Samuel ch. 13]

And of a love that is unconditional [and lives on forever]?
The love of David and Jonathan. [2 Samuel 18:1-3] (5:18)

Hafoch bah v'hapeich bah, d'chòla vah.

הִפְּךָ בָּהּ וְהִפְּךָ בָּהּ, דְּכֹלָא בָּהּ.

Turn Torah over and over,
inside out and upside down;
you will find everything within it. (5:24)

Little Gay Words

One road to affirmation and influence is subtlety. Because English is the native language of most of us, it provides a useful tool, both for those who understand Hebrew and for those who don't, to understand liturgy in new and liberating ways.

I believe that, when it comes to liturgy, many people become suddenly metaphorically challenged. They can't relate to what prayers say because they don't believe them literally. As Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman teaches, "Words never say anything on their own. Readers always interpret them. So instead of asking what the text says in and of itself, we have to ask what the text means to the reader who reads it." (*The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 150.) "Meaning comes not just from text, but from context. ... The history of what a text meant once upon a time has no necessary relationship to what it means now." (*Id.* p. 148.) These ideas are addressed in the Note on Translation in the preliminary pages of *Shavat va-Yinafash*.

So, in Psalm 95, *tzur yish-einu*, is traditionally translated as "the rock of our salvation" or similar. We asked the question: What does that mean, whether in the abstract, or to us? We translated it as "our liberating Power." This is meant to suggest both our self-liberation as women and LGBTQ people and acknowledge its ultimate Source.

For "*U-Melech gadol al kol elohim*," G-d is greater than other gods, we assume that paganism is no longer that much of concern. So what are our false gods today? Thinking too highly of our own power might be one, so we acknowledge that G-d is the "creative Force behind all that we create."

For "*nishtachaveh*," instead of "we bow down," we say "we are swept off our feet with wonder." What could be more gay? ;-)

In Psalm 96, "*mishp'chot amim*" is familiar perhaps as "families of nations." But what does that really mean? Germanic tribes? The UN? We took some poetic license to translate it as "families of all kinds," a welcoming concept for queer people.

"*Ya-aloz sadai v'chol asher bo*" is often rendered as "Let the field and its bounty exult." We asked: "Bounty"? "Exult"? Who says these things? Do we catch their meaning as we speed through? So a more explicit translation ... and more "gay" translation was chosen. The root of *ya-aloz* is also the root of the word *aluz*, literally "gay."* So, filling in the blanks a bit

* *Aluz* was suggested as a Hebrew word for Gay in the 80s, but it didn't stick. Unfortunately, the word generally used for a gay man is *homo*. Women did better on this score, with *lesbit*.

on what the bounty of the fields might be, we have “Gaiety reigns in the fields; plants and animals thrive.”

At the beginning of the Torah service, we sing, quoting a verse from the book of Numbers about the Israelites’ wandering:

“When the Ark was carried forward, Moses would say:
‘Rise up, O God, that Your enemies be scattered,
and those who hate You flee before You.’”

At the end of the Torah service, as the Ark is about to be closed, the liturgy contains the next verse from Numbers:

“And when the Ark rested, Moses would say:
‘Shuva, Adonai, riv’vot alfei Yisrael.’”

Literally, “Return, O God the myriad thousands of Israel.” Huh? Some try to answer the math problem with: “unto the ten thousands of the families of Israel.” So we took it a step farther: “Turn, O God: Behold the diverse families of Israel.”

Note on Translation

It is said that all translation is interpretation. Many of the translations of the traditional Hebrew prayers are intended to elucidate the original text by finding new meanings within it.

Jewish tradition teaches that it is appropriate to pray in any language. God will understand. Yet if one wishes to dive into the innate and deeper meaning of Jewish prayers, there is no substitute for learning Hebrew. Knowing Hebrew opens up worlds that another language cannot convey. (All Hebrew in this *siddur* is transliterated as a guide in learning to read Hebrew.)

All translation is interpretation, at its most basic level, because a word that is thought of as a direct translation of the parallel word in another language is often just the overlap of two circles of meaning, as in a Venn diagram. One language carries nuances and implications that may or may not be conveyed by the same word in the other language. Differences in structure, syntax, and other linguistic features magnify the imbalance. Divergence of time and culture between our present day and place, and the era and location in which the original was compiled, add other dimensions of challenge.

Whether we pray in Hebrew or another language, we also must face the challenge of metaphor. When Hebrew calls God "*Mèlech*" (*king* or the gender-neutral *sovereign*), whom are we supposed to think about? Saul? Pharaoh? Achashueros? Napoleon? Elizabeth II? In most of the blessings we say, God is *Mèlech ha-olam*, traditionally *King of the world* or *King of the universe*.

Is *olam* just the earth, or the infinite cosmos? It is even more: *Olam* is also unlimited time: *l'olam* means *forever*. Our ancient forebears apparently knew that time and space are the same, anticipating Albert Einstein. Space and time are things that move; *Mèlech* may come from the root *lech*, *to go*. *Mèlech* is the force that makes things go, that propels, governs, and rules the world.

Rabbi Jill Hammer teaches that *Mèlech* is our *Guide*. So we look to God to guide us on our path through the infinite and unknowable. *Mèlech ha-olam* can thus be understood as *Ruler of time and space, Guide through the infinite*.

Some of the translations in the *siddur* are fairly literal. Most attempt to overcome the challenges of nuance, time, and place by stretching the meaning toward words that resonate in a new way for us today and that reflect the Hebrew words without breaking them. Other translations are creative interpretation. Many are a mix of all three. Readers and pray-ers interested in knowing more are encouraged to study Hebrew and/or to ask the Editor.

Psalm 95

Sing out with joy to God;
celebrate our liberating Power.
Come out and give thanks to the Presence,
singing our songs to God.

For יהוה is infinite,
the creative Force behind all that we create.
In God's power are the earth's deepest mysteries,
and the high mountain peaks are God's.

God fills the seas and sustains them;
God shapes the land and renews it.
We are swept off our feet with wonder,
grateful to the One who made us.

You are our God,
who nurtures us
and keeps us whole.

Today, if we would only hear Your voice:
"Do not harden your hearts
as time and again in the wilderness
your ancestors challenged and tested Me,
even though they had seen My works.

