**Elul Guide Week 3: Love and Language Come into this World Together**

This week's exercise is to think about how gender identity can be part of [the teshuvah process](https://cbbsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Week-One.pdf). Consider the following definition of teshuvah:

***Teshuvah is a return to one's true path. To that sense of harmony that flows from expressing your innermost self in the way you live.***(p. 79, Rosh HaShannah Yom Kippur Survival Kit, Shimon Apisdorf).

Gender identity is one aspect of our innermost selves. It is also a topic that people have always grappled with, often without a common vocabulary or supportive community; but only relatively recently has the discussion become part of mainstream American culture. However, Jewish tradition has been discussing gender identity in various forms for centuries! (See the "Further Reading" section below to learn more.)

What is gender identity? It can be complex at first, but worth learning about. Here is the basic concept: Gender identity is who we feel we are inside. For some of us, our bodies and our genders allign. That is: I was born with a girl body and I feel like a girl. For me, I can easily express my innermost self as a woman because my gender identity is alligned with mainstream cultural understanding. There is space and acceptance for my own self expression. But the hope is that we can do better, and with more understanding our cultural perception can shift. For example, some people have a girl body but inside they feel like a boy (or vice versa). Or they feel no gender but rather just like a person. We want to make the world safe for people to express who they are inside, whatever that is for them.

Whatever your gender identity, we ALL have work to do during Elul in this regard: the conversation is new to many people, and so we have a chance to support greater inclusivity of everyone's experience by learning something new, or (if you already feel well-versed on gender identity) teaching others by example. Easier said than done, but like everything in Elul, it's the progress (not attaining perfection) that counts.

Spend your Elul practice learning more by starting with this[glossary of terms](https://www.pflag.org/glossary), or reading the articles on the Jewish gender conversation in the "Further Reading" section, below.

Want extra credit? Show some love! Attend [Santa Barabra's interfaith Pride celebration Love.Period](http://www.pflagsantabarbara.org/love-period-2018/) this Saturday, August 25th at 1pm in Chase Palm Park (note the new location).

Next week, we will tie up our Elul practice in our 4th and final week of the 2018 Elul Guide.

**Further Reading:**

* [On gender diversity in Jewish tradition](https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-lifesocial-justice-advocacy/jewish-views-on%E2%80%A6/health-wellnesscivil-rights/gender-diversity)
* [On the creation of gender in Genesis](%20https%3A/www.lilith.org/articles/gender-in-genesis/)
* [On gender ambiguity in the Talmud](https://www.lilith.org/articles/bet-you-didnt-know-what-the-talmud-says-about-gender-ambiguity/)