Reactions/Options

Faced with an unfamiliar issue or identity, we have four choices:

**Dismissal:** This issue doesn’t exist. Being “non-binary” is impossible and ridiculous. You are confused, so please stop talking about it.

**Tolerance:** Okay. Non-binary people exist. I find this confusing and uncomfortable, but I understand that it’s important to you. All the same, I’d prefer that you keep your gender to yourself or express it among other people in your community. Be who you are, but do so in ways and in settings where I don’t have to participate in the conversation.

**Acceptance:** I hear you. You are non-binary. I do not question your identity, and in fact I am getting used to the idea. Be non-binary in my house. I’ll use your pronouns and try to learn about this issue. I’m ok with it.

**Engagement:** It’s my responsibility to go beyond my comfort zone, to help make the world a more accepting (and, ideally, a more engaged) place. When a Lyft driver asks if my children are boys or girls, I will reply “I have two sons, and my oldest is non-binary.” And when that driver asks what non-binary means, I will explain. I will tell her that I’ve shared this information so that the next time she hears the term “non-binary,” she won’t have to ask what it means. I will correct my friends’ pronouns. I will look for opportunities to change the world.
Gender Diversity: Words You Should Know

Gender and Sexual Orientation are not the same: Who I am vs. Who I am attracted to

**Assigned Gender**
The gender a baby is given upon birth, usually based on the child’s birth sex.

**Gender Identity**
How we feel about our gender in our hearts and minds.

**Gender Expression/Gender Presentation**
How we show our gender to the world through external choices (e.g. dress, behavior, hairstyle). These don’t always match

**Cisgender**
Describes a person whose birth sex and gender identity align.

**Birth Sex/Biological Sex**
A specific set of genetic, chemical and anatomical characteristics that we are either born with or that develop as we mature.

**Binary Gender**
The faulty concept that there are only two genders: male and female.

**Genderqueer**
A broad descriptor many people use to indicate a person does not identify as either male or female.

**Transgender**
Describes anyone whose gender identity and birth sex do not align. The word should be used as, “transgender,” not “transgendered.” For example, “My brother Sam is transgender. He lives in New York.”

**Preferred Personal Pronouns**
In addition to the traditional pronouns (he/him, she/her, they), some people prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns, such as ne, ve, ze/zie and xe. If you don’t know [someone’s] preferred personal pronoun, it’s always best to ask.
What Does Jewish Tradition Say About the Gender Spectrum?

Excerpted from a pamphlet created by Rabbis Elliot Kukla, Reuven Zellman and TransTorah, in collaboration with the Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation and Jewish Mosaic, which in 2010 merged with Kesht.

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.

And one of doubtful gender and one of double gender etc. Our Rabbis have taught: "Male" is to exclude the women; "YOUR males" is to exclude the one of doubtful gender and the one double gender. "ALL your males" is to include the children.

Chagiga 4A

Whoever steals a man and sells him. Why is this said? Since it is said: “If a man be found to have stolen a person from among his fellow — men [he shall die]” I would know only [that this applies to] a man who stole another person. But a woman, or one whose gender is indistinguishable, or a hermaphrodite [who stole], how would we know [that this law applies]? Therefore the Torah says: “Whoever steals a person and sells him.” And since it is stated here: “Whoever steals a man,” I might think that [this applies] only if he steals a man. How would I know if he steals a woman? Therefore the Torah says: “If he steals a person.” It is for this reason that both [verses] are necessary, what one omits the other reveals.

Rashi on Exodus 21:16

Sarah and Abraham
R. Ammi stated: Abraham and Sarah were originally *tumtumin*; for it is said, (Isaiah 51:1) "Look unto the rock whence you were hewn and to the hole of the pit whence you were dug," and this is followed by the text, Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bore you.

R. Nahman stated in the name of Rabbah b. Abbuha: Our mother Sarah was an aylonit; for it is said, And Sarai was barren; she had no child, she had not even a womb.

**Yevamot 64a**

Jewish tradition teaches that people of all genders are created b’tzelem Elohim, in the image of God.