✧ "For forty years, a complete generation,
I grieved your straying hearts
that did not know My right paths.
So I swore, in My indignation,
to take you only to the threshold of My promised land."

The first part of Psalm 95 is a joyous song of gratitude to God for Creation and for sustaining us within it. The second part is a sharp reminder that ingratitude impedes our spiritual and physical progress. From there, we turn to sing a new song in Psalm 96. Our ancestors challenged their leaders, even God; we LGBTQ people have had to challenge unjust systems. A vision of a just world is incomplete, and cannot be fulfilled, without including the perspectives of the LGBTQ community, so we share with the world our perspective and our new song on God, on the care of creation, and on social justice.

*Ya-aloz sadai v'chol asher bo.
Az y'ran'nu kol atzei ya-ar,
lifnei Adonai ki va,
ki va lishpot ha-àretz.
Yishpot teiveil b'tzèdek
v'amim be-emunato.*

יַעֲלֹז שָׂדֵי וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ.
אֲז יִרְנְנוּ כָּל עֵצֵי יַעַר,
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כִּי בָא,
כִּי בָא לְשַׁפֵּט הָאָרֶץ.
יִשְׁפֹּט תִּבְּל בְּצֶדֶק
וְעַמִּים בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ.

Psalm 96

Sing! Sing a new song to God.
All on Earth, sing as one!
Every moment, bless the One,
Source of all that is.

Tell all the people
of wonders so vast
that we celebrate and sing.

More amazing is the One
than any imagined power.

Far beyond human grasp
is the Maker of sky and light,
who sends dazzling vigor
to this sanctuary, the Earth.

Families of all kinds, come offer to God.
Shower God with honor and strength.

Honor the Name of the blessings' Source.
Raise up a gift of thanks to God's noble courts.

Bow down. Enter the beautiful shrine
as all the Earth trembles.

Tell everyone: God is the One
who steadies the world,
who models fairness for all.

✧The heavens rejoice and the Earth is glad.
The sea and its creatures all roar with praise.

Gaiety reigns in the fields; plants and animals thrive.
The trees of the forest break into song, as God is sensed,
coming to guide the Earth with what is right,
showing all people what is true.

And when the Ark rested, Moses would say:
“Turn, O God: Behold the diverse families of Israel.”

*B'midbar (Numbers) 10:36**

Come up, O God, to Your home, where Your glorious Ark finds its rest.
May those who serve You be adorned with justice,
those who follow you sing joyous song.
Your servant David found a place for Your Ark;
do not turn away from those who succeed him.

T'hilim (Psalms) 132:8-10

A Tree Of Life

The wisdom of the Torah has been given to us;
Let us not forsake it.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 4:2

It is a tree of life to all who hold fast to it,
and all who support it find happiness.
Its ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all its paths are peace.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 3:18–17

Turn us to You, O God, and we shall return.
Renew our days as of old.

Eicha (Lamentations) 5:21

*This verse, B'midbar (Numbers) 10:36, recounts the words of Moses as the Ark would come to rest during the people's desert journeys. It provide the peaceful counterpoint to B'midbar (Numbers) 10:35, found at the beginning of the Torah service, in which the moving Ark is invoked as divine protection in battling against our enemies.

Too Queer for Shul or Queer for All?

Some of the readings from *Shavat va-Yinafash* speak expressly to LGBTQ people. Some also include their family and allies.

Many are explicitly inspired by queer experience, but attempt to speak to everyone. In some, the queer experience is the root but is not directly expressed. Is that palpable?

Where do you see the differences? Do you see them? Do they matter today?

How Good It Is To Gather

How good it is to gather,
in a rainbow of affections and sexualities,
in the house of a God
who loves each of us as we are created,
without limit and forever.

How sweet it is to gather,
in a spectrum of gender identities,
in the house of a God
who transcends human limits and categories.

How pleasant it is to gather,
Jews and people of all faiths and of no faith,
in the house of a God
who hears the prayers of all people.

How fine it is to gather,
people with firm beliefs,
together with people with questions in our hearts,
in the house of a God
who values deeds of caring and justice
far above the recitation of creeds.

adapted from Congregation Sha'ar Zahav

Call to Worship

Let us praise God, the source of all blessing!

Praised be God, the source of all blessing, now and forever!

Twilight People

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.

Rabbi Reuben Zellman

Every Truth Spoken is a Step Toward the Promised Land

When I speak the truth to myself—
 saying, this is who I am,
 I take a step out from the narrow place and open a space for miracles.
 My steps take me to the edge of the waters.
 Unsure what this journey will bring,
 I place my trust in the liberating Power, and move forward.

When I speak the truth to family and friends—
 saying, these are the ones I love,
 I join beloved others on the journey.
 In the desert, we may know great loss
 as we move through unfamiliar terrain.
 Yet we continue, seeking to know holiness and ourselves.

When we speak the truth to each other—
 saying, we are united in our diversity,
 we create a holy community, an embracing army of lovers.
 Truth has brought us here, and we sing our songs of freedom.
 The clear waters of the oases reflect our growing strength
 and we journey on, refreshed for what may lie ahead.

When we speak the truth to power—
 saying, this is who we are,
 we reach back to help those still stifled in *Mitzràyim**,
 or poised at the shore.
 And still we sing, remembering what we have accomplished,
 committing to the work that remains.
 We reach forward to create a promised land
 for all created in the image of the Eternal.

Alex Carter

**Mitzràyim* (the narrow place) is the name for Egypt. It means “the two narrows,” referring to the strips of land along the Nile that were and are Egypt’s most fertile and habitable.

Geulah

God did not lead us by the nearer way
when Pharaoh let the people go at last,
but round-about, by way of the wilderness —

pillars of fire and cloud marking night and day
to the edge of the flood-tide—uncrossable and vast.
“If God had led us by the nearer way,”

we cried, “we would not die here; let Egypt oppress
us as it will; let us return to the past.”
But we have come out, by way of the wilderness,

in fear; on faith; free now, because we say
we are free; no longer the unchosen, the outcast.
God did not lead us by the nearer way,

but into rising waters, which do not part unless,
with an outstretched arm, we step forward, and stand fast.
Round-about, by way of the wilderness

we have come here, blessed with love, lesbian, gay,
or sanctified in ways of our own, to bless
our God, who did not lead us by the nearer way,
but round-about, by way of the wilderness.

