

**Everyone is Created in the Image of the Divine
Finding Space for LGTQ Jews in the Modern Orthodox Community
Rahel Berkovits**

Course Description: As our modern secular understanding of sexual and gender identity evolves, how should the Modern Orthodox Jewish community react? What does Jewish law and modern Rabbinic leaders teach us about how to relate and respond to the needs of LGTQ Jews in our midst? Is it permissible to have a gay or gender queer identity as an observant Jew? Is there a path for Gay/Queer Jews to find love, relationship and family within the context of halakha? This course aims to honestly address the challenges and pain facing orthodox Gay/Queer Jews and bring to light those more open voices in the Modern Orthodox/National Religious camp who are grappling with these issues today.

Course Units: 10

Course Hours and How to Take the Course:

Completing this course successfully means actively participating in ten interactive webinars with Course Facilitator Rahel Berkovits. Each unit is 1.5 hours and requires half an hour of pre-study before the webinar to learn the sources that will be discussed. All sources provided in the original Hebrew with English translations.

**Unit 1: Introduction:
The Challenges and Understanding the Need**

**Unit 2: Judaism Concerns Itself with Acts not Identities:
Halakhic Texts on Male intercourse**

Examine and study the relevant verses from the Torah and their commentaries as well tractional rabbinic texts such as the Talmud and legal codes.

**Unit 3: Judaism Concerns Itself with Acts not Identities:
Halakhic Texts on Sex Acts Between Women**

Examine and study the relevant *sugyot* from the Talmud and their commentaries as well rabbinic legal codes and modern responsa.

Modern Rabbinic Responses in Israel: Units 4-7

In each of the following units a different Rabbi's view will be examined. They will cover such topics as: Same sex marriage and/or unions are they possible within halakha? Are any sex acts permitted between men? How should the community treat Gay Jews both inside and outside the Synagogue?

**Unit 4: Rav Binyamin Lau- Former Rabbi of the Ramban Synagogue
"It is not Permissible to Decree a Life of Loneliness on a Person"**

R. Lau discusses the crushing sense of loneliness that Gay Jews feel and argues that it is a basic human right defined by the Torah for people to live in partnership.

**Unit 5: Rav Yaakov Meidan- Rosh Yeshivah Yeshivat Har Etzion
"One Should Not Be Stringent With One Who Does Not Have A Kosher Release For His Sexual Desires"**

R. Meidan argues that people are different and one can not lump the entire gay community as one group as within it are religious (observant of *mitzvot*) and non-religious people. He proceeds to discuss how each group should be treated from minimally not interfering with

peoples civil rights to embracing Gay Jews who are part of the religious community. He addresses their rights within the synagogue and prayer structure and states that they may have a life partner with some sexual intimacy.

Unit 6: Rav Shlomo Riskin- Chief Rabbi of Efrat

“Great Pain: Rav Riskin’s Battle for Justice”

R. Riskin directly addresses the challenging verse from the Torah regarding a prohibition on gay sex and suggests ways to cope with and understand it in the modern day. He too argues for same sex partnership.

Unit 7: Rav Yuval Cherlow – Rosh Yeshivah Yeshivat Hesder Amit Orot Shaul

“One should be lenient in all that is possible because of the severe distress”

R. Cherlow answers halakhic questions posted on one of the religious gay websites such as “Is oral sex and hugging and kissing between two men forbidden?”

Unit 8: Intersex and Gender Non-Confirming and Halakha

Examine rabbinic literature from the Talmud to the modern day which acknowledges a more diverse human reality than just the normative gender binary of only male and female.

Unit 9: Transgender and Halakha

Examine and study modern halakhic responsa on such issues as what defines halakhic gender for *mitzvah* obligation, which side of the *mehitza* should a trans person sit on, and cross dressing.

Unit 10: Unanswered Questions and Processing

Customization options:

- Additional topics can be included upon request.
- Creating a course for Independent Study: There is an option to host the course asynchronously, enabling teachers to study the content and information independently, with along with consultation and discussions with Rahel Berkovits. Transferring the course to a format that enables independent study requires an outlay of funding, and requires two months preparation. The benefit is that then the course is available for all teachers, anytime, anyplace.

Costs and Terms:

*1.5 hour webinars x 10, which includes all materials

*5 hours consultation

*Facilitation forum for participants to post questions

Total: \$1950

50% due upon signing and 50% when complete.



About the Facilitator:

Rahel Berkovits is a senior faculty member at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, where she has been teaching Mishnah, Talmud and halakha for over twenty years. Rahel lectures widely in both Israel and abroad especially on topics concerning women and Jewish law and a Jewish sexual ethic. She is the Halakhic Editor and a writer for *Hilkhot Nashim* the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance's Halakhic Source-guide Series, recently published by Koren Publishing. Rahel is a founding member of Congregation Shirah Hadasha, a halakhic partnership Synagogue, and serves on their halakha committee. In June 2015, Rahel received Rabbinic Ordination from Rabbis Herzl Hefter and Daniel Sperber.