> וַיַּכְּרָא אֵלֶּה אָדָם בְּצֵלָמוֹ בְּצֵלָמוֹ בְּצֵלָמוֹ בְּצֵלָמוֹ בְּצֵלָמוֹ אֵוֶר הַשָּׁמַיִם אֵוֶר הַתֵּחַנָּה אֵוֶר הַדָּר מִּמֶּנָּה:

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Gen. 1:27

**Tzitz Eliezer: Orthodox Responsa from Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (1919-2006)**

In his large collection of responsa on Jewish law called Tzitz Eliezer, Rabbi Waldenberg (who served on Israel's supreme rabbinical courts) addressed some specifics regarding transgender people and halachah.

The identity and birthright of a human is not expressed by the separate organ parts of his body—and this will be the most important—but by the spirit and the soul which are within them. The Chatam Sofer got it right when he wrote that the body is not the human; rather the body is a bag made of dust and within that bag is inner wisdom, knowledge, and thoughts, which are the true definitions of personality.
Making Our Community Welcoming to All Genders

Whose responsibility is it to create a welcoming community?
- Do we wait for people to ask?
- Do we ask individuals what they prefer?
- Do we make gender neutral naming our standard policy?
- Do we change our bathrooms, locker rooms, camp cabins?
- Do we change our membership and program info forms?

In our places of worship: naming with honor and respect:
- Aliyah, misheberach and yartzeit: XXXX m’beit XXX
- See Kehilat Hadar Gender-Neutral Ritual Policy April 2018 | Nisan 5778

In our homes: blessing our children:
- Why is gender the defining characteristic of our ancestors?
- Aren’t all of our children descendants of both Abraham and Sarah?
- Solutions

Using preferred pronouns in English and Hebrew:
- Connotes respect and engagement
- Hebrew presents a challenge, but people are working on this. Do we dismiss it or support it?
Beyond the Binary: Gender Identity and the Role of Community
Susan Knoppow  Limmud Michigan – March 31, 2019  susan@wowwritingworkshop.com

Resources

Keshet
https://www.keshetonline.org/
Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life. Led and supported by LGBTQ Jews and straight allies, Keshet cultivates the spirit and practice of inclusion in all parts of the Jewish community. Our work is guided by a vision of a world where all Jewish organizations and communities are strengthened by LGBTQ-inclusive policy, programming, culture and leadership, and where Jews of all sexual orientations and gender identities can live fully integrated Jewish lives.

Svara
http://www.svara.org/
SVARA's core learning happens in the bet midrash, a space for study partners (chevruta) to build a relationship with the Talmud text, with one another, and with the tradition—and to do all that in community. The learning is rigorous, yet the bet midrash environment is warm and supportive. Learning at SVARA focuses on skill-building (learning how to learn), revealing and understanding the radical core of the Jewish tradition, becoming “players” in it, cultivating Talmud study as a spiritual practice, and becoming people shaped by one of the central technologies of our tradition: Talmud Torah (the study of Torah). Our mission is to open Talmud learning up to the 99% of Jews who have been shut out of the bet midrash for two millennia. SVARA is for you whether you did or didn’t grow up at day school or summer camp, you’re queer in any number of ways that give you the valuable insight of the outsider, you’re a woman who was told that Jewish learning isn't possible for you, you are or aren’t observant, or your relationship with Judaism doesn't match traditional expectations. SVARA students bring their real-life experiences to bear on the text and the tradition and learn in a Queer-normative space.

ELI Talk: An Unrecognizable Jewish Future: A Queer Talmudic Take
https://elitalks.org/unrecognizable-jewish-future-queer-talmudic-take
When the master narratives that guide our lives inevitably crash, how should we respond? Rabbi Benay Lappe asserts that there are three options: cling to the story as though nothing happened, discard it altogether, or integrate the old with the new and adapt. Arguing for the unique foresight of queer and marginalized perspectives in bringing the future of Judaism into being, Rabbi Lappe demonstrates how Talmud provides a blueprint for innovation and choosing option three.

