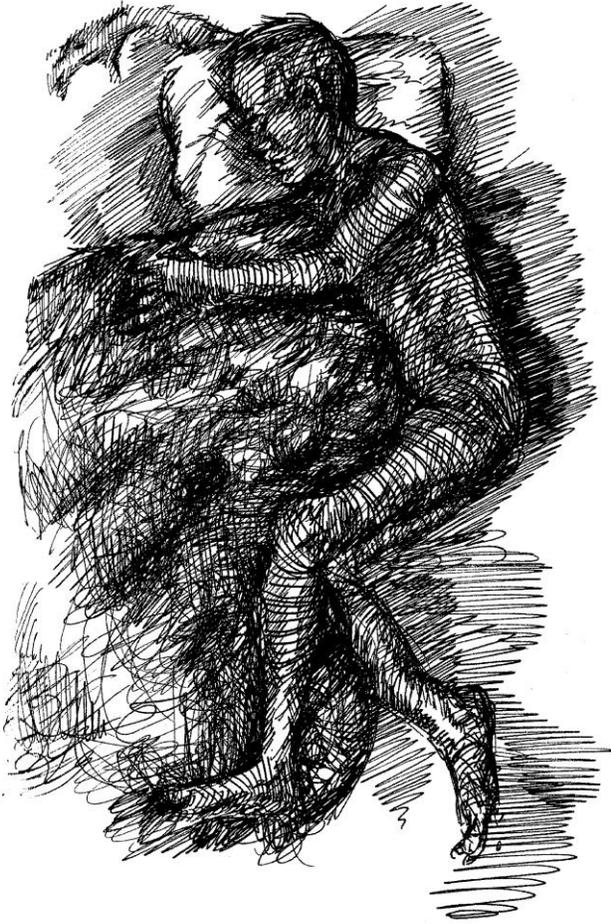


House of Jacob/People Israel

A Trans Jewish Zine



By Rena Yehuda Newman



I don't know when I started making this zine. In a sense I have always been making it. The Jewish people have always been inventing ourselves. There's a comfort to know that even in the uncertainty, it was all revealed to us at Mount Sinai. We are always becoming.

This zine was inspired by Micah Bazant, the first person to my knowledge to create a Jewish, Transgender zine called "TimTum". I found it in the back of a bookshop and in many ways it saved my life. I stand on the shoulders of the ones who have gone before me. That's the meaning of l'dor v'dor, from generation to generation.

Judaism has no binary, only unity through division. There is home and there is diaspora. There is the week and there is Shabbat. There is the shekhina and there is hashem. There is memory and there is the present. There is the world to come and the world as it is. There is the community and there is me. There is the House of Jacob and there is the People of Israel. One cannot exist without the other.

This zine is for the old so they may understand. This zine is for the young so we may reinvigorate. Judaism is a process we're all bound up in. The back of this zine is a drawing of my Great Grandfather's study.

Rabbi Nachman tells us that the entire world is built on yearning.

It is a blessing to live the contradictions in world. It is a blessing to struggle, to be dissatisfied, restless. It is a blessing to remember who I am and who I have always been, even before my first breath.

House of Jacob / People Israel
Datum / Date:

Thank you G-d for not making me a woman and

Thank you G-d for not making me a man

For there are too many generations

delivered in my blood to be just one part
of the great spirit.

Our faces are in our blood
buried there,

great grandfathers and Matriarchs

my curls were shaped two centuries

flesh of so many spirits borne into one

their eyes awake in mine

can't you read my bloodline

in the liminality

the cheekbone, the nose arch, the penstroke of a brow.

Every Jewish text must be read and reread because each Jew grows into more of themselves, more of a Jew in the time capsule between one encounter and the next. The learning – it is all about the learning, the way it turns into growing and adds oil to the ner tamid of one's eyes. The Jew glows, Judaism illuminates. Learning is the birthright of the Jew. It is a birthright that allows us to reinvent ourselves and see the world new. A Jew should learn so much that each holiday is like the first, so rich with meaning (stacks of memories layered on stories, on lessons and teachings and tradition and heirloom) that it is impossible to resist loving it so much that it is recreated once again, in every year as in every generation.

Shabbat 54b: Whoever can protest the members of his household and does not protest is held accountable for the actions of his household. Whoever can protest his fellow citizens and does not protest is held accountable for the actions of his fellow citizens. Whoever can protest the whole world and does not protest is held accountable for the actions of the whole world.

רב ורבי חנינא ור' יוחנן ורב חביבא
מתנו בכליה דסדר מועד כל כי האי
זוגא הלופי רבי יוחנן ומעייל רבי
יונתן כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי
ביתו ולא מיחה נתפס על אנשי ביתו
באנשי עירו נתפס על אנשי עירו
בכל העולם כולו נתפס על כל העולם
כולו

words have
great power in
our tradition

“Abracadabra”

דברא אברא

is originally
Hebrew,
meaning, “I
create as I
speak”

words are real
there is no
oversensitivity
in Judaism

Desert
Yearn
Midrash
Wander
Ink
Yizkor
Memory
Wrestle
Eternal
Teshuva
Return
Neshama
Exile
Tongue
Bless
Kadosh
Affliction
Obligation
Dedication
Destruction
Might
Ruach
Sea
Name
Speak
Rachamim
Evening
D'var
Land
Sanctify

Shenye Yidden —

the Torah
has duality:
the written
Torah and
the oral
Torah.



Being Jewish is so much about galut (exile)- being in a place, but not fully being there - a sense of displacement, millenia of wandering, of watching your ba ck. While at the same time, today in North America , assimilating. Moving through (and upwards in) the crowd, while still having a deep sense of being different. With assimilation comes a fear of being found out.

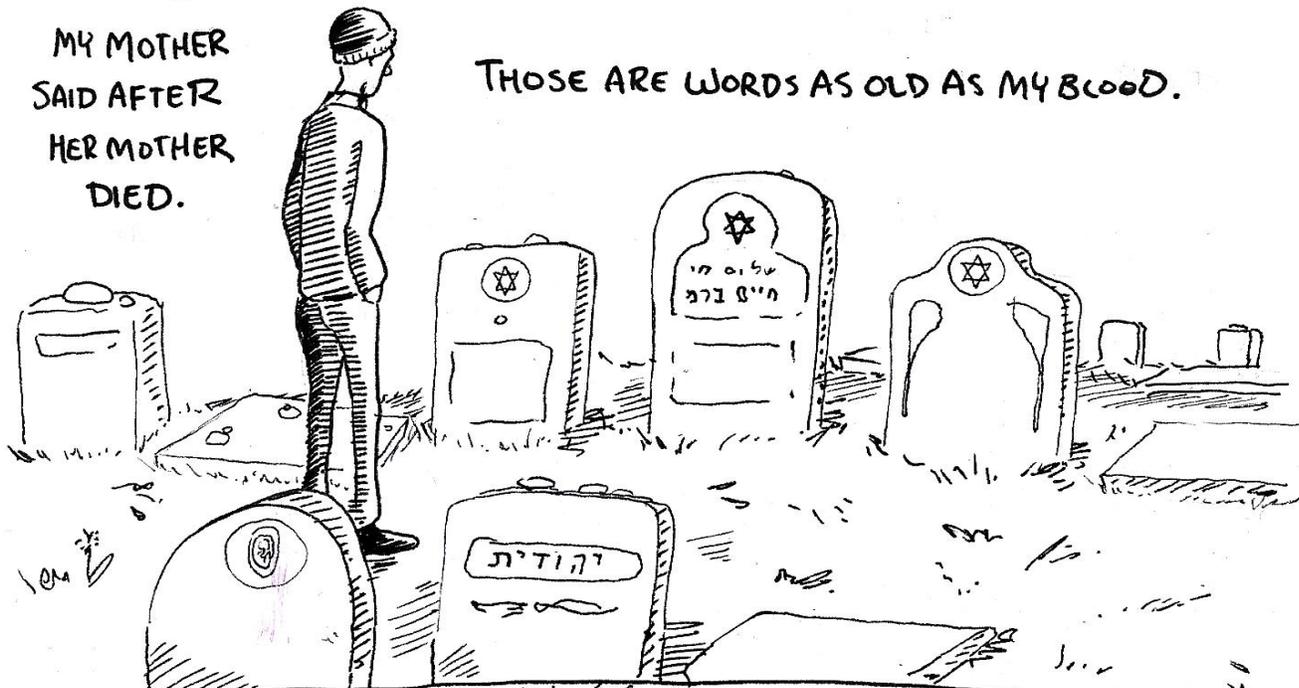
- Excerpt From “TimTum” by Micah Bazant

"JEWS DO DEATH
RIGHT."