Dan Bellm

וַיְהִי בְשִׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פֶּן־יִנָּחַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה: וַיֹּסֵב אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָעָם
דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף ...

Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds *Sh’mot (Exodus) 13:17-18a.*

AMIDA FOR SHABBAT EVE

O God, open my lips, that I may declare Your praise. *T'hilim (Psalms) 51:17*

Ancestors

◆We are grateful to life's Eternal Spirit, our Origin,
and the God of our ancestors:
the vision and promise of Abraham, the steadfastness of Isaac,
the spiritual wrestling of Jacob, the strength of Sarah,
the wisdom of Rebecca, the patience of Rachel, the loyalty of Leah,
the kindness of Bilha and the soulfulness of Zilpa.
Expansive, powerful, awesome, supreme God, You love kindnesses,
You are the ultimate owner of every thing,
and You remember our ancestors' caring
with Your concern for their descendants' future fulfillment
with love for the sake of Creation.

On Shabbat Shuva add:

May the Power that desires life, remember us unto life
and inscribe us in the book of life, affirming the living God.

You are our Ruler, our Saving Power, and our Helper.

◆We bless You, Holy One, Guardian of our ancestors.

As LGBTQ people and their families and friends, we know that our relationships and families have often been ignored, or condemned, because they were not deemed "traditional." Ironically, there are Biblical relationships and families that have also been excluded from recognition and, indeed, erased from our consciousness.

Ya-akov Avinu, our ancestor Jacob, who is called Israel/God-wrestler, and from whom we all descend – in body or in spirit – had children with his two wives, the sisters Leah and Rachel, and with their respective handmaids, Zilpa and Bilha. Some say Bilha and Zilpa were Rachel's and Leah's half sisters, born to their father Laban and a servant. *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer 36*. After Rachel died, Bilha adopted her sons, 8-year-old Joseph and newborn Benjamin, as her own. *B'reishit Rabba 84:11*.

The Children of Israel had four co-mothers who raised them together. Our ancestors descended from all of them, whether their relationships were celebrated or not, whether they were regarded as equal or not. The children of all four mothers were treated equally in inheriting a share of the Land. So we remember and celebrate them all. They are equal in our eyes. They are equal in our prayers.

based on Siddur B'chol L'vav'cha, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah

Day 44

Dear God,
friends with AIDS slip through my fingers
faster than grains of sand,
and seemingly as many.

I can't hold them.

God, dear God,
please catch them
with your open hands,
within your welcoming embrace,
with your loving heart.

I wish I could be there for them.

I pray they'll be there for me
when I slip.
You too, my God,
our God,

Amen.

*Chris Glaser
from Coming Out to God, 1991*

And, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet," Act III, Scene 2

We Pray For Those Who Are Ill

Within this hour of prayer,
 how can we not pray for those who are ill?
 We pray for ourselves and for our friends,
 for those we know and those we don't,
 for those we love and those we don't.
 We pray for a healing of the body
 and a healing of the soul,
 a healing of the mind
 and a healing of the spirit.

May it be Your will, our God and God of our ancestors –
 Sarah and Abraham,
 Rebecca and Isaac,
 Leah , Rachel, Zilpa, Bilha, and Jacob –
 that a *r'fu-a sh'leima u-m'heira* – a full and speedy healing – be sent to all
 persons who are ill or suffering, especially those whose names we say
 now, aloud or in our hearts: _____.

We pray
 that the Power that lights up the world every morning
 will bring light to those who are ill;
 that the Power that turns seeds into blossoms
 may flow through those who languish.

We pray
 that those who are in our hearts may be speedily healed.
 But if that is not to be, if their lives are near their end,
 we pray that their death may be gentle,
 as they slip into God's embrace.

Dace Stone

B'rucha at Shechina,
rofeit ha-cholim.
V'nomar: Amein.

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ שְׂכִינָה,
 רוֹפֵאת הַחֹלִים.
 וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

Praised are You, the healing Presence of God. And let us say: Amen.

Concluding Service

ALÈINU

Alèinu has been reworded by many progressive communities, who see the first paragraph as comparing ourselves favorably to other peoples and religions. But as members of groups who have been told they are less worthy – Jews, LGBTQ people, people of color, Jews by choice, or otherwise not the “norm” – we know that it is healing to assert, be grateful for, and – yes – take pride in, our differences and our uniqueness. We therefore include *Alèinu* in its traditional formulation.

Alèinu begins by affirming diversity and it ends with a prayer for unity. In the *Sh'ma*, we proclaim that God is one. In the *Alèinu*, we pray that God's goodness will be known by all and that evil will be overcome. We pray that God's restoring power will nourish all humanity.

L'takein olam b'malchut Shadai is traditionally translated as “to perfect the universe through the kingdom of the Almighty.” “*Malchut*” means “kingdom” or “realm.” *Shadai* is a very mysterious word for God. The root of the word is the word for “breast.” *B'malchut Shadai*, in the realm of the cosmic Mother, everyone will be nourished and cared for.

Alèinu is a prayer for the day when we will celebrate our diversity of heritages in peace, as the harmony of a symphony. Our unity will reflect God's unity that we declared in the *Sh'ma*.

And so we hope that the time not be distant
when Your name shall be worshipped throughout the world,
when righteousness shall fill the earth and injustice be no more.
Fervently we pray that the day may come
when all shall turn to You in love,
when corruption and evil shall give way to integrity and goodness,
when superstition shall no longer enslave the mind
nor idolatry blind the eye,
when all who dwell on earth shall know that You alone are God.

May all, created in Your image, become one in spirit,
united in Your service.
Then shall Your sovereignty be established on earth.

As it is written in Your Torah:

“God shall reign for ever and ever.”

Sh'mot (Exodus) 15:18

✧And the word of Your prophet Zechariah shall be fulfilled:

“God shall rule over all the earth.

On that day, God shall be one and God's name one.”

Zechariah 14:9

All are seated.

Soon the day will come
when science will win victory over error,
justice a victory over injustice,
and human love a victory over human hatred and ignorance.

Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld

In 1896 Hirschfeld issued the pamphlet "Sappho and Socrates" on homosexual love. In 1897 he founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee to conduct research to help defend the rights of homosexuals and repeal Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, which since 1871 had criminalized homosexuality. In 1919 he opened the Institute of Sexual Research in Berlin. The Institute was forced to close in 1933. Paragraph 175 was finally repealed in 1994.