Stand with Trans
http://standwithtrans.org/
Since 2015, Stand with Trans has been dedicated to developing programs, educational events and support groups to serve the Transgender Youth. Our mission is to provide the tools needed by transgender youth so they will be empowered, supported and validated as they transition to their authentic life.
Kehilat Hadar Gender-Inclusive Ritual Guidelines

May 2018 | Iyar 5778

Introduction

Kehilat Hadar is an independent, egalitarian community that meets for Shabbat and holidays on New York City’s Upper West Side. We are committed to spirited traditional services, lay leadership, and a warm and welcoming environment. Some of our community members and guests at our services use gender-neutral pronouns in English and/or Hebrew.

Hebrew is a gendered language, and before implementing these guidelines, we hadn’t had a policy about how to modify the traditional text to offer honors (such as an aliyah, hagbah, and gelilah) without using masculine or feminine pronouns, as there is no gender-neutral equivalent to they/them in Hebrew.

As part of an ongoing commitment to increasing the inclusiveness of our community’s egalitarianism, we began a process of researching gender-neutral language for ritual honors. Below, we share our new guidelines on providing honorees with three options for how to be called up, using either masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral language. We hope these new guidelines will be an important step towards the goal of making Kehilat Hadar a fully welcoming space to all. We’ve chosen to begin with this focus on ritual inclusion, and we welcome a continued conversation about additional inclusion initiatives. Please contact us if you’d like to share ideas or continue the conversation.

Our gender-inclusive ritual guidelines were inspired by the All Gender Torah Service Liturgy prepared by Rabbi Guy Austrian at the Fort Tryon Jewish Center in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan and was guided by our mara d’atrah (halachic advisor) Rabbi Ethan Tucker. Before sharing our plan with the community for feedback, we shared an earlier draft of these guidelines with specific members of our community who plan to use this gender-neutral language and with others experienced in developing LGBTQ inclusion training. We also shared the draft with our team of shamashim (ritual coordinators), who are charged with putting the guidelines into practice at our services.

Values and Principles

In developing these guidelines we seek to affirm and enact the following values in our community:

- Respect for each individual’s gender identity and the way in which they’d like to be named in public
- Inclusion of participants and guests in ritual aspects of our services, both as individuals and as members of a couple or family
- Preservation of the existing gendered Hebrew language options with the addition of a neutral option
- Ease and fluidity of implementation by the shamashim

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1 For example, people who are non-binary and/or genderqueer “experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.” (This definition and many others can be found at Refinery29’s Gender Nation Glossary.)
Language

1. Calling up a person for an aliyah, and other situations where a person’s name is called

FEMININE

תַּעֲמֹד בַּת, שֶׁלֶשֶׁית

| Ta’amod ___ bat ___ , shelishit |

Let ___ daughter of ___ parent(s) stand (ta’amod), the third [person to be called] (shelishit).

NEUTRAL

נא לַעֲמֹד מִבֵּית, שֶׁלֶשֶׁית

| Na la’amod ___ mibit ___ la’aliyah hashelishit |

Please stand, ___ from the house of ___ parent(s) for the third aliyah.

MASULINE

יָמֹד בֶּן, שֶׁלֶשֶׁי

| Ya’amod ___ ben ___ , shelishi |

Let ___ son of ___ parent(s) stand (ya’amod), the third [person to be called] (shelishi).

For the gender-neutral option, we use the infinitive na la’amod which is not gendered, rather than a masculine or feminine gendered verb. Within the person’s name, we use neutral mibit rather than the gendered ben or bat. If the person having the aliya prefers mimishphat, l’vêt, or another term to refer to their family instead of mibit, we will use the term that the individual provides.

2. Calling up a child of a Kohen, before their name

FEMININE

בַּת כֹּהֵן קָרִיב

| Bat kohen kirvi |

Daughter of a kohen, approach (kirvi)

NEUTRAL

N/A (do not say “kohen kerav”)

MASULINE

כֹּהֵן קָרִיב

| Kohen kerav |

Kohen, approach (kerav)

The phrase kohen kerav is a reference to Leviticus 9:7, which says “Then Moses said to Aaron: Approach (kerav)...” It was modified for female children of Kohanim when they started to be called up for this aliyah, but it is not required and therefore the simplest change for the gender-neutral option is to skip the phrase.
3. Maftir aliya, after their name