MY MOTHER
SAID AFTER
HER MOTHER
DIED.

IF I FORGET HOW TO SAY KADDISH,
IT IS AS IF I FORGET MY NAME.

THOSE ARE WORDS AS OLD AS MY BLOOD.

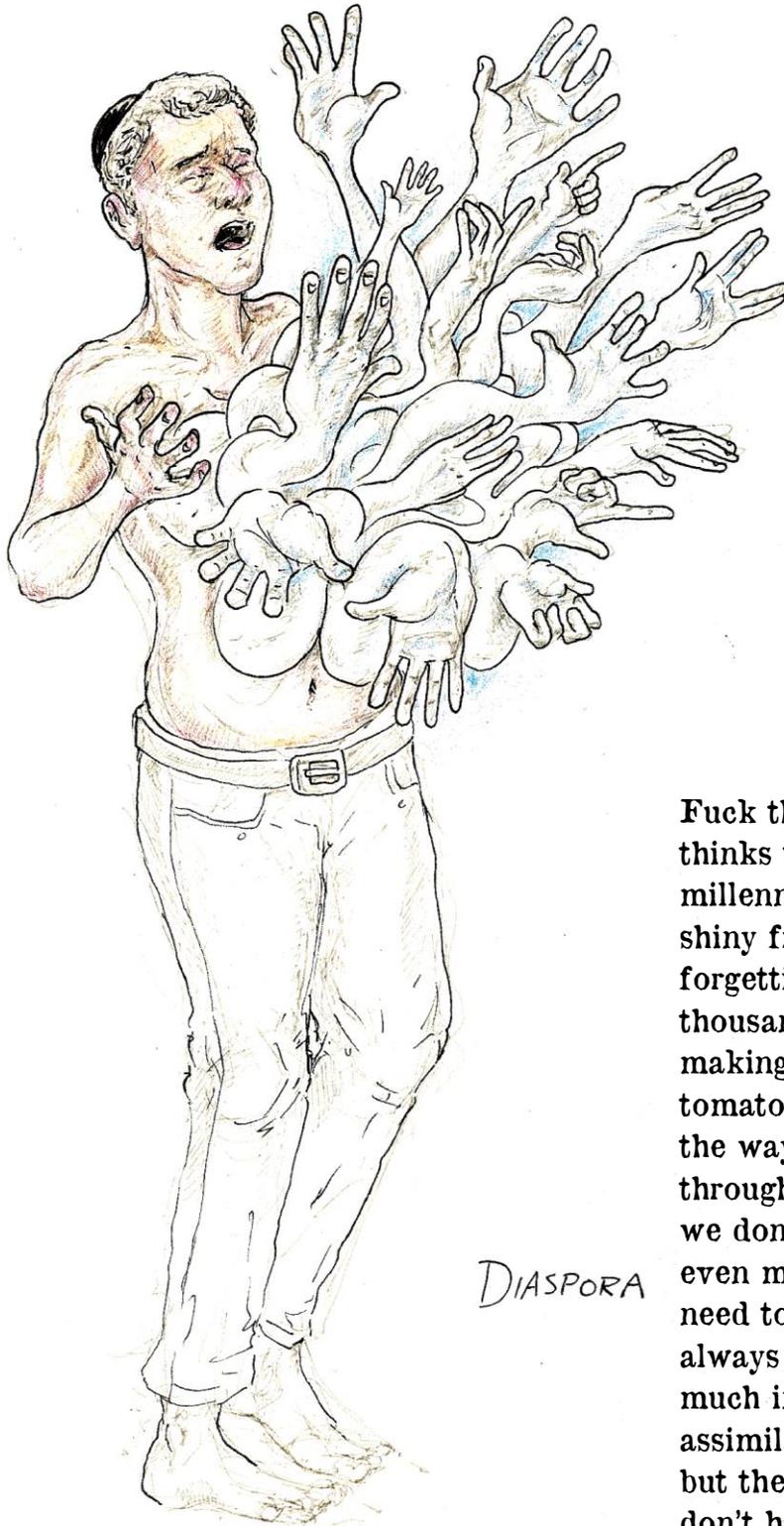


WHEN THEY PUSHED OVER
THOSE JEWISH GRAVESTONES,
AFTER TRUMP'S ELECTION,
IT HIT US HARD.

WE LOVE OUR DEAD.
OUR HOLY CEMETARIES.

WILL THEY MISGENDER ME
ON MY GRAVESTONE?

One forefather has two names. Ya'akov (Jacob) gets his second name, Yisrael (Israel) after he spends a whole night wrestling with an angel. But unlike Abraham, who started as Avram and gained the 'h' permanently, the Tanakh refers to Ya'akov as Yisrael and Yisrael as Ya'akov interchangeably. He has two names. Later, the Torah and the Rabbis refer to Jewish men as "The People Israel" and Jewish women as "The House of Jacob", and so these two names acquire gender – and genderqueerness.



DIASPORA

I grew up as a Reform Jew. I had spent my life believing I knew everything about Judaism, firm in my identity, until my senior year of high school. The Jewish world split open and I realized there was too much I had not been taught, too much that had been omitted to me. Ever since then I have been a stranger and a searcher for all the secrets and memories hiding in diaspora.

Fuck the old Jewish establishment that thinks that my identity as a Jewish millennial is frivolous, can be bought by shiny free trips to Israel, insults me by forgetting to mention that I am thousands of years old. Fuck them for making Israel just the land of cherry tomatoes. Fuck them for thinking that the way to access me and my peers is through "Friday night dances" as though we don't care enough about Shabbat to even mention it by name. You don't need to incentivize something that was always meant to be mine. We've lost so much in the process. I'm trying to resist assimilation, to hold communal memory, but the Sheldon Adelsons of the world don't help.



Every queer Jewish zine has these pictures of Jacob & the angel. It's one of these enduring images. It's gay. It's heavy. All of them are both cliché and not cliché. Every one of them is charged. Sexual. Needy. True, I think.

The picture is in every book, is in me.

What is it?

I feel your hands on me from the inside
I feel your breath in my mouth
What will happen to you

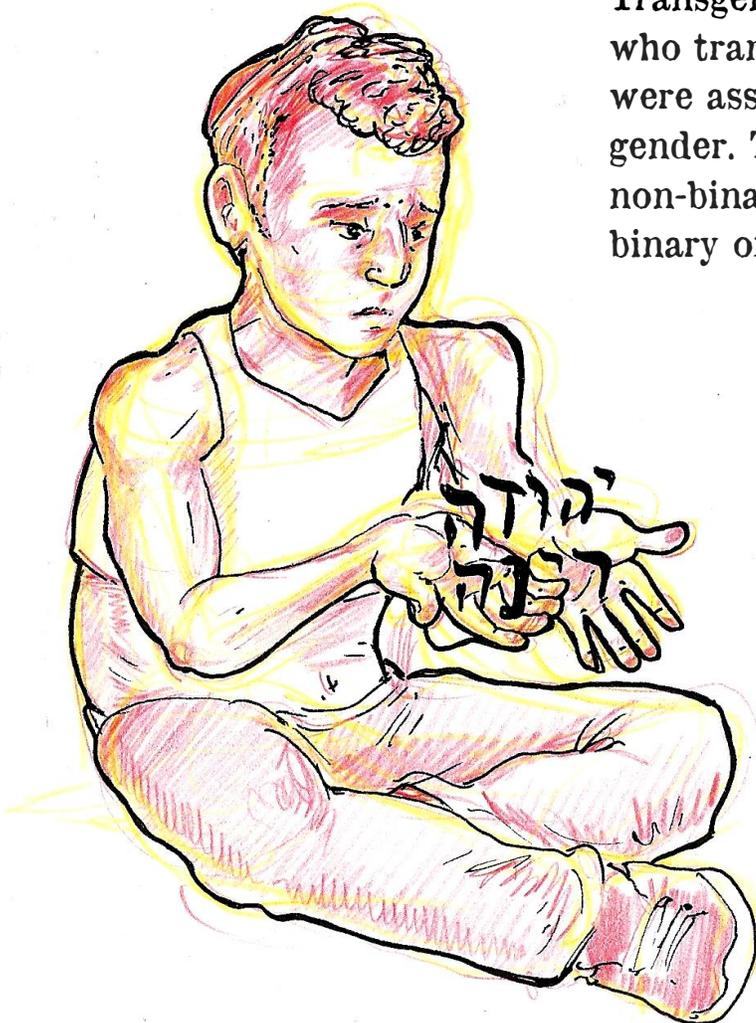
Feel it feel it in a good way.
They can't see you so what but you are there
you exist you are the invisible boy
You are defiant and exist despite them.
You can survive in hiding in the sewers of my self.
You emerge you are starved You are blinded
everything is red and hurts.
But this will pass. You will walk above ground.
Someday you will be special but
you will wear no special marking.

