

MAKING YOUR CONGREGATION OR COMMUNITY MORE TRANS-FRIENDLY

Synagogues and other Jewish organizations are beginning to make changes and develop programming ideas to make their community more trans-friendly and to help educate members about transgender experiences. The following are examples of some steps that synagogues have taken to become more educated and welcoming.

Language

In flyers, newsletters, announcements, sermons etc., instead of writing “men and women welcome” or “for both men and women,” try “all genders welcome” or “for all genders.”

Facilities

Consider whether all of your facility’s restrooms must be gender-specific or whether one could be made available to everyone. This need not be complicated; covering the “men” or “women” sign with “all-gender restroom” is sufficient. Remember to do this for temporary, shared, or rental facilities also.

Ritual

- ◆ Consider how comfortable a trans person might be marking a wedding, b’nei mitzvah, conversion, loss, or other life cycle event in your congregation. How open could they be about their identity during the process? What about from the bimah?
- ◆ Transgender people often experience particular life-cycle events such as a gender change or a name change. Some wish to mark these events in a Jewish way, either publicly or privately. Consider how open your community is to developing new rituals or adapting existing ones.
- ◆ It is important to be especially sensitive around vulnerable experiences such as the mikveh or illness. The best approach is to listen carefully to the needs that the trans person expresses and to accommodate those to the greatest possible extent – even if it’s not the way things are “usually” done.



- ◆ Rethinking liturgy: Are there non-gendered and gender diverse language options for human beings and for God?
- ◆ Consider observing the national Transgender Day of Remembrance in your congregation. Commemorations are held annually on November 20th. For more information: www.gender.org/remember

Education

- ◆ Invite the community to a panel discussion, workshop or other event that will open up dialogue.
- ◆ Offer an adult education class or sermon about trans issues in general or about trans and intersex issues in Jewish text or Jewish community.
- ◆ If another organization is putting on a trans-related program, offer to host it, co-sponsor it, or advertise it.
- ◆ Consider what messages are conveyed in your religious school or children’s programs about gender and gender roles.

Political and Social Action

- ◆ Include transgender and gender diversity issues as part of your community’s social action work. There are many transgender community services and advocacy organizations that are in great need of our support.

Outreach

- ◆ Make sure to publicize changes that your congregation is making, as well as programs that you are planning. This will help to let trans people know that your community cares about being an affirming place for them.
- ◆ Consider an outreach plan. The world at large is not very welcoming to transgender people. Therefore, trans people often assume that they are not welcome or included – unless it is stated otherwise.

MAKING YOUR JEWISH CONGREGATION OR COMMUNITY MORE TRANSGENDER FRIENDLY

“And God created the human being in God’s own image...”

— Genesis 1:27

WHAT DOES 'TRANSGENDER' MEAN?

Transgender or **trans** is a broad term that can encompass anyone who doesn't identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth. This includes people who take medical steps to modify their appearance and those who do not.

Some transmen and transwomen identify completely with their preferred gender (for example, they may have been assigned male gender at birth and raised as a boy but now see themselves as completely female), while other trans people may identify with an alternate gender identity that is neither male nor female.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Transphobia, the fear of gender variation in society, impacts all parts of life. Children who do not gender-conform are often met with physical, verbal and sexual cruelty and are sometimes forced to drop out of school, while youth are frequently disowned by their families and lose economic support. Transgender adults face discrimination in employment, healthcare and many social services.

The Jewish community is equally impacted by transphobia. As a result, many trans and gender nonconforming individuals feel unwelcome in synagogue and unable to access spiritual care or support.



WHAT DOES JEWISH TRADITION SAY?

Although Jewish Sages often tried to sort the world into binaries, they also acknowledged that not all parts of God's creation can be contained within human categories. Jewish sacred texts include a wide range of gender diversity.

Two gender variant figures – the *tumtum* and the *androgynos* – appear more than 200 times in the Babylonian Talmud alone. According to one midrash, the first human being was an *androgynos*, while the Talmud teaches that Abraham and Sarah, the first Jews, were *tumtumim*. Most centrally, Jewish tradition teaches that people of all genders are created *b'zelem Elohim*, in the image of God (Gen. 1:27.)

ASKING QUESTIONS

The first question to ask about someone else's gender is: "Do I really need to know?" In most situations, a person's gender is not relevant. For example, if someone walks into Shabbat services and their gender is unclear, there is almost certainly no reason to ask or comment in any way. The person is there to pray and to be among community. They can be welcomed without knowing what their gender identity is.

If you decide that you do need to know or understand something about someone else's gender, appropriate and respectful questions include: "What pronoun do you prefer?" or "Is there anything I/we/the community can do to make this a more comfortable place?" It is inappropriate to ask about our bodies, our medical history, or how our families feel about our gender.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES:

This is just a starter list - there are hundreds of transgender organizations, films, books, etc. that can provide more information.

TransTorah – www.transtorah.org

(coming in Summer 2007!)

Educational, pastoral and liturgical resources to help congregations and Jewish communities become more trans-friendly, as well as spiritual resources for trans and gender nonconforming individuals.

Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity – www.jewishmosiac.org

Mosaic is currently creating a transgender resource library which will be open to the public soon.

The National Center for Transgender Equality – www.nctequality.org

This website includes 52 things you can do for transgender equality for use in your community group.

The Sylvia Riviera Law Project – www.srlp.org

SRLP's website includes educational and training materials as well as good information on the social and legal impacts of transphobia.

The Intersex Society of North America – www.isna.org

People who are intersex have face different issues than trans people. ISNA is the primary organization offering national intersex support, education and advocacy.