**FEMININE**

Maftirah

The one who will read the Haftarah (*maftirah*)

**NEUTRAL**

Likriyat hahaftrah

For the reading of the Haftarah

**MASCULINE**

Maftir

The one who will read the Haftarah (*maftir*)

4. Hagbah and Gelilah

**FEMININE/FEMININE**

Ta’amodnay hamagbahat v’hagolelet

Stand (*ta’amodnah*) the lifter (*magbahat*) and the wrapper (*golelet*)

**FEMININE/MASCULINE**

Ta’amod hamagbahat, ya’amod hagolel

Stand (*ta’amod*) the lifter (*magbahat*), stand (*ya’amod*) the wrapper (*golel*)

**NEUTRAL**

Na la’amod l’hagbahat haTorah v’li’gilgat haTorah

Please stand (*na la’amod*) for the lifting of the Torah and for the wrapping of the Torah

[The neutral language is to be used when either or both honorees use gender-neutral language.]

**MASCULINE/FEMININE**

Ya’amod hamagbihah, ta’amod hagolelet

Stand (*ya’amod*) the lifter (*magbihah*), stand (*ta’amod*) the wrapper (*golelet*)
MASCULINE/MASCULINE

Ya'amdu hamagbiah v’hagoel

Stand (ya’amdu) the lifter (magbiah) and the wrapper (golel)

5. Divrei Torah

ALL

We will now hear a d’var Torah from _name_.

There was no ritually significant reason that our previous language of “Our darshan/darshanit this morning is _name_,” was gendered in the first place, so we’ve elected to switch to a gender neutral version for all people who give a d’var Torah.

6. Other Cases

We look forward to the opportunity to address other instances of gendered ritual language, such as marriages, births, and other special occasions, as they arise.

Implementation

We must also consider the way in which a person is made aware of the options available to them and asked which one they’d like to use, as a person’s choice of pronouns is often a very personal issue of identity. We are also sensitive to the possibility that some people may use different pronouns in Hebrew than in English. To avoid inadvertently making a guest uncomfortable by asking such a personal question, shamashim will focus on the practical matter of the aliya, not their identity more generally.

Once the new option has been announced, Shabbat morning regulars will have the opportunity to inform shamashim if they would like to switch the language they use. We expect that the shamashim can learn the pronoun choice of Shabbat morning regulars, just as they know who among them are children of Kohanim and Leviim. When a shamash offers an aliya to someone whose pronouns are not known to that shamash, they will point out the three options listed on our aliya cards and ask how the person would like to be called up. For example, “Shabbat shalom! Would you like an aliya?” and if yes, “We have three options for language when calling up people for a aliya. Please let me know how you would like to be called up.” The shamash can explain further that we have 3 options: feminine (ta’amod), gender neutral (na la’amod), or masculine (ya’amod), if the person isn’t sure what that question means.

In addition to the explanation on the aliya cards, we will also indicate these options on the page number handouts that go on the seats, so that people who are not offered aliya that week are nonetheless made aware of the possibilities.
I am the parent of a non-binary child

The first time my oldest child told me that gender existed on a spectrum, we were parked in the driveway, sitting in our old Honda minivan with the engine idling and the radio off. Miriam had just returned from a youth group weekend and we were catching up.

“No, sweetheart,” I said to my precocious 14-year-old. “Sexuality is on a spectrum; you can be straight, gay or lots of things in between. Gender is either male or female.”

Miriam corrected me. “No, Mom. Gender is on a spectrum, too.”

At the end of high school, Miriam came out as non-binary. That, too, was a confusing surprise. My husband David and I listened intently, nodded in all the right places, and said we would do everything we could to be supportive. We had no idea what that meant.

I would be lying if I pretended it’s been easy.

For the first 18 years of Miriam’s life, I was sure I was raising a daughter. And I was. Until that daughter told me they were neither female or male, and that I should switch to “they/them/their” pronouns when referring to them in the third person.

Pronouns need their own discussion. We’ll save that for another day. But in the meantime, here’s the short version: People who are non-binary use a variety of pronouns, but they/them/their are the most common today. The English language is still figuring this one out. My child (and many other non-binary folks) use they instead of she or he, them instead of her or him, and their instead of hers or his.