- Excerpt from "TimTum" by Micah Bazant

Transgender (tranz'jendər): Someone who transitions from the gender they were assigned at birth to another gender. This includes those who are non-binary, i.e., outside of the gender binary of man and woman.

Semantic Drift (sem-an-tik drift): The linguistic process through which words transform from their original meaning into something totally new. The process through which "They" has become a gender neutral, singular pronoun.

Gender Binary: A culturally specific, western Christian construction/lens of gender, which limits people to see themselves as only man or woman.



Today the Orthodox Rabbi's son, who is not quite ten years old, is filling in coloring pages before we sit down for parshah study. He fills in the beard on a fictional biblical man with a bright orange marker, not unlike my hair. "Look, it's me!" I joke to him. The boy squints at me with hard eyes.

"You don't have facial hair." He says.

"Well, not yet."

"No, you're never going to have facial hair." He says quietly, looking down at the drawing. From the beginning, each time I came to their home I presented masculine, davened as a male, went by Yehuda exclusively. It is the first time something has happened that indicates to me that he knows.

"I will." I say, and I do not know if it is true.

You know who else didn't have facial hair? Rabbi Yochanan.

R. Yochanan's Beauty | Bava Metzia Page
84b

Rabbi Yochanan said: "I have survived from the beautiful of Jerusalem."

One who wishes to see the beauty of Rabbi Yochanan should bring a brand new silver cup and fill it with the red seeds of the pomegranate and place around its rim a garland of red roses, and let him place it at the place where the sun meets the shade, and that vision is the beauty of Rabbi Yochanan.

Rabbi Yochanan did not have the splendor of face. [i.e., a beard]



HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy): A process that many trans people go through to alleviate the dysphoria from living in a body that does not fit with one's gender/a body that others read incorrectly. This may include getting Testosterone or Estrogen.

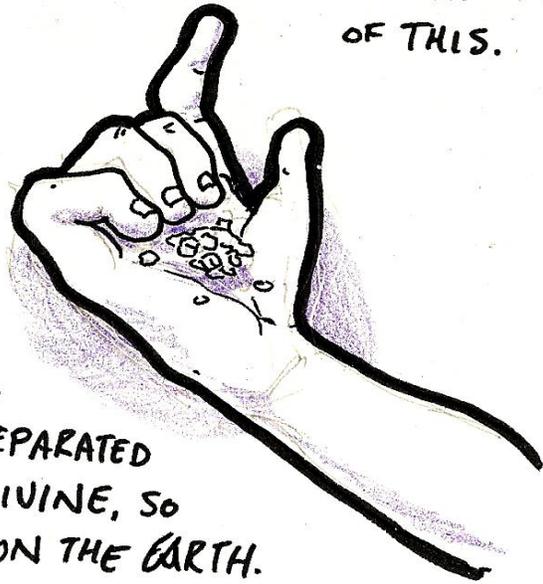


IN PARSHAT VAYIKERA,
THE TORAH TALKS AT
LENGTH ABOUT
SACRIFICE. IT SAYS
THAT ALL SACRIFICES
MUST BE MADE WITH
SALT.

THE TALMUD ANSWERS
ON THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THIS.

ON THE SECOND DAY, HASHEM
SPUT THE EARTHLY WATERS
FROM THE HEAVENLY ONES.

THE EARTHLY WATERS CRIED
OUT IN PROTEST,
NOT WISHING TO
BE SO FAR SEPARATED
FROM THE DIVINE, SO
LOW UPON THE EARTH.

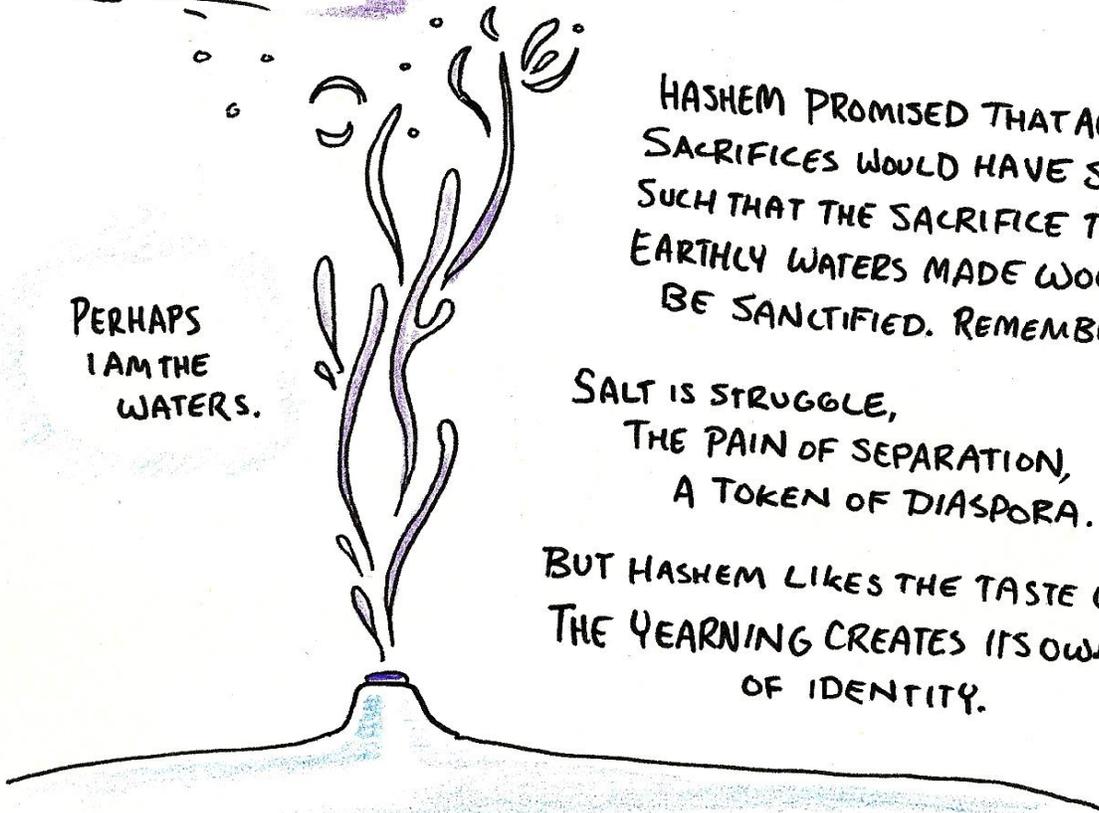


PERHAPS
I AM THE
WATERS.

HASHEM PROMISED THAT ALL
SACRIFICES WOULD HAVE SALT,
SUCH THAT THE SACRIFICE THE
EARTHLY WATERS MADE WOULD
BE SANCTIFIED. REMEMBERED.

SALT IS STRUGGLE,
THE PAIN OF SEPARATION,
A TOKEN OF DIASPORA.

BUT HASHEM LIKES THE TASTE OF SALT.
THE YEARNING CREATES ITS OWN KIND
OF IDENTITY.



I know this: that this tradition was so cherished that it was maintained through extreme hardship. And maybe we didn't just survive in spite of it, but because of it. I know something that was precious to them. And when I think of how ~~many~~ little many people (in this century of war and disruption and colonization) knew of their family history- I feel lucky: Judaism is huge and it is rich.

I feel like Judaism is a secret package delivered to me through time, disguised and concealed, hidden from the enemy, smuggled through hell under layers and layers of protective cover. With parts so dangerous and large that they were sometimes unknown to the smugglers themselves.