Sister, Comrade

Sister that I never held near,
Comrade that I never embraced,
Your memory is almost lost:

The one we don't talk about,
The loving one who never married,
The one for whom no Kaddish was said.

Your loneliness calls out to me.
I know of your struggles; we are not strangers.
And if my path is easier,
I will not forget who walked it first.

We call you to mind;
But did you not sometimes think of us,
Your children, friends, lovers across the years,
Those who would follow and think of you,
And bless your memory, and call you to mind?

With Ruth and Naomi, we will not forget you.
With David and Jonathan,* we will not forget you.
In the name of God, you are our brothers and sisters,
And we ask that you be remembered for peace.

Congregation Sha'ar Zahav

*Pirkei Avot (Chapters of the Sages) 5:18 teaches:

“A love that is unconditional never vanishes
What is an example ... of a love that is unconditional?
The love of David and Jonathan.”

Two Hundred Thirty-Five

In Memoriam

Let there be a time of gentleness,
Let there be a place of memory;
There You ease our hearts, Holy One,
There You offer comfort.

Debbie Perlman

A Meditation in Memory of a Parent Who Was Hurtful

Dear God, You know my heart. You know me better than I know myself. When I recite *Kaddish*, my emotions swirl. The parent I remember was not always kind to me. This parent's death left me a legacy of unhealed wounds, anger, and dismay that a parent could hurt a child as I was hurt. I do not want to pretend to feel love and grief that I do not feel, but I want to do what is right as a Jew, and as a child called to rise to the challenge of *Kaddish*.

Help me, God, to subdue the bitter emotions that do me no good and to find that place in me where gentler memories may lie hidden. Help me, God, to feel some measure of affection for the parent I have lost, and gratitude to You for helping me bear my pain and for liberating me from my personal Egypt. Lead me, I pray, through this desert I am trying to cross and help me reach Your holy place.

Rabbi Robert Saks

A Meditation in Memory of a Nonhuman Companion

how do you say *kaddish* for a wolf?

the human heart is a large house
and we are of a tradition
blessed with an extraordinary command:
God bids us to love
but not all eyes that capture our hearts are human
when they close forever, we feel their loss
and we name it grief

so may the One Who blessed those who came before us
bless those whose hearts have an empty room
may you know that the connection of life
is a strange and wondrous blessing;
and when, in the corner of your eye, you think you see
your beloved friend now gone,
may you feel a moment of comfort;
may you remember that throaty purr;
a draft of wind from flickered wings;
the feel of fur under your hand;
may that howl always visit your dreams
(the song of something once wild, sung only for you)
may you never forget that your heart is a large house

how do you say *kaddish* for a wolf?
... with deep, deliberate breath

Joss Eldredge

Now that we are ready to embark on this new day, we say three more blessings to give thanks for our uniqueness:

*Baruch ata, Adonai Eloheinu,
Mèlech ha-olam,
she-asàni Yisrael.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשִׂינִי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

We praise You, God,
for including us in the community of Israel.

*Baruch ata, Adonai Eloheinu,
Mèlech ha-olam,
she-asàni ben/bat/bar* chorin.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשִׂינִי בֶן/בַּת/בָּר* חוֹרֵין.

We praise You, God,
for blessing our struggle for liberation.

*Baruch ata, Adonai Eloheinu,
Mèlech ha-olam,
zocheir ha-brit u-m'shaneh ha-briyot.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
זוֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וּמְשַׁנֵּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת.

We praise You, God,
for remembering Your covenant of the rainbow,
our symbol of diversity and life.

*"Bar," is actually an acronym for either "ben rev" ("rev" roughly meaning "mister") or "bat rev" and thus can be considered a gender-inclusive term.

The last blessing is not one of the traditional morning blessings. It is an amalgam of two blessings in the category of "blessings on pleasures, sights and sounds" on pages 437 and 438. (Unlike most blessings, which are said at a fixed time or in connection with a specific activity, blessings in this category are recited whenever certain events happen to occur.) The first half is from the blessing on seeing a rainbow and the second half is for seeing people who are in some way out of the ordinary. Combining these two elements creates a new blessing particularly appropriate for LGBTQ people to say each morning as an expression of gratitude for who we are.

A Prayer for Our Country

We are descendants of serfs and peasants
who came to these shores
with golden dreams for the future.
The Lady's lamp beckoned them to freedom.

We are descendants of villagers and chieftains
brought in chains and despair,
their Middle Passage foreshadowed
lives of hardship and pain.

We are descendants of those from many lands
who saw across the border fence
a southwest desert path
to a better life for their children.

We are descendants of ancient peoples,
who revered the Creator and Creation,
whose histories were erased
as they were driven from their lands.

Eternal One, God of all people and all places,
help us honor the grand diversity of our history,
and celebrate the kaleidoscope of our present.

Give each of us the strength to help our country
fulfill its promise of freedom and opportunity—
to tear down barriers that still exclude,
to open doors still closed.

Fill the hearts of our leaders
with Your love of justice and compassion.
give them strength to seek peace and pursue it,
to resist the false gods of politics and power.

Be with us as we strive for a more hopeful future
for all, in our own time.

Alex Carter

ADDITION TO THE AMIDA FOR PRIDE WEEK

עַל הַנְּסִים וְעַל הַפְּרָקָן וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמִּלְחָמוֹת
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְדוֹרוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Al ha-nisim v'al ha-purkan v'al ha-g'vurot v'al ha-t'shu-ot v'al ha-milchamot
she-asita l'doroteinu ba-yamim ha-heim ba-z'man ha-zeh.*