After lots of practice, my ear is getting tuned to this change. The distinctions may seem like a clumsy trick of the English language, but the implications run deep.

The pronouns we use reflect our level of respect for the person we are speaking with or about. When someone tells me, “I’ll just call Miriam ‘she’ because that’s what I’m used to,” they are passing judgment on my child. They are saying, “My comfort is more important than your child’s comfort.” Whether or not they intend to be dismissive they are telling me, “Miriam’s identity is not valid because I don’t understand it.” Being mis-gendered – or mistaken for the wrong gender – stings. Hearing “she/her/hers” instead of “they/them/their” causes my child pain.
Does that sound harsh? Does it sound like I’m asking friends, family and strangers to engage in an issue that doesn’t involve them? I can assure you that whether or not you think you know someone who is non-binary, you do. The more people I talk to and the more I write about this, the more I realize that David and I are experiencing something that is both utterly unique and increasingly common. You know someone who is non-binary. They just might not have told you yet.

As a parent, I am doing everything I can to expand the universe in which my child and other non-binary people can feel comfortable. That’s what an ally does. I’ve had conversations about gender identity with my parents and with cab drivers, with my closest friends and with checkout clerks. When someone I haven’t seen for months asks, “How’s Miriam?” I say, “They’re fine, thanks.” When a business associate asks, “You have three kids? Boys or girls?” I tell them, “I have two sons, and my oldest is non-binary.” Some people nod because they get it. Most of the time, I have to explain further.

Here’s a peek into the types of questions and reactions I’ve heard from friends, relatives and strangers when I mention Miriam or talk about what’s been going on in our lives, along with my responses.

**Do you think it’s a phase?**

*No. And even if it were, what difference would that make? I want to keep the lines of communication open and help my child find a comfortable home in the world – with or without me. If I deny their reality, I will be shutting that door.*

**What you are describing is scientifically impossible. There are two sexes: male and female, and therefore two genders.**

*That’s not helpful. And anyway, I’m talking about gender, not biological sex. Gender has always been a social construct (which changes by era and culture.) Some say sex is constructed, too.*

**This is just kids’ latest way to try to be unique. They’ll grow out of it.**

*The fact that many of the people who (publicly) identify as non-binary happen to be under 25 does not mean this gender identity doesn’t exist for older people. They may not have had the language or the need for it, or they just might not be sharing it with you. Wait a few years until non-binary is more familiar to the mainstream public. You’ll be hearing more of this.*

**My child says the same thing. I think it’s because she’s depressed.**

*If you think your child is depressed, I encourage you to get them help to deal with that directly. Please don’t deny your child’s identity.*

**I’m so sorry. I feel terrible for you.**

*Keep your pity to yourself. It is both misguided and unwelcome. As soon as you smugly think to yourself, “Thank God it’s not my kid” you separate yourself from my family and isolate us from the larger community. Please deal with your discomfort away from me.*
You are amazing (brave/courageous/etc.). I couldn’t possibly handle this.

Annoying and unhelpful. See “I’m so sorry,” above.

That’s ridiculous. “They” is a plural pronoun.

Language is always evolving. You’ll get used to it.

Can’t you just use “they” when you’re together and use the old pronoun with everyone else?

Language matters, and I have been asked to change mine. The best way to get used to that change is to use the preferred pronouns all the time. The more others hear “they” in reference to one person, the more familiar it will become, and the more welcome and comfortable my child (and other non-binary folks) will be in our communities.

I hear you. We’re having the same conversation in my house.

Let’s talk.

I am completely confused.

That’s OK. You don’t have to get it all at once.

I love my child. They are exactly the same artsy, sensitive, insightful person they have always been – same concern for the world, same love of farming, poetry, Judaism and family, same funky sense of style. I keep exploring and sharing my experiences in my blog and in my daily encounters. It gets easier and more comfortable all the time.

Here are some places to learn more:
- [Here’s What It Means When You Don’t Identify as a Girl or a Boy](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-non-binary-gender)

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