Now it has landed here, with me, in ~~the~~ north america, the year 5760. I don't know when my family was last free to be openly and fully Jewish. Most Jews never were. I feel a responsibility to the generations who sustained this, who died and lived as Jews- who am I to throw away this most precious of gifts- now, when I am finally free to fully unwrap it.

- Excerpt from "TimTum" by Micah Bazant

“ THE MAGIC IN MY QUEERNESS
IS MY JUDAISM. ”

My friend Efrat says this and immediately it is true. We had been at a meeting of queer Jews, asking ourselves if the group should be opened up to include non-Jews as well. But the truth is, the intersection of these two identities is so crucial, so specific and sparking that to expand the circle would be to water down a truth that we all carry tucked into our belts and binders. I am incomplete in secular queer spaces, somehow. The two are inseparable. Judaism has always been so queer. But the magic in my Queerness is my Judaism.

Datum / Date:

You'll get there &
new things will feel wrong.
Old things will comfort you
the scent of parchment and cracking book spines
Hebrew in its timeless letters
the round aura which candles breathe
these will become necessary
in ways they were not before.
It will be this way
and you will not know why
but just that it must.
You will begin noticing
how the new world wasn't built
with the inertia of the last.
You will step into torn seams
cheaply made and broken
just as quickly,
and trip on unfilled potholes
and spend time in places
made to look like ruins
to satiate the longing for history,
but we know tempered steel painted like marble
is no cure for a nation's dementia.
We are all strangers here but
you more than most.
It's buried in your childhood
on the books on
older relatives' shelves
in the way devouring
the fruits of western labors
consuming the offering of citizenship

Datum / Date:

feels faintly like disappearing,
an abandonment of a tongue
that used to be tied
to something...
and the sensation of empty memory
tied to something...
what something?
will jostle and spit on you in unexpected moments
at Christmas time,
Saturday morning,
a graveside.
I have whispered sounds that
sound like the words
into thin pages
for that tied tongue
no longer keeps tick with my eyes
when I rock back and forth
to incant, to pray, to speak.
It has forgotten, too.
Family trees will hold you in dead branches
Questions of who will linger
under bowls of hard candy
behind the weekly candlesticks
beneath the ketuba in your parent's room.
The way your brother will not sing
when we bless the wine
will break you.
You will not know why
only that it is this way, now.

- December 30th



I DON'T WANT TO SPEAK FOR ANYONE ELSE'S EXPERIENCE, BUT I'M GUESSING A LOT OF TRANS PEOPLE HAVE HAD SOME HARDSHIPS WITH THEIR CLOSETS, ESPECIALLY DURING THEIR TRANSITION.

I DID.

I FELT LIKE I WANTED TO GET RID OF EVERYTHING.

PURGE.

OLD CLOTHES CAN OFTEN FEEL LIKE REMCS OF SUFFOCATION, OR LIES.

REJECT ALL THE THINGS FROM THE TIME BEFORE.

BUT OF COURSE I KNEW THAT CLOTHES HAVE NO GENDER. OF COURSE I KNEW PRESENTATION IS ONE OF THE FEW WAYS I COULD CONTROL HOW MY BODY IS READ. BUT THERE WERE STILL THOSE ITEMS - THOSE DRESSES & TOPS THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO THROW AWAY. I DID LOVE THEM. I STILL DO. THE GIRL IS NO LONGER HERE BUT SHE IS STILL ME.

I DO NOT WANT TO KILL THE FEMININE PARTS OF MYSELF. THERE IS NO BEAUTY IN THAT SACRIFICE, IN ORDER TO SURVIVE IN THIS WORLD.



TALKING ABOUT THIS MAKES ME ANXIOUS.



I'M WORRIED ABOUT WHAT YOU'LL SAY. I'M WORRIED YOU'LL TELL ME I SHOULD WEAR THESE THINGS BECAUSE "I LOOK GOOD" WHEN WHAT YOU MEAN IS THAT IT'S EASIER FOR YOU. I'M WORRIED YOU THINK I SHOULD WEAR THE FEMININE PARTS OF MYSELF BECAUSE IT MAKES MY BODY MORE LEGIBLE TO AN EYE I DO NOT WISH TO PLEASE, NOR CARE TO...

THIS RESPONSE IS DISINGENUOUS

AND IT HURTS ME.

I CROSSDRESS ONE NIGHT, HOME FROM BREAK. I ADORN MYSELF IN A TIGHT BLACK DRESS.

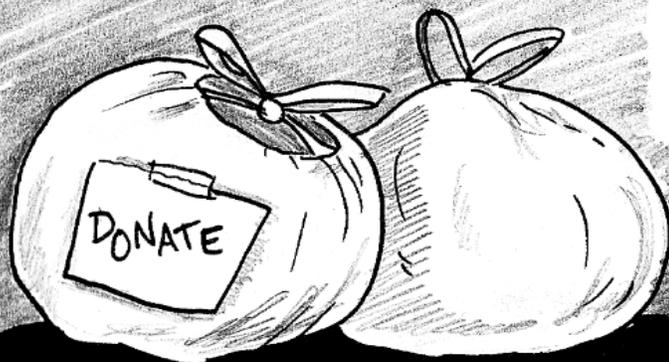
"YOU SHOULD DRESS LIKE THAT ALL THE TIME!"

MY MOTHER SAYS.

SOMETHING IN ME ACHES AND COMES CLOSER TO DEATH.

I REFUSE TO SACRIFICE MY TRUE MASCULINITY FOR A CONSTRUCTED FEMININITY, BUT IN THE SAME VEIN, DO NOT WANT TO KILL MY FEMININE PARTS JUST SO I CAN CHERISH THE MASCULINITY I HAVE FOUGHT FOR.

I GAVE AWAY SOME THINGS I DIDN'T WANT TO.



Activity: Step Up Step Back

Instructions: Bring together a group of 5+ people. Invite them to stand in a circle. Tell them you will read aloud each statement. Tell them that if the statement is true for them, they should step forward into the circle. After each statement, tell them to step back so the circle resets. Read aloud the statements. Watch the participants, or stare forward with no particular focal point. Lead a guided reflection, asking questions like, "What did you notice? Did any of these stand out to you? If you'd participated in this activity at a different time in your life, would your answers be different?"

Alternate instructions: Read these in your head alone and contemplate who you are becoming.

Preface each statement with "Step forward if..."

- Growing up, the toys I was encouraged to play with reflected my own interests.
- I do not fit many stereotypes about my gender identity.
- I can see positive role models of people of my gender identity in most places.
- Bathrooms that I feel welcome in are always available.
- I experience a lot of gender.
- I've been in a health/sex-ed classes in which transgender and non-binary gender identities were discussed and well-explained.
- As a child, I was interested in toys and activities which were "non-traditional" for my gender.
- I prefer choosing clothing based on designated sections like "girl's clothes" and "boy's clothes".
- I feel comfortable wearing a dress.
- I feel comfortable wearing a suit.
- I feel comfortable wearing makeup.
- I feel comfortable wearing a tie.
- I feel comfortable wearing bracelets
- I feel comfortable wearing high heels.
- My community is very supportive of people who are transgender and non-binary.
- In elementary school, at least once, my class was divided into a "girls versus boys" activity such as separate lines, sports teams, dress code, academic challenges, et cetera.
- I have at some point changed how I was acting because a parent, teacher, or other authority figure considered my actions "wrong" because of my perceived gender.
- No one has ever questioned if I should be in a particular place because of my gender.
- Growing up, I was aware of people who were transgender or gender non-conforming.
- I have been made fun of or felt isolated for wearing clothing or participating in an activity because it was something that the "other gender" was supposed to do.
- I always try to use gender-inclusive language
- I use deodorants, soaps, and other hygiene products regardless of gender designation.
- I have struggled to find formal clothes that accurately represent my gender identity and gender expression.
- If I signed up for summer camp or program, there was no question about which cabin or dorm I would be placed in based on my gender.
- It is easy for me to find movies, shows, and books that will help me better understand my gender identity and the history of people of my gender.
- In English classes, I've read a bunch of books with strong characters of my gender.
- I feel like I understand terms like gender, genderqueer, transgender, and non-binary.
- When I meet someone for the first time, I don't worry about them using the wrong pronouns.
- I have felt judged because of my gender identity.
- I have questioned my gender identity at some point.
- I feel uncomfortable with rigid concepts about gender.