בְּיָמֵי הַתְּנוּעָה לְזִכְיוֹת הָאֶזְרָח בְּאֶמְרֵי קָמָה קָהֵלֶת הַגָּאִים לְהִלָּחֵם
עַל הַכְּבוֹד וְהַצֶּדֶק הַמְּגִיעִים לְכָל בְּנֵי וּבְנוֹת אֲנוּשׁ, כְּשֶׁמְחַלְלֵי שְׁמֵךְ,
בְּטַעֲנָתָם שֶׁהֵם שׁוֹנְאִים בְּשֵׁם יְהוּדָה, עֲמָדוֹ נֶגֶד בְּנֵיךְ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ
לְהַשְׁפִּילָם וּלְאַסְרָם, לְהַשְׁמִידָם וּלְמַחֲקָם, וּבְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים, עֲמַדְתָּ
לָהֶם בְּעַת צָרָתָם, רַבֵּת אֶת רִיבָם, וַיִּנֶּתְךָ אֶת דִּינָם, חוֹזֶקֶת אֶת לְבָם
לְעַמּוֹד בְּיַחַד, לְפַקֵּחַ אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וְאֶת עֵינֵי הָעוֹלָם, לְהַבִּין שֶׁהַחַרּוֹת
וְהַזְכוּת לְאַהֲבַת שְׂיֻכוֹת לְכָל יִצְרֵי־רֵחַ. חוֹזֶקֶת אוֹתָם וְאוֹתָנוּ כְּדֵי שְׁנוּכַל
לְרַאוֹת נִפְלְאוֹת וּלְעַשׂוֹת נִסִּים, לְהִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִהְיָה וּלְאַהֲבַת אֶת מִי
שֶׁנֶּאֱהָב, לֹא בְּצֵל מְגוּרֵינוּ אֶלָּא בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים, לְחַיּוֹת כִּיְהוּדִים בְּחִיק
הַקְּהֵלָה, לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת אַחוּדֵינוּ, וּלְשִׂישׁ עֲלֵינוּ וְעֲלֶיךָ.

”אֲבָן מֵאִסּוֹ הַבּוֹנִים הִיְתָה לְרֵאשׁ פְּנָה.”

”וְלֹא נְבוּשׁ וְלֹא נִכְלָם לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.”

Rabbi Ayelet Sonya Cohen

We thank you for the miracles, liberation, heroism, and triumphs that You brought to our ancestors in those days at this season.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and trans people, began to organize for the dignity and justice each of us is due as human beings on this earth. Those who profane Your name, claiming that they hate us in the name of God, rose up to criminalize us, pathologize us, brutalize us, and erase us. And You, in Your great mercy, stood with us in the time of our troubles. You fought alongside us, vindicated us, gave us the courage to stand together, to open our eyes and the eyes of the world around us, to see that the freedom and the right to love belongs to all of Your creations. You have given us the strength to witness and create wonders, to be who we are and to love whom we love, not only in the safety of our home, but outside in the light of the world, to live as Jews in the embrace of the community, to sanctify our unions and celebrate ourselves before each other and before You.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

“May we never know shame again.”

Rabbi Ayelet Sonya Cohen

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In the Sukka

We invite our ancestors,
historical, mythical, fantastical —
We welcome them all:

Ruth and Naomi
David and Jonathan
Emma Lazarus, Harvey Milk
Wonder Woman, Man of Steel
Bachelor uncles, maiden aunts.

We welcome the ones who came before,
whose strength, humor, compassion
showed us what was possible,
helped us imagine who we could become,
and loved us into our selves.

As they join us in this, our temporary shelter,
the harvest moon illuminates our faces.
Space collapses into one moment
as we dance through time in all directions.

Alex Carter

*Baruch ata, Adonai Eloheinu,
Mèlech ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav,
v'tzivànu leisheiv ba-sukka.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

Praised are You, our Eternal God, Guide through the infinite,
who dedicates us to holiness through Your *mitzvot*
and brings us together to dwell in the *sukka*.

The first time one sits in the sukka, add She-hecheyànu on the bottom of page 384-5.

WORLD AIDS DAY**After the Plague Years**

We walked in the shadow of skyscrapers;
we vlogged in the shadow of death.
Glitter balls cast silver stars
on dancing faces, grimacing.

We marched, we loved,
we nursed, we grieved.
Shouting in the face of indifference,
raging at the wall of denial.

Too long gone now,
the dancers the DJs
the actors lawyers artists waiters.
Too many buried young,
too many never old.

We remember them
and say their names
and ask that their memories
will always be
the blessing
that we know they were.

Alex Carter

For the Fallen

They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning
We will remember them.

*from "For the Fallen" WWI memorial poem
by Robert Laurence Binyon, 1869-1943*

Shine On

Your hearts, and your souls, had the power to reflect and refract what is good and holy about the world.

You were the prism through which the light of the Sacred shined.

For the good of the world that so desperately needs all of the great gorgeousness you had to offer, may your sparkling light continue to shine, shine, shine, shine on — on all of us.

May the names we read now be for a blessing, always.

Queer Mi She-Beirach

In community with our queer ancestors
Most of whose names are lost to us,
Forgotten
Or even deliberately obliterated,
May we be blessed and healed
In free and open ways
Not always granted
To those
Who went before us.

May we come to know a time of complete healing
And may we share this healing with all the world
In the name of all who have been forgotten
As a blessing for all queer folk who are here
And for all of those who are yet to come.

Now let us say: Amen.

Maggid Andrew Ramer

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

God full of mercy, bless the souls of all who are in our hearts on this Transgender Day of Remembrance. We call to mind today young and old, of every race, faith, and gender experience, who have died by violence. We remember those who have died because they would not hide, or did not pass, or did pass, or stood too proud. Today we name them: the reluctant activist; the fiery hurler of heels; the warrior for quiet truth; the one whom no one really knew.

As many as we can name, there are thousands more whom we cannot, and for whom no Kaddish may have been said. We mourn their senseless deaths, and give thanks for their lives, for their teaching, and for the brief glow of each holy flame. We pray for the strength to carry on their legacy of vision, bravery, and love.

And as we remember them, we remember with them the thousands more who have taken their own lives. We pray for resolve to root out the injustice, ignorance, and cruelty that grow despair. And we pray, God, that all those who perpetrate hate and violence will speedily come to understand that Your creation has many faces, many genders, many holy expressions.

Blessed are they
who have allowed their divine image to shine in the world.

Blessed is God,
in Whom no light is extinguished.

Rabbi Reuben Zellman

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY
Psalm 126

A song of rising:

When God restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like dreamers.

Then our mouth will fill with laughter and our tongue with joyous song.

Then they will say among the nations:

“Great things has God done for them.”

Great things has God done for us,
we were filled with joy.

Return, O God, our fortunes
like streams in the Negev.

