

A Blessing for Transitioning Genders

by Rabbi Eli Kukla, 2006

Jewish tradition teaches us that we should be saying a hundred blessings a day to mark all the moments of kedusha, holiness, that infuse our lives. There are blessings to recite before eating and drinking, performing religious commandments, witnessing rainbows, oceans, thunder or lightning, seeing old friends, tasting new fruits and arriving at a new season. And yet many of the most important moments in the lives of transgender, intersex and gender queer Jews are not honored within our tradition.

I wrote this blessing for a friend who wanted to mark each time that he received Testosterone (hormone therapy), but it could be used for any moment in transitioning such as name or pronoun changes, coming out to loved ones or moments of medical transition. Jewish sacred texts such as the Mishna, the Talmud, midrash and classical legal codes acknowledge the diversity of gender identities in our communities, despite the way that mainstream Jewish religious tradition has effaced the experiences of transgender, intersex and gender queer Jews. This blessing signals the holiness present in the moments of transitioning that transform Jewish lives and affirms the place of these moments within Jewish sacred tradition.

This blessing takes the same form and grammatical structure as classical blessings that mark wondrous occasions. “The Transforming One” as a name for God appears in the traditional blessings of gratitude that are recited each morning. The Hebrew verb root of this word, *avar*, has multiple layers of meaning within Judaism. Most literally it means to physically cross over, however it also implies spiritual transformation in High Holiday prayers. It lies at the root of the word *Ivrim*, Hebrew people. We are the *Ivrim*, the crossing over people, because we physically crossed over the Jordan River to escape from slavery and oppression and spiritually transformed ourselves. At its core, our ancestral sacred memory holds this moment of painful and yet redemptive, physical and spiritual transition. In Modern Hebrew, this same verb root is used to form the word, *ma’avar*, which means to transition genders.

The second blessing is also taken from morning liturgy. It is based on the book of Genesis, which teaches that male and female bodies were equally created in God’s image. The Midrash, classical Jewish exegesis, adds that the Adam HaRishon, the first human being formed in God’s likeness, was an androgynos, an intersex person. Hence our tradition teaches that all bodies and genders are created in God’s image whether we identify as men, women, intersex or something else. When we take physical or spiritual steps to more honestly manifest our gender identities we are fulfilling the foundational mitzvah, religious commandment, to be partnered with God in completing the work of creation.

TRANS TORAH

The final blessing is classically recited each time we reach a new event or season. Saying it at moments of transition celebrates God's nurturing and sustaining presence in allowing us to reach this moment of self-transformation. However, this blessing is in the first person plural and also marks our collective transition as a people as we begin to transform our tradition in order to honor and celebrate the lives of transgender, intersex and gender queer Jews.

This blessing may be recited before any moment in the transitioning process:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam Ha'Mavir L'Ovrin

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of Time and Space, the Transforming One to those who transform/transition/cross over

Afterwards recite:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam sh'asani b'tzelmo

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space who has made me in God's image

For special events taking place for the first time or for the first time in this season (such as a name or pronoun change, beginning hormone therapies or surgeries) add:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam Sh'hechianu, v'kimanu, v'higiyanu, la'zman hazeh

Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God Ruler of Time and Space who has kept us alive and sustained us and helped us to arrive at this moment