We slept intertwined
 between the greens and idle hours
 more gentle than anything ever done
 the chance of chanced
 to wind each other above and below
 hotel sheets as we kissed
 we delved below
 but never too far to strike a shift.
 The extraordinary safety and the
 softness
 a mouth too small yet
 a body to fit my own
 we held the other in quiet dark,
 touching backs,
 sending morse code tangles
 across an arm
 then waiting for the echo to return
 on a hand or neck
 halfway cross the deep.
 Reposition, nestle, bury, exhale.
 We have always known how to be sweet
 it just unfolded that way.
 The absence of words gave itself to a
 story all its own.

If I let him kiss me
 it will be because he
 is the timid one
 and I
 understand we cannot
 force these things upon
 our lovers
 the force of our love.

I am still & have always been
 a person who falls in love with home
 even if I never meant
 to be there, exactly.



It is Simchat Torah

The dirt it is everywhere it is
everywhere there is nothing
untouched, no clean space it
gets into all things and i

it hurts it hurts when it touches
my eyes are raw
their freedom their lucidity
burns against the dirt
particles hiding and jumping in
every open wound + pore.

whispers have always told
me that holiness is
in the tablecloths after meals
tarnished silvers
grandfather's books.
all my life I have seen letters
that do not decay in
their sheepskin bundles
I stood and received them i
was kissed and told these
were a gift for me

generations
some burnt, some perished, some
rejoicing
enter my breath when i read aloud
my inheritance
bending at the knee.

i am starting to know why
god is important
when angels shout only in
the still small voice.

in the image the image
have you seen me
when I look upon the mirror
have you
whispered/murmured/breathed
into your own ear
'created them'
til the words turn to sounds &
lose permanence.

names hold more weight than pillars
so I wear two great pillars
built in the notches
of my spine where
I had hoped trees might grow.
the name, the name
how do i cry out
or you to me
the only space with enough air
is the one between us
soundless.

what is my name
i am here but
here i am but
what is my name

it is too much to bear
i could not sleep
has anyone found
the antidote
is too bound up
in leather pieces or
barbed fences
to seek with such tender hands yet
unhindered fingers are
the only thing which can
undo the tangle
how else can i be clean/free

my people have
always been sending this time capsule
to me now and
the kin of my bones
reach to bring me inside
I am falling upon the threshold
again and again and
no one will touch me
they beckon still

how could I sleep
in such a holy place
say the chassidim of the sukkah
how could I sleep
in such a holy place
I say in the morning dark

say this body is whole
this slice up soul is entire
say we have built a temple
with no doors
say we must try again or
carve carve carve
upon the doorposts
a space in time
with enough air
for all have known
there is a thinness in this room.

when I wordless rise in custom
when my chest bobs to my core and back
when song bursts forth
to startle me in its fullness
all the fractures fill with light.



Fragments

1. I asked my parents for a name that I can pray with. When I began to daven on the men's side, the first one they gave me grew alien. So I asked them to name me once again. Though my first name is Hebrew, my second one must be too. My mother took time to consider the request. Over Shabbat dinner one unparticular week she set her fork down at the side of her plate. "I was thinking about names," she says. "I've decided on Yehuda. For your grandmother, Judy. Her Hebrew name was Yehudit." I let the name settle. It sets on my tongue. I whisper it after she says it, and in the moments before I fall asleep. I am named for a strong woman and the rush of pride is buried in the sound.

2. When we got there, the rabbi's wife ushered Yoni and I inside, surrounded by her kids. The house warmed our cheeks. I wandered around and discovered the men in the sukkah, outside. "Hey Yehuda!" the Rabbi greeted me.

I asked how I could help. I went inside to the kitchen and tried to make myself useful, bringing in the schwarma and pickles in great big bowls. His greeting echoed in my head.

It was then that I realized I love it when he says my name. He says it joyfully and kindly. Because he is practiced and learned he knows the name by instinct. It flows from his tongue more easily than mine. It comes deep from the throat and ends on the tips of open lips. The way he says it honors the warmth and history behind it that I don't yet understand. He calls me by my name, a name of another lifetime, yet mine all the same. He says it and it feels like home. G-d laid their name upon the temple, made it a home for G-d's name. Judaism is concerned with names: they are a resting place for consciousness to lay its feet.

3. I like the way the small artscroll machzor fits in my fingers, how it feels used and meant to be used, unlike other bound prayer books which still crack at the spine because even so many years later, they are new and not thoroughly thumbed through.

4. I went on a quest once to learn stories of my great grandfather, Hymie D. Berman. He was the hero of our family. Towards the end chapters of his life, he became a Talmud scholar. He employed the help of a rabbi named Avram Etedgi, who I had met only once, in my grandmother Judy's last days.

Avram came to visit her, the daughter of his friend. I had been sitting in the nursing-home room with her, the Alzheimer's having made her disoriented. I wasn't sure if she knew who I was. I was drawing and trying to be somewhere else, I think. I remember him complimenting my sketchbook. He was kind and full of life in a space that was not.

I remember my mom and my aunt telling me that he had history with our family, that he had studied with Hymie many years ago. When I began studying, I always thought of Hymie. He passed away when I was eight. I wanted to know more of his stories.

When I went back to Minnesota for one holiday or another, I asked my grandfather to take me to Avram's shul. We sat in services and I approached him afterwards with my request. He embraced me, remembered me, told me tales. It felt like something holy, I think.

5. I felt silent pride at my new ability (developed like a super power in training over the past year) to keep pace in the siddur, finding myself on the correct page at the right line before it was called. Though I could not recite (or more accurately, mumble along) with the speed of the Hebrew, the words were easy to catch from the air and see written before me, suddenly not fragmented but flowing. The whole service was a long, fast-paced poem.

Even in the moments I felt most like an outsider, the mechitzah standing beside me, I was reminded simply that this is my birthright. Not a free trip to Israel but this: this history and tradition and emotion. I was born to have this. It is for me. The Torah and Talmud layered in the text, the repetitions and wisdom and communal way that voices rise up suddenly without prompting, break out into organic song borne of niggunim which seep so deeply into our bones that they jump with uncontrollable joy when they can make themselves known, leaping into our mouths. This, my G-d, is my birthright.

Women's song

In the sukkah I stayed while the men
the men
went to daven. For I would not count
of ten for the minyan I would not
be needed, not unwanted but
something else & alien I suppose.
But I stayed with
the women
and we sang.
I had not heard the women's songs.
They are slower and the melodies
more fine
woven silk
it was in the absence of a lesser
dominance
that they came alive
my voice was not a stranger it was
kin to them
I was used to pretending on notes
I have felt other in song for so long
here
it was a different kind of relief
eyes resting shut
sinking into the harmony

and though I am no woman
the rabbi's wife
(whether it be through nescience or
heedlessness I won't know)
set a hand upon my back
as one, together.
The guests who knew me by Yehuda
alone
must have been curious.
But my name is a marker
like Hashem ascribed to the temple
I rest inside.
The power of the women's song
overwhelmed me
with a strength they don't tell you
about
because they never made those
sounds
that lifted up to the stars,
didn't know the words
since the ones they created
were all inadequate to capture
just a crest
of kol isha
cascading in the hems of G-d's dress.

I spend the rest of the night in the basement with my dad, listening to Dylan records. We'd been singing earlier, me home for break. Like old Friday nights, he played guitar and we'd harmonize in the living room while my mom gradually fell asleep on our awful creme colored couches. When she finally dozed off, then re-awoke, announced "I need to go to bed," we descended downstairs at my request.

I sat on the blue-checker couch with my sketchbook and idly drew naked, slightly fat men as my father pored over his records, the density of them filling the long shelves. He played Dylan's 115th Dream, My Back Pages, You're a Big Girl Now, and Motorcycles something. Dylan can be so funny in his songs - he doesn't care so much about the production. I like it when he laughs, sort of giggles during the recording. The songs are long. He sits down & tells you a story. Dylan's songs are a different kind of song. They tell you about a world you aren't certain is real or half made up. Some of it you'd like to believe is made up, but it's not. Those ones are the ballads.

My Dad's favorite albums are the earlier ones. He remembers Dylan from high school, early college. It's nice to just sit there, listening to him DJ, choosing the next song carefully, moving from comedy to tragedy in between the silence of the needle. The stereo crackles. It's good to be home.

My father + I meet
as young men
in a Berlin café
before the war.