Those who sow in tears with joyous song will reap.

The one who walks along tearfully
carrying the bag of seed
will surely come with joyous song, carrying sheaves of grain.

A poetic translation

They used to sing a song
On the steps of the Temple
The very place wiped out,
Put back together
Stone by stone.

Exile or return.
Which is the dream?
We left something behind
But no one remembers what or where.

Our mouths are filled with laughter
And a taste of mockery
Our tongues with cries of joy
Tinged by knowing,
Somehow we are still in exile.

The miracle that people said
could never happen
Happened.

We were as surprised as everyone else
Happy and unprepared.

Mysterious Being,
Return our return.
Restore our restoration.

Bring us back to wherever we started
And we'll be strong
Like stream beds in the desert
Etched and hard but ready for the flow.
Waters of weeping, saturating
Sprouting cries of joy
Fresh, green.

I was the one who trudged along
Sowing my trail of tears
And now I think I'm ready
For the golden sheaths they watered.

Shim'on Menachem

Life Occasions

Before affixing a mezuzah:

*Baruch ata Adonai,
Elohèinu Mèlech ha-olam,
asher kid'shànu b'mitzvotav,
v'tzivànu likbò-a mezuzah.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְקַבֹּעַ מְזוּזָה.

Praised are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of time and space,
whose *mitzvot* make us holy and who commands us to affix a mezuzah.

On returning to the spot where you (or someone close to you – insert name or relationship) experienced a miracle or were saved from imminent danger:

*Baruch ata Adonai,
Elohèinu Mèlech ha-olam,
she-àsa li / l' _____
neis ba-makom ha-zeh.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי / לְ- _____
נֵס בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה.

Praised are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of time and space,
who did a miracle for me/for _____ in this very place.

At time of transition, including of gender:

*Baruch ata Adonai,
Elohèinu Mèlech ha-olam,
ha-ma-avir et ha-ovrim.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמַּעְבִּיר אֶת הָעוֹבְרִים.

Praised are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of time and space, the
Transforming One for those who transition / transform / cross over.

Rabbi Elliot Kukla

PRIDE WEEK

Sometimes it takes more than shouting it to show your pride.
It takes more than a sign, a fabulous outfit, or a month of parades.
Pride has to resonate from within; shine out to everyone around you.
It has to mean something to you and only you first
before you announce it to the world.

Solange Nicole

In 1322

The French poet Qalonymos ben Qalonymos wrote "On Becoming a Woman," a moving and eloquent plea to God to make Qalonymos a woman, so Qalonymos could live their life as they truly wished: "If that alone might be done, how wondrous then would be my fortune!"

As we gather today, let us be strengthened by the knowledge that despite the efforts of those who would erase us, we have always been brilliant facets shining in the many-colored diamond of our tradition.

And Today

Who would you have been, if you had never been punished for gender inappropriate behavior? What would it be like to walk down the street, go to work or attend a party and take it for granted that the gender of the people you met would not be the first thing you ascertained about them? What if we all helped each other to manifest our most beautiful, sexy, intelligent, creative, and adventurous inner selves, instead of cooperating to suppress them?

Patrick Califia

May the Love

May the love that overcomes all differences,
that heals all wounds,
that puts to flight all fears,
that reconciles all who are separated,
Be in us and among us
now and always. Amen.

Rev. Frederick E. Gillis

For LGBTQIQ People

Our people came out of Egypt a mixed multitude,
the spray of dividing waters sparkling diamonds all around them.

We stood together at Sinai, all of us—future, present, past—
amid the rumble of thunder and the crack of bright lightning
to enter into covenant with the One who loves us,
in whose shining image we are all created, over and over again.

We have wandered bleak landscapes, built flimsy tents of skin
and then houses of stone.
We have planted orchards and vineyards, seen two Temples rise
and then go down in the surging flames, forcing us into exile.
We have loved and lost, grieved and danced,
transgressed and celebrated.
Hidden, suffered, thrived.

And we gather here this day, in the community of our people,
a mixed multitude, and we sing out:
Hear O Israel, we stand together, all of us,
descendants of the single first human created on the sixth day,*
and of our myriad parents down through the generations,
too numerous to name.
We stand together, link arms, and pray.

Blessed are You, God of the universe, who sanctifies us
with the commandment to love ourselves and one another—
in all our varied ways—and blesses us with a diamond-bright radiance
that still ripples out from Your first spoken words of creation.

Maggid Andrew Ramer

Who's on First?

In 1993, as the Bet Mishpachah liturgy committee was working on a new *machzor* for the *Kol Nidrei* service, we considered the various confessional pieces. One of our members, now Aleph-ordained Rabbi Beth Cohen, said, "You know, of course we should confess our sins, but as gay people, we've been told too long that we are wrong. Shouldn't we take an opportunity to acknowledge what we have done that is good?" From there, to mirror *Ashamnu*, we composed *Ahavnu*. It has become a fixed part of our liturgy.

A year and half ago, Rabbi Avi Weiss published a similar recitation of good deeds, apparently completely unaware of ours. He later found out there were earlier antecedents to his. I thought about getting in touch with him, but never got around to it.

Regardless of who was "on first," this is a demonstration that a concept which may have originated with queer Jews can speak to all Jews.

We Have Loved

Ahàvnu

אהבנו

Just as we as a congregation recite our sins, we take a moment this morning to acknowledge our accomplishments, good deeds, and joys. We do this not to congratulate ourselves, but to inspire ourselves. Just as each of us did not necessarily commit all the sins we confessed communally, each of us has surely not done each of these good deeds. Our intentions are often good, but we miss the mark. Just as our communal confession should help us recognize our transgressions and turn from them, we recite good deeds to help us see where to turn.

