

Pride and PreJewdice

JQYU's Jewish Queer College Newsletter

Back to School

Hey everyone! Welcome back to a new school year! We hope everyone is getting settled well into their classes. For those of you new college attendees, be sure to check out the College Tips column so you know just what is in store for you. We've also collected a list, coming soon on our website, of Jewish LGBTQ+ resources and contact information for colleges all across the US. This list is just the beginning, so please contact us if you have more to add! Enjoy this edition!

M. Lattin (she/her) and Mic Braun (they/them)

The Modern Meaning of the Shema

Parshat Va'etchanan

Sheva Friedenberg (she/her)



Across states, countries, even continents, Jewish communities and individuals worldwide have made Judaism their own, creating a beautifully diverse and complex nation. I saw this so clearly last summer when I had the opportunity to travel to Israel and visit the Kotel—the Western Wall. The crowd was made up of people from all walks of life, all coming to visit this holy site. I had managed to squeeze my way to the front and put my hand on the ancient stones, and while doing so, noticed something interesting. Walking through the crowds, I heard chatter in different languages, children crying, people praying for their loved ones; but there was one common sound I heard numerous times through the crowd: the Shema.

The Shema prayer has been a part of the Jewish people since the time of Moses and is mentioned in a Torah portion read this month, Parshat Va'etchanan. When I looked at its verses in the text, I started thinking back to my years in Jewish elementary school classrooms, hearing stories on many occasions about how the Shema miraculously reconnected people, helped people, and even saved lives. As I started delving into the meaning of the Shema, trying to find something deep and meaningful to talk about, I realized that I may be going two steps too far. In more modern times, many people who are connected to the Shema likely don't know the translation. They may not know the origins, or even why it's something that they know to begin with.

The text of the Torah portion mentions the Shema extensively, telling the reader how to apply it to everyday life. It mentions the commandment of Tefillin, something done during morning prayers involving wrapping leather straps attached to small black leather boxes containing the Shema on one's forearm and forehead. Another mentioned object is the Mezuzah, a fixture placed on one's doorposts, containing the Shema as well. The Torah teaches us to recite the prayer each morning and evening as well. If not all people understand exactly what or why they're saying it, then why do we continue these practices?

I believe that there are traditions that run in families through the generations that stop needing a reason as they connect the family to their heritage by being passed from parent to child. When someone finds a long-lost cousin they didn't know existed but has the same tradition—it's incredibly exciting and they know that they're certainly related. A connection exists even though they didn't know one another! I think that the same goes for the Shema. When you meet another person from across the world who knows the same short, ancient verse as you do—you feel a connection that I believe to be the feeling that we are meant to have as a nation! G-d wanted to remind us that no matter what, we are all from the same heritage. We are so different and unique as individuals, but there is always a common thread to tie us together.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom!

Jewish LGBTQ+ Icon: Joshua Rush

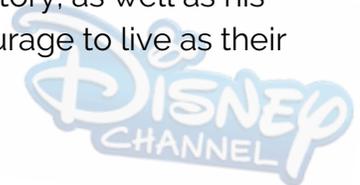
Samara Karow (she/her)



Joshua Rush, age 17, has cemented himself in recent Jewish LGBTQ+ history by not only playing the first gay main character on a Disney show but by recently coming out, as bisexual. His character, Cyrus Goodman recently made news by being the first Disney Channel character to say "I'm gay," in a scene in which he was sitting shiva. In the "real world," using the internet, Rush came out in a clever tweet; "First to respond to this tweet is bi," he said, before quickly retweeting; "First! i win! it's me. i'm bi. And now that I've said that, I have a few things to rant about. There are more important things to talk about than me liking a whole bunch of genders, but I do want to share a few things with you guys." In his following tweets, he spoke about his personal struggles around coming out and called for fans to donate to GLAAD, a nonprofit that works on LGBTQ activism. Amidst the controversy over whether straight actors should play gay characters, one thing is clear: Rush contributed to the LGBTQ+ community in both his personal and professional life.

Luke Mullen, who played Cyrus's love interest, TJ, on *Andi Mack* has not identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, but he, like many others, showered Joshua Rush in support. Rush explained that it wasn't any of the cast members or even Cyrus himself who emboldened Rush with the courage to come out, but his loving fanbase. If it wasn't for them, he may have never come out at the young age of 17.