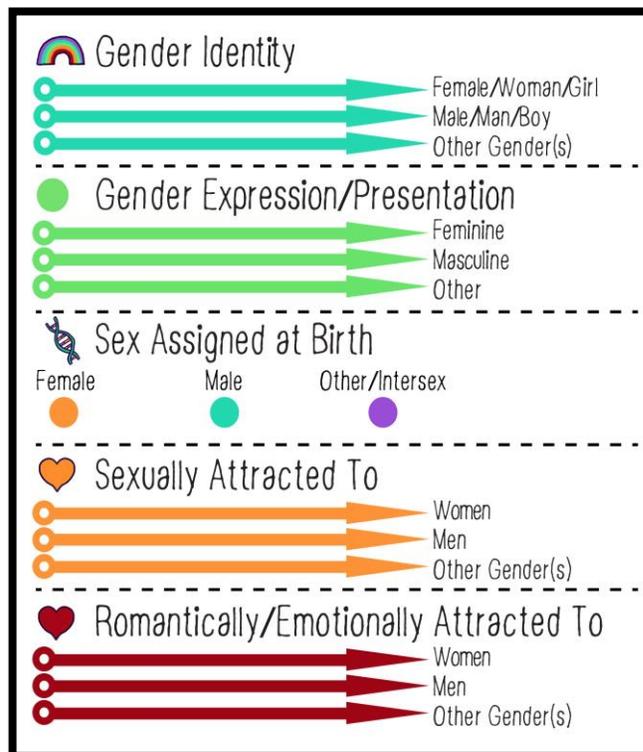


- March 24th 2017

"My Father and I meet as young men in a Berlin café before the war" by Micah Bazant

Midrash: Storytelling to understand the spaces in between.

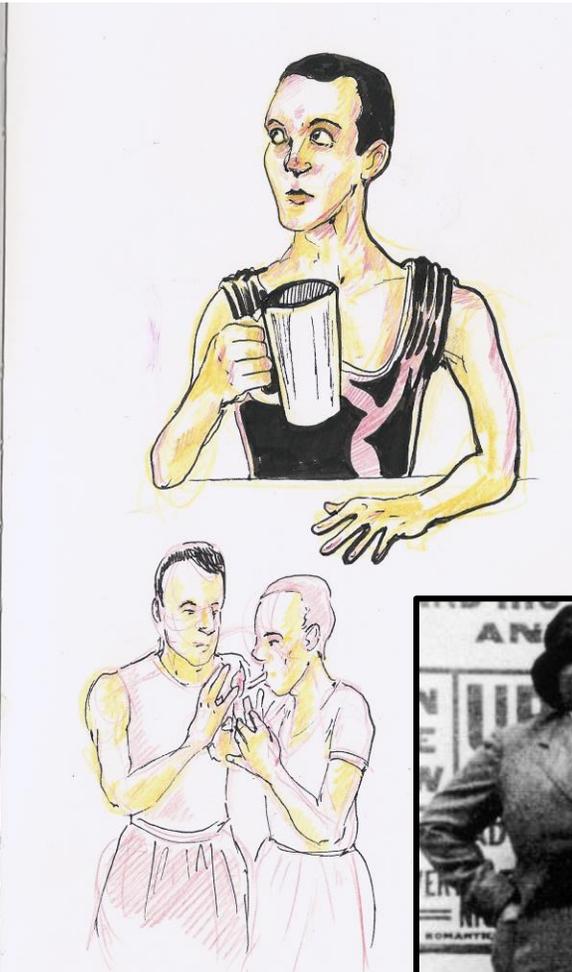
Boy of my dreams
 red hair and kind smile he
 is a part of me.
 This is the sad/beautiful part
 of this community
 so much of our poetry
 is devoted, desperate love odes
 to our unreachable selves.
 It must be this way.
 To love your trans body
 is to perform a radical act
 that most days it seems
 no one else will.
 There's little space to write
 great declarations & odysseys
 to others, no,
 i must write love poems
 to the boy of my dreams
 whose eyes i glimpse in the mirror
 on good days, yes
 i think i could love him
 but if you can't, who will?
 i see him in the young men shouting obscenities
 shirts off on the basketball court
 eating along at a subway table
 walking a dog he is
 in all the windows
 there is no room to love any boys
 other than the one breathing inside me.



Credit to TSER's
 "Gender Unicorn" for
 this gender spectrum.

"The spirit of modernity is Jewish, no matter how one looks at it...Women and Jews are pimps, it is their goal to make man guilty. **Our era is not only the most Jewish, it is also the most feminine of eras...**There is nothing with which the Jew can truly identify, no cause for which he can risk his life unreservedly. What the Jew lacks is not the zealot but the zeal, because anything undivided, anything whole, is alien to him. It is the simplicity of belief that he lacks and it is because he lacks this simplicity and stands for nothing positive that he seems to be more intelligent than the Aryan and is supple enough to wriggle out of any oppression. Inner ambiguity, I repeat, is absolutely Jewish, simplicity is absolutely un-Jewish."

- Written by notorious eugenicist and anti-Semite Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* 1903



The Pansy Craze – Cross-dressing and Queer Culture during Prohibition



During American Prohibition in the 1920s, people wanting to drink alcohol went to speakeasies – illegal, underground bars. In the absence of law enforcement, certain social taboos were thrown out the window. Speakeasies became places of drag and cross-dressing, and seeing men in dresses and women in tuxedos wasn't uncommon. After prohibition ended, their existence was wiped from our storytelling of the time. But these folks who took part in the pansy craze could be considered the first people with non-binary gender identities, for a brief moment allowed to come alive.



Binder (ˈbɪndər): A necessary, life-saving piece of transitional apparel which makes the chest appear flat.

The first chest binder I ever had was given to me by a friend who knew I had been wanting to try one on but was too afraid to order one or ask my parents. It was black with clips on the side, from a sketchy Chinese vendor on Ebay.

When I wore it for longer than two hours my chest ached. But the websites said to start with small amounts of time and work my way up to 8 hours. You don't do more than 8. The body gets used to such things. It is resilient in this way.

I bought my first real binder after months of research, dark grey. I asked my mother and she was skeptic but understood. When it finally arrived from gc2b, I ran my hands over the discreet packaging, inconspicuous for those teens who order one and risk homelessness if their parents were to discover such things on their doorstep. There is a process and learning curve to wearing binders. I watched videos. I learned how to put it on, to take it off, a ritual object of sorts.

Concerned friends ask if it is comfortable. I answer that it is not. They ask if it is safe. I tell them that there is not enough research to determine it, but it's sure as hell better than ace bandages, which break ribs. Ask yourself why there is no research, why there is not enough information for me to make informed decisions about my health. You get used to things. It's better than the anxiety of not wearing it, the dysphoria makes it harder to breathe than wearing it. Besides, I never asked for your opinion. My safety matters more to me than it does to you. That's why I do this.

Transboys know how to deal with a pain that the cisboys don't.

When I went through my pseudo-yeshiva boy phase, I was afraid the dark grey half-tank would show through my white shirt to the men at shul.

I bought a white binder just for Shabbat.

My friends and I have debated if one can make tzitzit out of a binder. If you could, I wouldn't wear them. But it would be nice to know.

Texts

Judaism is a room with many doors. Hundreds of doors. The door of text study is my way in – and it is a wide door, a difficult door. My friend Louis says that Torah speaks in different languages: stories, parables, midrash, poetry, and especially Halakha, Jewish law. He and I meet each other at a barrier with that final language, struggling with it in our own ways. These languages are the ground on which we wrestle.

Deuteronomy 22:5

(5) A woman must not put on a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination (תועבת) unto the LORD your God.

"The prohibition on cross-dressing is not explained, except to note that it is abhorrent to God. This rule perhaps was intended to prevent unacceptable sexual practices or pagan cultic practices. More likely, it aims to maintain gender boundaries, analogous to the laws against forbidden mixtures in [Deuteronomy] 22:9-11, thus preventing confusion about the public presentation of a person's gender identity." -*The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

"There once was a man whose wife died and left him with an infant to suckle and he could not afford to pay a wet-nurse. A miracle occurred and he grew breasts like a woman's two breasts and he nursed his child. [A first Rabbi] Rav Yosef said: Come and see just how great this man is that such a miracle was performed for him! Abaye [another Rabbi] [argued]: On the contrary - how bad is this man that the order of nature was changed for him." -*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 53b*

"Where can we find a powerful image of the Divine feminine within Jewish sources? One name for Her which has been with us for centuries is the Shekhinah, the "dweller within." In ancient times, the Shekhinah was a Talmudic word for the glory of God that rested on the *mishkan* (the *mishkan* was the Tabernacle, God's sacred dwelling space in the wilderness). (...)

