

Article

“Casting Our Sins Away”: A Comparative Analysis of Queer Jewish Communities in Israel and in the US

Elazar Ben-Lulu

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ariel University, Ariel 407000, Israel; elazarb@ariel.ac.il

Abstract: Every year, diverse Jewish communities around the world observe Tashlich (casting off), a customary atonement ritual performed the day after Rosh Hashanah. This performative ritual is conducted next to a body of water to symbolize atonement and purification of one’s sins. Based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in two egalitarian Jewish congregations in Tel Aviv and in New York City, I show how Tashlich performance is constructed as a political act to empower gender and sexual identities and experiences, as well as the socio-political positionality of LGBTQ Jews in various sites. By including new blessings, the blowing of the shofar by gay female participants, and by conducting the ritual in historical and contemporary queer urban spaces, the rabbis and congregants created new interpretations of the traditional customs. They exposed their feelings toward themselves, their community, and its visibility and presence in the city. The fact that the ritual is conducted in an open urban public space creates not only differing meanings and perceptions than from the synagogue, but also exposes queer politics in the context of national and religious identities. Furthermore, this comparative analysis illuminates tensions and trajectories of Jewishness and queerness in Israel and in the US, and sheds light on postmodern tendencies in contemporary urban religious communities as a result of the inclusion of the LGBTQ community.

Keywords: Tashlich; ethnography; gender; Jewish holidays; LGBTQ; New York; Tel Aviv; Queer



Citation: Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2022.

“Casting Our Sins Away”: A Comparative Analysis of Queer Jewish Communities in Israel and in the US. *Religions* 13: 845. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090845>

Academic Editor: Kathleen McPhillips

Received: 19 July 2022

Accepted: 31 August 2022

Published: 13 September 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The congregation’s Rabbi stood near the fountain at the entrance to the community building, surrounded by community members: a human circle, all with eyes closed, holding palms full of breadcrumbs, and looking forward to offering prayers, confessions, and requests. After explaining the meaning of the custom, she said: “I invite you to close your eyes. We will start from Elul of the last year. Now we will follow month by month and remember the days which have passed. You are invited to come and take a minute of communion and scatter the breadcrumbs. Then, we will all bless together the prayer of Tashlich. This is your personal Tashlich, which we are beginning now together”. (Fieldwork note, Tel Aviv 2014)

One of the most famous Jewish atonement rituals is Tashlich (casting off one’s sins), which dates back to the 14th century. On the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah¹ (or on the second day if the first day falls on the Sabbath), Jewish observers gather in a community setting and perform the ritual next to a body of water (the seashore, a stream, or a river) to symbolize atonement and purification. In places where there is no nearby body of water, Jewish communities prepare a special cistern ahead of time to carry out the custom in the synagogue’s courtyard. After reciting verses 7–19, the prophet Micah recounts: “*And thou shalt cast all their sins of the sea into the depths of the sea*”. The worshipers shake out the hem of their garments in a symbolic gesture of throwing their transgressions into the depths of the sea (Sherbondy 2003, p. 144).

This custom offers performative symbolic meanings: moving the body, exposing the palms, and shaking out the pockets of one’s clothing. According to the Kabbalah, water and

fish symbolize change, purification, cleanliness, and protection against the forces of the evil eye. The children of Israel are likened to fish caught in the fisherman's net as they are judged on Rosh Hashanah for their actions. The connection between human beings and God is also likened to living water (Frankel and Teutsch 1992). This custom demonstrates that Jewish ritual is more than a liturgical text or phenomenological experience (Guzmen-Carmeli 2020); it is a praxis that expresses a dynamic between the individual body and space.

Throughout Jewish generations, Tashlich ritual absorbed local characteristics in various interpretations. For instance, in Kurdistan, Jews used to jump into the water; in the Galicia area, they threw branches into the river; and in India, Tashlich was performed for matchmaking ceremonies. Needel (2008, p. 68) argues that the Jewish community of India, Bene Israel, was most likely unaware of the customary rituals of Tashlich, enabling them to adapt what they knew as a Jewish tradition to Indian culture².

Some Jewish communities developed their own rituals in light of the connections and influences attributed to the holiday's meaning. A warning was issued by rabbis who cautioned against creating rituals based on superstitions that were not related to forgiving iniquities, and that they should therefore be removed from the service (Stone 1939; Kozodoy 1997).

Following the sociological and anthropological assumption that the Jewish calendar creates the identity of individuals and of the Jewish community (Fader 2007; Shoham 2017), this ethnographic study exemplifies how contemporary egalitarian Jewish communities—one in Israel and the second in New York City (NYC)—perform this traditional ritual. The participation of women and LGBTQ people, who had previously been excluded from participating in Jewish public religious practices and from serving in leadership positions, has changed the ritual's structure and infused it with political messages and meanings. I clarify how the participants experience the custom, what gender interpretations they infuse into the traditional symbols, their religious and spiritual perspectives, and the impact of urban space on the performance. The ethnographic description exposes a liturgical movement between renewal and conservatism and demonstrates that Jewish public performance is an outcome of gender recognition among the participants, as well as of dynamic negotiation with the urban space. It also reveals that queer and non-heteronormative experiences cross national boundaries, which are reflected by similar LGBTQphobic, patriarchal, and chauvinist responses.