אָהַבְנוּ, בִּרְכָנוּ, גִּדְּלָנוּ, דָּאָגְנוּ לַזּוּלָּת.
הֶאֱזִינוּ, וְדִינוּ, זְכָרְנוּ, חֲבִיקָנוּ, טַעַמְנוּ חַיּוֹת.
יִצְאָנוּ מִהָאָרוֹן, כִּי־בָדָנוּ, לְמַדְנוּ, מִצָּאָנוּ, נִדְבָנוּ.
סִלְחָנוּ, עוֹדְדָנוּ, פִּטְרָנוּ, צִדְקָנוּ, קִבְּלָנוּ אַחֲרֵי־וֹת.
רָאִינוּ, שָׂמְחָנוּ, תַּמְכָּנוּ, תְּהִינּוּ, תִּקְנוּ.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Ahàvnu</i> | We are open to love: for God, for ourselves, and for others. |
| <i>Beiràchnu</i> | We acknowledge God's blessings in our lives. |
| <i>Gidàlnu</i> | We cultivate the earth, being careful to protect its resources. |
| <i>Da-àgnu la-zulat</i> | We take care of friends, family, and partners who are ill. |
| <i>He-ezìnu</i> | We lend a sympathetic ear. |
| <i>Vidìnu</i> | We confess our sins that we may learn from our mistakes. |
| <i>Zachàrnu</i> | We remember those who have died and keep their spirits alive in our hearts and minds. |
| <i>Chibàknu</i> | We embrace the love and teachings of our parents. |
| <i>Ta-àmnu chavayot</i> | We taste new experiences and live our lives more fully. |
| <i>Yatzànu mei-ha-aron</i> | We come out of the closet, putting our fears aside. |

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| <i>Kibàdnu</i> | We are respectful of others whose views and values differ from our own. |
| <i>Limàdnu</i> | We teach our children, our nieces, and our nephews about love. |
| <i>Matzànu</i> | We find a place in our community. |
| <i>Nadàvnu</i> | We give our time and money to worthy causes. |
| <i>Salàchnu</i> | We forgive those who have wronged us. |
| <i>Odàdnu</i> | We encourage others who need a few words to help them on their way. |
| <i>Patàrnu</i> | We find solutions to troubling problems and obstacles. |
| <i>Tzadàknu</i> | We work to make our world more just. |
| <i>Kibàlnu acharayut</i> | We accept responsibility when asked to do so and step in without being asked. |
| <i>Ra-ìnu</i> | We see the suffering of others and work to ease their pain. |
| <i>Samàchnu</i> | We share joyous celebrations with our loved ones. |
| <i>Tamàchnu</i> | We support leaders who defend our rights. |
| <i>Tahìnu</i> | We marvel at the wonders of Creation. |
| <i>Tikànu</i> | We mend what has been torn. |

Ahavnu, beirachnu: Yom Kippur is also a time to confess our good

AVI WEISS | OCTOBER 6, 2016, 10:19 PM |

My wife, Toby, and I years ago attended a seminar called “Marriage Encounter.” Its goal: to help good marriages become better.

At the outset we were asked to write, for ourselves and ourselves alone, what we believed were our positive and negative qualities.

At first I had difficulty identifying my positives — what I know to be the truth — as opposed to what others thought of me, and how I may have fooled them into thinking what is not quite true. While I did manage to claim some positives that felt worthy, it was a struggle to reach them.

As it turned out, I was not alone in this difficulty: most of the participants found it easier to write about their negatives than their positives.

The presenters explained that, deep down, people by and large lack confidence in their own abilities. We may “put on airs,” appearing confident and capable, but at heart most people — even the most successful — lack belief in themselves.

This is a major stumbling block in developing loving relationships and good marriages. The famous biblical mandate “Love thy neighbor as thyself” makes this point. The prerequisite to loving an “other” is to love oneself.

I often think of this Marriage Encounter moment during the High Holidays, especially on Yom Kippur — the Day of Atonement — when over and over we recite the *Vidui*, the confession prayer. While beating our hearts we follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet declaring our transgressions: *ashamnu* (אשׁמנו), *bagadnu* (בגדנו), *gazalnu* (גזלנו), *dibarnu dofi* (דברנו דפי) — we have trespassed, we have dealt treacherously, we have robbed, we have spoken slander. The benefit of the *Vidui* confession is its potential for inspiring the commitment to improve.

But repetitive *Vidui* can also have an opposite effect: it can bring one to despair, to loss of confidence, even to loss of belief in one's capacity to do good. After so many *ashamnus*, one may be left overwhelmed, wondering, "Is there anything I've done right? Do I have the capacity to make positive contributions to the world?"

Relative to *Vidui*, it is important to recognize that Yom Kippur is not only a solemn day but a joyous one. The Jerusalem Talmud puts it this way:

“ Said Rabbi Abahu: The way of the word is that when one comes to be judged, one wears black clothes, and allows his beard to grow long and unkempt, concerned about the outcome of his case. This is not the case concerning the People of Israel. The Book of Life and Death are before us, who will live and who will die. And yet, we wear white, we wrap ourselves in white garments, we trim our beards and we believe that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will act kindly towards us. (Rosh Hashanah 1:3)

The 13th-century commentator Rabbenu Yonah adds that the final meal (*seudat ha-mafseket*) before the fast is viewed as a festive meal. In his words:

“ On holidays, we joyously partake in meals. Bearing in mind, however, that on Yom Kippur we fast, the law was established that we eat sumptuously beforehand. As we approach Yom Kippur, we eat a hearty meal, full of optimism, belief and joy. (*Sha'arei Teshuva*, Gate 4, Section 9)

This is a remarkable commentary. The Talmud views the *se'udat ha-mafseket* with concern, that with every bite we could choke to death. For this reason, we first pray the afternoon Mincha service, with *Vidui*, so that if we die during the meal, we will have at least recited a final confession. (Yoma 87b) Rabbenu Yonah turns this on its head: the meal before Yom Kippur is not a “fearful meal,” but a festive Yom Kippur meal.

In this spirit, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook in his commentary on the Mishnah points out that just as there is a *vidui la-ra*, a confession for the bad, so, too, is there a *vidui la-tov*, a confession for the good. An example is *vidui ma'aser*. In the fourth and seventh year of the sabbatical cycle, we recall that we have given tithes properly over the past three years. To the priest, we gave *terumah* (gift offering), to the Levite, we gave tithes, in support of Jerusalem we gave the second tithes. And we helped the indigent (*ma'aser ani*) by giving money to the poor. In short, our actions were an all-encompassing doing good (Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

Rav Kook puts it this way:

“ A person should also be joyous concerning the good he or she has done. It follows that

just as there is a great benefit to self-improvement through confessing one's sins, so is there great benefit to confessing one's good deeds. Therefore, the commandment of *Vidui* was established concerning the setting aside of the obligatory gifts (*terumah* and *ma'aser*). (Rabbi Kook's Commentary to Mishnah *Ma'aser Sheni* 5:10)

Now, Rav Kook carefully insists we speak with humility of our good deeds. We can always do better. But, reminding ourselves of what we've done well builds self-confidence, which is critical to belief in one's ability to do and accomplish for oneself, for Am Yisrael and for the world.