According to the Talmud, the Shekhinah, the Indwelling, is the Divine that resides within the life of the world, dwelling on earth with the Jewish people and going into exile with them when they are exiled. While the traditional Jewish image of the transcendent God is male, in the kabbalah, that image has been accompanied by the feminine image of the Shekhinah—the inner glory of existence. (...)

The Shekhinah embodies joy, yet she is also a symbol of shared suffering and empathy, not only with a nation's exile, but with all the hurts of the world. Mystics believe that in messianic times She will be reunited with her heavenly partner and that they will become one. Many Jewish poets of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have reclaimed her as a powerful feminine image of God."

On shabbat, the idea behind the Sabbath 'bride' is often connected to the Shekhina. As the bride enters, there is no longer a separation between Adonai and Shekhina. Here is the notion that during the Sabbath, the masculine and feminine energies of God blur and become one, without distinction, without end (ein sof).



Max Goldbaum at the Speakeasy

Back in the earlier 1900s, as Jews began immigrating heavily from Eastern Europe, a Jewish mafia and subculture arose. During the time of prohibition in the 1920s, there was a small scene of Jewish boxers, operating out of underground rinks, barred from competing as Jews. My freshman year of high school I wanted to make a comic about this. It featured a young man named Max who took on the Anglicized name "Troyer" as a disguise for his Jewish heritage in order to compete as a boxer. His uncle was part of the mafia and is the one who encourages him to compete. I never finished it.



The Tragic Tale of Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Laqish

Bavli Bava Metzia 84a

One day Rabbi Yohanan

was swimming in the Jordan.

Resh Lakish saw him

and thought he was a woman.

He dug his spear into the Jordan and leaped to the other side of the Jordan.

R. Yohanan said to him: "This ^{physical} strength of yours—for ^{intellectual} Torah!"

Resh Lakish said to him: "This beauty of yours—for women!"

R. Yohanan said to him: "If you will return/repent, I will give you my sister, who is more beautiful than I."

Resh Lakish accepted [the offer] upon himself.

He then tried to jump back to bring his clothing – but he was not able to.

R. Yohanan taught Resh Lakish Bible and he taught him Mishna, and he turned him into a great man.

One day the Beit Midrash was divided over an issue: "The sword and the knife and the spear and the sickle – from when do they "receive *tume'ab*"? From the moment their manufacture is complete."

And when is their manufacture complete?

Rabbi Yohanan said, "When they are honed in the furnace."

Resh Lakish said, "When they are burnished in the water."

Rabbi Yohanan said, "A brigand knows his brigandry."

Resh Lakish said to him: "What good have you done me? There they called me Rabbi and here they call me Rabbi."

R. Yohanan said to him: "I've done you good by bringing you under the wings of the *Shekhina*." *Feminine Aspects of God*

Rabbi Yohanan became severely depressed.

Resh Lakish became severely ill.

יום אחד היה שוחה רבי יוחנן

בירדן

ראה אותו ריש לקיש והשב שהוא

אשה

תקע את הרומח שלו בירדן וקפץ

לצד השני של הירדן.

אמר לו: כוחך לתורה!

אמר לו: יופיין לנשים!

אמר לו: אם תחזור בך – אתן לך

את אחותי, שיפה היא ממני.

קיבל עליו.

רצה לחזור להביא את בגדיו – ולא

יכל לחזור.

לימד אותו מקרא ומשנה, ועשה

אותו אדם גדול.

יום אחד היו חולקים בבית

המדרש:

"הסייף והסכין והפגיון והרומח

ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי

מקבלין טומאה – משעת גמר

מלאכתן". ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן?

רבי יוחנן אומר: משיצרפם בכבשן.

ריש לקיש אמר: משיצחצחן במים.

אמר לו: לסטים בלסטיותיה יודע

[שודד בעסקי השוד שלו יודע]!

אמר לו: ומה הועלת לי? שם רבי

קראו לי, וכאן רבי קראו לי.

אמר לו: הועלת לי שקירבתי

אותך תחת כנפי השכינה.

חלשה דעת רבי יוחנן

נחלש [נחלה] ריש לקיש.

Awareness of gender in beauty/intellect

RASHI COMMENTARY
Resh Lakish saw him – Who was a brigand.
Your strength for Torah – how suitable is your strength for carrying the burden of Torah.
Your beauty for Women – how suitable is your beauty for women.
Was not able – To jump as before, for once he accepted the burden of Torah upon himself, his power was diminished. [As it is written: "The Torah exhausts the power of a person" (Sanhedrin 26b).]

Entry, Late March

You're not supposed to write on Shabbat but if I don't date this entry then you won't know when it was written. Did you know that all the great kabbalistic poems describing the splendor of Shabbat were inevitably written before or after the sacred time – never during? In Judaism (or in Hebrew, a distinction that moves from imperceptible to gaping depending on if you mean ancient or modern), “to sin” is to miss the mark, for holiness to be absent in an action. Absence of holiness is not presence of malignancy.

I've been struggling with transience. I remember when I learned the word ephemeral in my sophomore year of high school, in English class. I lied about knowing what it meant because it felt like a word I should've already known. I learned a little more about my inability to admit shortcomings, especially when they feel like they should no longer be shortcomings. A lesson: When a Jew doesn't know, they must ask.

In Jonathan Safran Foer's “Here I am”, when the second son is giving his Bar Mitzvah D'var Torah, he talks about struggling (“wrestling”) and Jacob and the Angel and closeness. That all wrestling is just about closeness and it's easier to be close than to stay close. The character (and by extension, Jonathan himself) says that the only way to keep something close to you is to wrestle with it.

Last night at farbragen, I stayed up til two with the rabbi and the new girl from New York in the side room of the storefront, a temporary space. When she asked me about how Judaism feels about gender and sexuality, the rabbi nodded at me and I told the story of the title, which is to say, I told the story of Jacob and the Angel and how I too have two names. The answers were not answers but stories because a Jew's understanding of response to questions must necessarily be narrative because there's just absolutely no other way to begin scratching the surface.

At Shabbat dinner, after a horrible week and an even longer day, I looked around at the people I loved and the guests they had brought too and suddenly couldn't bear the thought of endings. I had a sense that people were leaving, which they will, and I wanted to set my hands over the crowns of their heads & give them a blessing with words I don't completely understand.

Jonathan Safran Foer wrote, "Only one thing can keep something close over time: holding it there. Grappling with it. Wrestling it to the ground, as Jacob did with the Angel, and refusing to let go. What we don't wrestle we let go of. Love isn't the absence of struggle. Love is struggle."

We are commanded in the mitzvah of ahavat yisrael, you know.

When I told him that I cried because of loneliness, and the loneliness of my father, and the nervousness that I would die alone, he set down the dishes and held me there in the kitchen. During long hugs in hard moments I'll loosen just a little bit to test the give and see if it will end because of that smallest shift. I did this three times and he did not let go.