As a bisexual Jew myself, seeing someone close in age who is so prominent in the media live out and proud as his authentic self provides me a great sense of reassurance. Though I am three years older than Joshua Rush, when I was younger and watching Disney Channel, I didn't have role models like him leading the way. Instead, LGBTQ+ youth like me didn't necessarily have the opportunity to discover who they really were until much later. I hope Joshua Rush's coming out story, as well as his contributions to media and politics, grant young people the courage to live as their authentic selves, no matter who they are.



Interview with Tali Benkoe.

Kevin Lubin (he/him)

Q: How did you first find out about JQY?

A: I'm not sure I remember. I think maybe a friend of mine's brother attended JQY a few years ago and she told me about it. Then, Rachael Fried came to visit Israel and we attended a Shabbat meal together where I heard more about JQY.

Q: What made you decide that you wanted to become a JQY social worker?

A: I wanted to be a part of an organization that is so closely related to my own story.

Q: Do you feel that you've made a difference in the time you've been working with the organization?

A: Yes!

Q: What direction do you think JQY is currently headed in, having a new executive director, and also the recent partnership with IGY (Israel Gay Youth)?

A: Hmm...that's a good question. I think the change is going to be good for JQY. Knowing Rachael, I think she's going to get JQY into tiptop shape. Since JQY is small, new things are constantly popping up with relatively short notice, so it's hard to say what exactly will happen. In terms of IGY, I think it's going to open up new opportunities for JQY members. I think there will be a wider community of teens and young adults to get to know!

Q: Now onto the more personal questions. What is the connection between your religious identity and your sexuality or gender?

A: Well, both are things I was born into, so they've been with me for as long as I can remember. They've shaped the course of my life and I feel grateful for both of them. They also both present me with challenges, sometimes interwoven and sometimes separate. Lastly, they both help me get into programs because I come off as interesting ;). Use it, people.



Q: How do those aspects of your identity relate to your profession of social work?

A: That's a good question. I think now they're related but I wouldn't say they were always. Doing compassion-driven work is something that seems very innately part of me. I have always been sensitive, even before I knew I was Jewish or had crushes on girls. Now they're related because I see doing social work at JQY as a way to tie it all together.

Q: In June, JQY hosted a Nachas event to honor Rabbi Daniel Atwood and the strides the queer community has made in the Orthodox world. What was your takeaway from that experience?

A: Ohh boy, I was upstairs at the ticket stand. What I will say is that it was heartening to see so many people getting together for an event called Nachas. It felt like we were really a community who could celebrate the simchas of our other members. There was also a diverse crowd of straight and queer people, which gave me the sense that we might be moving in a direction with less distinction between us. I would love to hear what you all took away from it.

Q: Are there any parting words you would like to share?

A: To quote my great-grandmother, "Az dos shmatzdokh, kratzdokh"—if it itches, scratch it ;).

Tali Benkoe (any pronouns) is currently an intake social worker at the Jewish Queer Youth center in midtown Manhattan.

Creative Writing

It Gets Better

S.T. (he/him)

There are voices all around me. Familiar feelings in a blank space. So I stand, centered in this swarm of thoughts and wishes. I turn my face, I breathe in. Overrun, they wash over me. The heart of the community I have found. I reach my hand out, to grasp, to hold this beauty I've discovered. Forward I stumble, again and again, yet in my grasp, I hold those precious sentiments. There's been an ache internal—so long you'd forget it's there. For, in my life there were always expectations, always judgment, always responsibility assumed. To stand as one different from the image of self found in the eyes of others, to think of what they must want from all they can only best manage to see. It is why I must hide what it is they can not find on their own. The cold life of the paranoid and misunderstood, the solitude existence of unappreciated individuality. Short breaths, brave face. Shaken core, worry and strife. To be not the being I am, but the only me I can manage.