Inspired by this approach, we may consider an opposite recitation of *Ashamnu*, focusing on the good we've done. It, too, can be listed following the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

אָהַבְנוּ, בֵּרַכְנוּ, גָּדַלְנוּ, דִּבְרַנּוּ יָפִי

We have loved, we have blessed, we have grown, we have spoken positively.

הִעָלִינוּ, וְחָסְנוּ, זָרַזְנוּ

We have raised up, we have shown compassion, we have acted enthusiastically,

חֲמַלְנוּ, טִפַּחְנוּ אֶמֶת

We have been empathetic, we have cultivated truth,

יַעֲצֵנו טוֹב, כִּבְדְנוּ, לְמַדְנוּ, מְחַלְנוּ

We have given good advice, we have respected, we have learned, we have forgiven,

נְחַמְנוּ, סָלַלְנוּ, עוֹרְרְנוּ

We have comforted, we have been creative, we have stirred,

פָּעַלְנוּ, צַדִּיקְנוּ, קוִיֵּנו לְאֶרֶץ

We have been spiritual activists, we have been just, we have longed for Israel,

רַחֲמָנוּ, שָׁקַדְנוּ

We have been merciful, we have given full effort,

תְּמַכְנוּ, תְּרַמְנוּ, תִּקְנוּ

We have supported, we have contributed, we have repaired.

Even the traditional *Ashamnu*, the confession for the wrongs we've done, has overtones of optimism. Consider how music is divided into major and minor keys. Typically, the major keys are thought to be upbeat, the minor ones more melancholy.

But as Rabbi Ari Hart points out, we detail our *ashamnu* failures in a major key. The music is triumphant, suffused with a spirit of positive hopefulness. (You can hear the traditional *ashamnu* melody [here](#).)

In advocating *Ahavnu*, I am not discounting *Ashamnu*. Rather I suggest we find room alongside our negatives, to feel good about our accomplishments both as individuals and within our community.

Perhaps everyone should consider reflecting upon his or her good attributes by writing out a personal *Ahavnu* in English or Hebrew alphabetical order. It would also be good to do the same relative to the Jewish community and the State of Israel. With all of our challenges, there is so much to be proud of.

Yes, Yom Kippur is an intensely serious day. It is a day of self-reflection. But it is also an “up” day. It is a day to combine tears, worries and regrets with smiles, confidence and a humble but positive sense of accomplishment. A day to lift our hands from our hearts heavenwards, while singing and dancing – *ahavnu* (אהבנו), *berachnu* (ברכנו), *gadalnu* (גדלנו), *dibarnu yofi* (דברנו יפי).

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Author's Note: I'm grateful to Dr. Shalom Holtz, Rabba Anat Sharbat and Rabbi Steven Exler for their help in formulating the Ahavnu. Dr. Yehudah Freidenberg did the vocalization. Subsequent to my penning this Ahavnu, it was brought to my attention that Rabbi Binyamin Holtzman wrote another Ahavnu in 2012. It can be seen [here](#). In the same vein, years earlier, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin suggested a reading for Yom Kippur which he called “For the Mitzvah We Performed.”

Our Liturgy

The new, second-edition, hardbound *Shavat va-Yinafash*, published in December of 2017.

Bet Mishpachah's unique prayer books reflect the spiritual values of our congregation. We are very proud of our *siddur* for Shabbat evening and morning, *Shavat va-Yinafash* (Rest and Renewal), our *machzor* for the High Holy Days, *Chadeish Yameinu* (Renew Our Days), and our *shiva* book for a house of mourning, *Ha-Makom Y'nacheim* (Place of Comfort), which were developed by our Liturgy Committee to meet our needs as LGBTQ Jews and allies.

With great pride and joy, Bet Mishpachah dedicated the updated and expanded second hardcover edition of its unique prayer book, *Shavat va-Yinafash*, at its weekly Shabbat service on December 1, 2017. *Shavat va-Yinafash* offers a wide variety of beautiful prayers, readings, and meditations by contemporary liturgists, including several very talented members of Bet Mishpachah. Several special prayers from a trans perspective are also included.

The *siddur* provides complete Shabbat services for Friday night and Saturday morning, including the service for reading the Torah. It also includes the Festival *Amida* and selected prayers and readings for holidays and special occasions throughout the year. As with the first edition, the English translations in the second edition use gender-neutral terminology with respect to God, and both male and female forms with respect to people are used in Hebrew and in English. The second edition has also added many references to women, such as all six Matriarchs and the Prophet Miriam. Some Hebrew prayers are in the feminine. Much of the translation of the traditional Hebrew prayers is original to Bet Mishpachah and is uplifting and inspiring in new ways. In the new edition all Hebrew is transliterated.

The first hardbound edition of *Shavat va-Yinafash* was published in 1991 and was adopted by several other LGBTQ synagogues around the country, including ones in Cleveland, Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, and Dallas. Bet Mishpachah used softbound drafts of the second edition until it was finalized by the congregation's Liturgy Committee, printed, and published.

Please support the congregation by donating a bookplate on the inside the front cover of a *siddur* that will be used during services at Bet Mishpachah. You may order bookplates in honor of or in memory of a loved one, at \$54 each. **You may order your own copy of the *siddur* (without a bookplate) for a donation of \$40, including shipping. Go to betmish.org, then Our Services and Liturgy, Our Liturgy.**

Bet Mishpachah's Liturgy Committee worked for several years to compile, translate and edit prayers, readings, and meditations for the second edition of *Shavat va-Yinafash*. In this endeavor the Liturgy Committee was chaired and led by Scott Reiter, who also did all the desktop publishing in Hebrew and in English. The committee included Allan Armus, Alex Carter, Rabbi Laurie Green, Elke Martin, Larry Neff, Ruth Potts, and Rachel Wolkowitz.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed. In addition, if you have an interest or background in liturgy and would like to participate in this process, please contact liturgy@betmish.org.