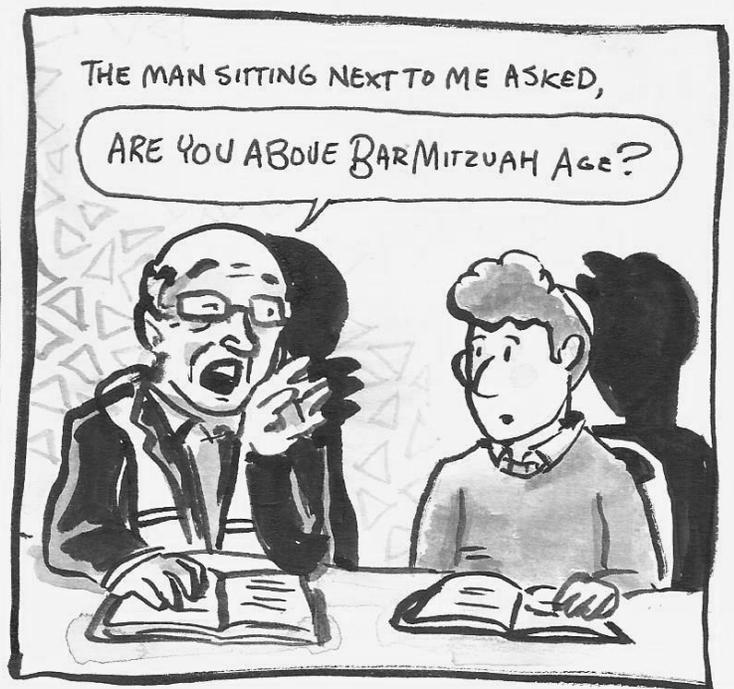
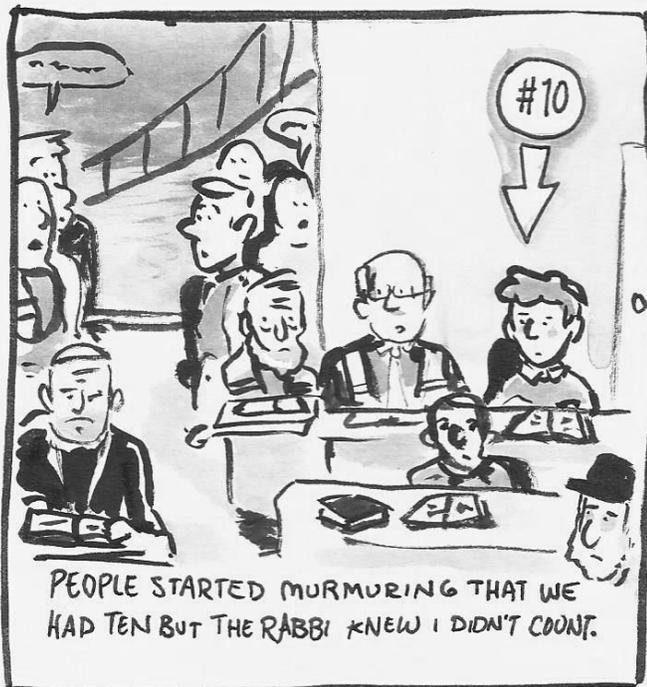
When I was at camp as a child, saying goodbye was a morbid act, and endings were inconceivable. As a survival tool (like resisting death or doom or leaving) I learned how to write letters. I was a revelation when, after seven years of impossible goodbyes, Isabel told me that there were silver strings between us that would never break. They may grow dusty or lose their shine, but they're still there, always, underneath the developments and the rubble.

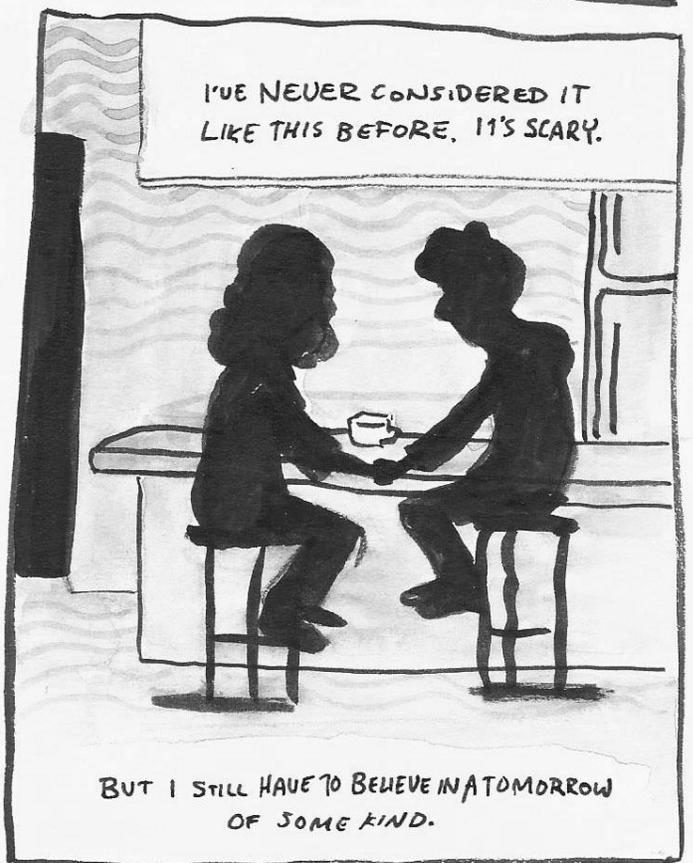
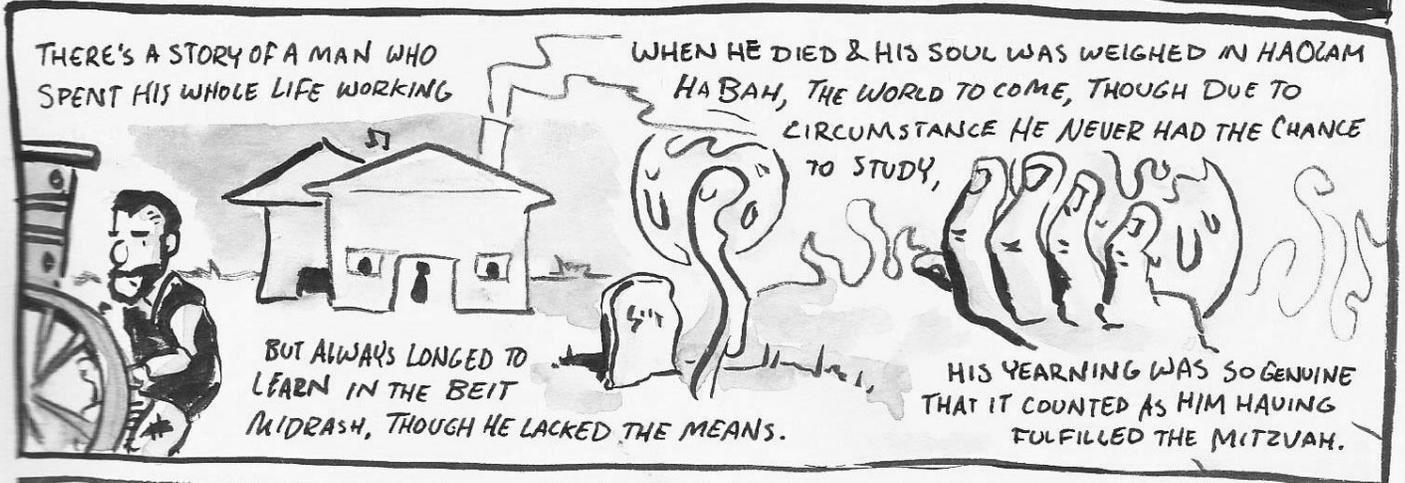
Last night I dreamt that I was dancing with my high school boyfriend. I think the dream unfolded from third person. It was easy to dance with him. It wasn't romantic or exciting, just easy. I rested my head in the crux of his neck and shoulder where he rested his violin. When my friend hugged me in the kitchen, I had put my arm above his shoulder, placed my head on the other. He is taller than me and this made it difficult, but all that meant was that I had to strain a bit to be there and maintain it.

Some maintenance comes easier than others, requires less content than others because you still remember the soreness in your muscles from the last time. For example, a phonecall every four months can be enough. But sometimes you go camping in Algoma or drive for hours on Floridian highways and it's barely enough hurt to be satisfied.

In Yiddish, saying the prayer after you eat and are satisfied is called *benching*. In my daydreams during davening, I am the flyweight champion of Jewish wrestling. But it's true that I could use a bit more exercise.

MINYAN





השׁיבנו ה' אלך



THE WHOLE ENTIRE WORLD IS A
VERY NARROW BRIDGE & THE MOST
IMPORTANT THING IS NOT TO BE AFRAID.

Datum / Date:

(ר י נ) יהודה (ה)

Yehuda is a young man who looks more like a boy. He makes me think of cold, overcast early spring days and the way wet basketball on frozen fingers, slapping freezing palms pairs well with raw breath, black hooded sweatshirts, sneakers with mud, and a very sharp sense of solitude. He doesn't talk much, but I'm sure his voice sounds like the infinity echo of rubber on concrete that dashes out into the ~~city~~^{empty} park, never finding a wall. I bet it cracks. I don't know if it's angry. I think he was a gentle child, but I don't remember him. Sometimes we'd play hide and seek but he'd stay hiding, never got found.

He is the bird and the book in me.



