

CORNERSTONE 2020 RESOURCE

Rainbow Torah: How Jewish Tradition Helps Us Celebrate LGBTQ Identity

Elective 3

AUTHOR(S):	Ariella Rosen
SUMMARY:	This session invites participants to explore traditional Jewish texts that can be understood to celebrate LGBTQ identity, and think creatively about how to apply their messages to their camp communities - <i>Submitted by Ariella Rosen</i>
TOPIC(S):	Jewish text, Identity, Visual Arts, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will be able to give examples of traditional Jewish texts that speak to the LGBTQ experience in a positive way. Participants will be able to recognize opportunities to not only make their camps more inclusive of LGBTQ campers and staff, but also affirming and celebratory of them!
AUDIENCE:	Older campers or staff (15 and older), preferably a smaller group (max. of 20, but can be modified to be done with more).
TIMING:	90 minutes.
APPENDICES:	Rainbow Torah Text Packet
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Copies of text handout, watercolor palettes, paintbrushes, cups of water, watercolor paper (or any plain white paper).
SET-UP DETAILS:	This session can take place in any space where doing art is permitted. It can be nice to sit at a table for text study and watercolor, but any space where participants can spread out in partners and alone works.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

00:00-00:10- Introductions
00:10-00:30- Judaism and LGBTQ Identity
00:30-00:50- First Dive into Texts
00:50-01:00- Second Dive into Texts
01:00-01:15- Picturing this at Camp
01:15-01:30- Closing Conversation

Introductions (10 min.)

Ask participants to share their name, pronouns, and why they chose to participate in this session. Set the tone: This is not meant to be a LGBTQ 101 session, so we will not be spending time introducing the different facets of identity that the letters stand for. With that in mind, we will agree to maintain confidentiality and a non-judgmental space, and asking questions and defining terms is encouraged!

Ask each participant to answer the following two questions:

- What is an example of a way that LGBTQ identity is welcomed at your camp?
- What is an area in which LGBTQ individuals might not yet feel like they can be their full selves at your camp?

Explain that participants should hold onto the answers to these questions and allow them to inspire their participation in the rest of the session today.

Judaism and LGBTQ Identity (20 min.)

Show [Rabbi Benay Lappe Tedx Talk](#) (start at 4:45, no need to show the entire clip)

Discuss:

- How has Judaism historically not been inclusive of LGBTQ identity?
- Reflect on Rabbi Lappe's struggle with being both Jewish and gay. How does this struggle resonate with you?
- How have you seen Jewish communities celebrate LGBTQ identities in our time?

Explain: the purpose of this session is to uncover all of the ways Jewish tradition has been recognizing LGBTQ identity all along. This acceptance is not new, but actually has its roots in ideas and texts that are thousands of years old.

First Dive into Texts (20 min.)

Invite participants to find a partner (hevruta in Hebrew). Together, you will look at at least one of the texts in the packet, though you are welcome to look at more. Pick any one to start with.

For the first round, only discuss your answers to the "understanding the text" questions. Facilitator will move around and help answer any questions that come up.

After about 15 minutes, bring the group back together, and invite people to reflect on a text they explored together, and discuss any questions they have. There is no wrong way to understand the text!

Second Dive into Texts (10 min.)

Invite participants to return to hevruta. This time, discuss the same text(s) using the “applying the text” questions.

Picturing this at Camp (15 min.)

Apply an idea you discussed with your hevruta (partner) to a “moment in camp.” Close your eyes, and try to picture a scene, real or aspirational, in which the LGBTQ-affirming message of one of the texts we explored today is playing out in real life. What is happening? Who is there? What do you see?

Play calming music (bonus points if it’s music by a queer Jewish artist!), and invite participants to use watercolors to depict that scene. (Abstract art is great too- everyone is an artist today!)

(What’s queer about watercolor? It’s harder to have crisp, defined lines. Most often, the picture looks more beautiful when you allow the colors to blend into one another.)

Closing Conversation (15 min.)

Ask participants to share their pictures, or set up a gallery for everyone to walk through.

- How can we build reminders to elevate and celebrate LGBTQ identity at camp?
- What are the moments that can help remind us? (Rainbows, sunsets, havdallah and other moments that are “in between” might be a good start.)
- How can we use these reminders and moments to help our camp communities to continue to grow and improve in celebrating our LGBTQ campers and staff?
- How do we ritualize these moments? (Rituals involve something that is repeated and familiar. So, for example, how might we lift up LGBTQ people at camp when we see a rainbow, or as we enter into or leave Shabbat? Discuss examples of what they can do.)
- What is one action you commit to taking at camp this summer? Write it on the back of your painting.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

Watercolor in general can be a helpful tool for processing ideas and texts.

As well, this session could be used to inspire a Pride celebration at your camp.

This session can be done as a staff training program, or even as a cabin or unit activity. A cabin might use this as an opportunity to decide together how to celebrate a fellow queer camper(s) (with their consent, of course), especially if they feel like they can’t yet be their full selves at camp.