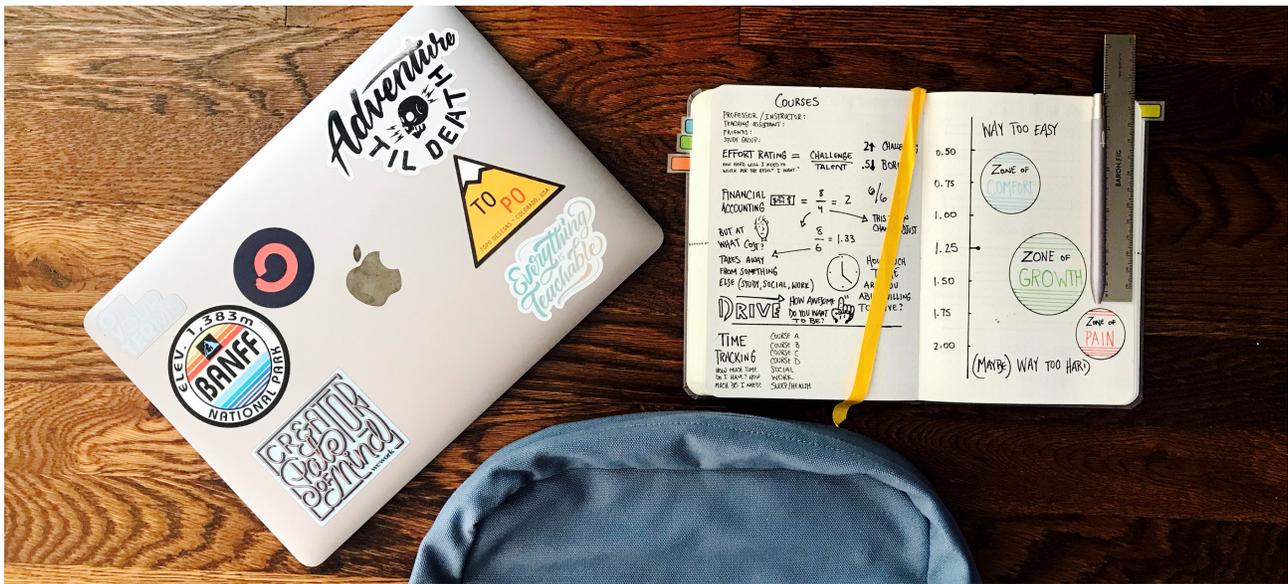
Where is a future for the troublesome present? Where is validation to be found for those who exist in a veil; where is acceptance for those that seek only a life of those who dare walk with hope in their heart? Resolute eyes, exasperated sigh. Perhaps...there is no such thing. Tired of anger, tired of the endless conflict. There is no other path than the beaten road of defeated mentality. I must accept not the hopes of the future but the realities presented to me. I know not of what can be done, I know not possibilities as I wish there to be. All I have is the singular voice I carry. A tune I cannot fully comprehend, the humming of he who can only want. The solitude song.

But the tale does not end here. It cannot. This story continues. For, as long as there are those who hold the same melody, there is hope. In the wake of others who can feel the way as I do, be the way as I am, I see there is more than one way this song can be sung. They are bright and beautiful. They are proud; they are fire. And they found me as I found them. With warm heart and warm wishes, I brace all they wish to offer. To say there is a loneliness that need not be alone, an individuality that need not be so different, a me that can exist in a world I thought it could not. For, through their words and their hopes I can believe all I wish for as long as I'd been silently hoping. They tell me, I might not always reach as far as I want. They say there are times you can be alone. They remind me who I am is not perfect, but what remains is what I can rely on. These are the people I have learned to love. They are my community, my perfect imperfection in an imperfect perfection. I stand taller, knowing I am known. I am heard. I can face the problems that for too long have shamed me. The puzzles that seemingly taunted without answer. I am not too different than all I've known myself to be. In a way, it's what I've always wanted. To be me.

The world can be cruel. The days, long and cold. But for every chill, there is a hearth. I see futures again. I see roads, overgrown yet never inaccessible. It is in this belief that I find myself. With my own hands, the tomorrows I can make. Nothing memorable can carry in minds that cannot find the beauty laid dormant, laid hidden. That might be what we are, but not what we will always be. Life is a spirit to itself in its high and lows. What we can depend on is that life will never be simple. It can't be. You could even say it will always be as complicated as we are. We are not alone in searching for ourselves. Sometimes we can search with others, sometimes we look on our own, sometimes we can only see with what we have, sometimes we don't even have that much. And that's okay. Because there are always those who are waiting. No matter how lost we are, there will always be those who'd be lost without us. Life can be a high ride or a low march. We can be broken; we can feel whole. We can fall and we can climb. We are alive, and we hold all we need, so long as we have those that sing these songs as we do. In strength, a path forward can be found. That is why I believe. Believe in a thought so simple. So small. Yet from this idea, I gain all the strength I need to try, try again. I think, 'It gets better'. And it does. Time and again.

College Tips

Kevin Lubin (he/him)



Well, well, well, I guess it's that time of year again. Light sweaters, pumpkin and cinnamon scents, leaves turning gorgeous colors...It's nearly autumn, which also means, for better or for worse, it's time for class to start again. This can very well be the greatest semester yet! Whether it's your first year of college or your fourth, consider these tricks for your first week to help you start your year off strong:

- New semester, new you! For many people, college is the first chance they get to unashamedly be who they truly are. Take this semester, particularly the beginning, to be your absolute truest self.
- Dress for your own success. Whether you prefer formal wear or pajamas, wear what you know will give you the motivation to get ahead. I know that I perform best in a big, chunky sweater and flowers in my hair; you better bet that's what I'm going to be wearing to be the happiest and most productive version of myself as soon as class starts up again.
- Find some friends early on. This tip is mostly applicable to those of you just starting college and therefore it's a whole new territory. Having some people who are in your classes and operating on the same schedule can be such a blessing, particularly in those rougher moments of the semester. It's always a great thing to compare notes and study together, which both build relationships and help everyone stay on top of their studies.
- If you're enrolled in a certain class you're not obligated to take and you're not enjoying it, don't take it! This sounds like an obvious tip, but be forewarned. I've known plenty of people who took classes that they hated just because they thought they'd love it and were then stuck in those courses because they'd missed the deadline to switch out. Don't be that person!
- Always have pencils and pens on you! Even if you don't necessarily need them, you can definitely be that hero who saves your fellow, pencil-less students.
- If you know in advance about days that you're going to be absent, email your professors as soon as possible. For example, if you are unable to attend class on Yom Tov or a family simcha, let your teachers know long before the holiday or event begins. This is also a good way to have your professor recognize your name and know who you are, which leads us directly into our next tip:

- Your professors are there to help you. Don't be afraid to form a connection with them and talk to them outside of class. You can let them know if you're falling behind or unsure of how to complete certain assignments, and nine times out of ten they will want to assist you and help you succeed.
- The last and most important tip is to use your resources! At the end of the day, college is extremely difficult. It can be physically, intellectually, and emotionally taxing in so many ways. As such, never forget you can ask for help. Friends, peers, professors, advisors—they're all there to pick you up when you're down. So be yourself, be beautiful, and keep moving forward!

Best of luck this semester!

LGBTerminology

Noam (they/them)

Disclaimer—all of this information is how I personally understand the following terms, everybody has their own unique definitions and that is valid.

Hey y'all! It's Noam and it's time for a quick recap. Last time we got some useful info on various sexual orientations. Wait—what is a sexual orientation anyway?? Well, I'm glad you asked.

- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

How a person defines their sexual attraction(s), if any, usually in relation to the gender, sex, or similar characteristics of the people they are attracted to.

Whew!! What a mouthful. Basically, one's sexual orientation is based on the gender they are typically sexually attracted to. In my opinion, it is crucial to differentiate between sexual orientation and romantic orientation.

- **ROMANTIC ORIENTATION**

How a person defines their romantic attraction(s), if any, usually in relation to the gender, sex, or similar characteristics of the people they are attracted to.

You may be wondering, "what's the difference between sexual attraction and romantic attraction?" Good question! Sexual attraction is usually more based on who one may want to get physically intimate with, while romantic attraction is, for example, who one may enjoy going on a date with.

Something worth noting is that pretty much any term indicating sexual orientation has a counterpart indicating romantic orientation counterpart, so to speak. For example, we know that Pansexual usually means one feels sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity. So, Panromantic means one feels romantic attraction to people regardless of gender identity. Kinda neat how that works, right?

Well, that's all for this month's LGBTerminology. Looking forward to the next one!



JQY (Jewish Queer Youth) supports and empowers LGBTQ children, teens and young adults in the Jewish community, with a special focus on those from Orthodox, Chassidic, and Sephardi/Mizrachi homes. JQY promotes the mental health, emotional well-being and physical safety of these individuals by providing national crisis, communal, and advocacy resources, as well as in-person support programming in New York.

JQYU (JQY University) is a cross-campus network for LGBTQ Jewish college students. JQYU serves as an umbrella community for queer Jewish campus organizations as well as queer Jewish individual students.

Have submission ideas for our newsletter?
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