Much like Katz (2009), who focuses on publicizing the miracle of Chanukah in the American urban space on behalf of the Chabad Orthodox community, I elucidate how non-Orthodox Jewish communities signify urban space as a political means to present Jewishness that is intersected with other identities, such as sexual and gender identities. The fluid connections between individualization, communities, and space should be examined not only in the context of macro-social discourse and forces, but also in the light of the system of local actions and meanings within which the subject is built. For this reason, I stipulate that the participants should be perceived as active agents and not passive players.

Fedele and Knibbe (2013, p. 5) argue that to understand contemporary spiritual and religious phenomena, analytical lenses of gender and power are essential. Wilcox (2009) shows how American women's religious experiences are exemplary cases of postmodern patterns of religious identity, belief, and practice in urban space. Previous research shows how women, and also particularly queer people, have an important role in the creation of new Jewish liturgy and sanctity (Milligan 2014; Schwartz 2013; Avishai 2020). According to Israeli anthropologist Shokeid (2002), queer Jewish rituals not only function to maintain the cross-generational continuity of tradition, but to also provide daily therapeutic support for Jewish LGBTQ people coping with various life experiences. In addition, Milligan (2013) shows how head covering—especially through pride yarmulkes for gay Jewish men—takes on importance as a significant symbol that demonstrates an affirmation of their Jewish and masculine identities. Thus, by their participation, they construct the Jewish community as a safe space and affirm sexuality and gender discourse as an integral part of their religious worship.

Versteeg and Roeland (2011, p. 122) argue that practitioners themselves frame the genealogy of their experiences and that it is strongly subjective. The critical observer becomes aware of several social dimensions, among which are forms of authority and power, structures of legitimization, and standards of authenticity. Drawing on ethnographic research, Wanless (2021) shows how diverse religious identities and practices have ideological cores that prioritize subjectivity, situate authority within the individual, and are based on the ideals of sharing and community.

According to Werczberger (2021), the complexities of Jewish individualization, whereby the focus is on the self and self-authenticity, is tightly linked to the cultivation of identity and communal belonging. This discourse is understood in terms of the 'inward turn' and the 'turn to tradition' of contemporary Jewish life, as well as the penetration of consumer logic into Jewish forms of spirituality. In another study, Kaplan and Werczberger (2017, p. 586) argued that contemporary religion becomes a preferred site for the middle class to showcase their symbolic power to redefine the very meaning of Judaism as a self-actualizing technique. In this study, I suggest expanding this recent research to show how the process of individualization of religion could take place not only among spiritual groups but also in institutional religious denominations, such as non-Orthodox Jewish congregations. In addition, I show how socio-economic status is not the only category that catalyzes this process of self-authenticity, and that sexuality and gender play significant roles as well.

I first discuss Tashlich's gender evolution by tracing the new deconstruction to the ritual. Then, I present the field and the selected research methods. The ethnographic findings are divided into three dimensions: textual, performative, and geo-political space. Lastly, I discuss how examining Tashlich ritual allows us to interpret sexual and gender politics in the Jewish community and what, on the macro level, it contributes to the understanding of the place of religious denominations in the construction of gender and religious politics.

2. From Tashlich to Nashlich: Re-Composing the Ritual's Liturgy

Tashlich is originally a Jewish Eastern European (Ashkenazi) custom from the Middle Ages that spread over the years to Sephardic communities through Rabbi Chaim Vital. It originated as an imitation of a Christian custom that was prevalent in the city of Köln in Germany in the 14th century (Sperber 1990). The German rabbi, Jacob Moulin, notes in his writings the spread of the custom and its prevalence in all Eastern European communities within a short timespan (Goodman 1970).

Tashlich's historic evolution, as well as the conflicting interpretations in the way it is carried out, reveals how structured the custom is. This structure comes into play through cultural perceptions held by the community, its geographical location, and the ritual interactions conducted within the space to mark community visibility and representation. Therefore, Tashlich is not just a personal remorse ceremony or a moment of communal gathering, but a community experience that operates in a broader cultural context and within the framework of environmental and social conditions that allow it.

In this controversial holiday's background, Rosh Hashanah's customs, such as Tashlich, were debated among scholars and leaders. Since Tashlich is a custom and not a commandment (*mitzvah*), there is an argument in Jewish law (*halakha*) regarding women's participation in this religious practice. According to Rabbi Moses Isserles, who was an eminent Polish Ashkenazi rabbi in the 16th century, women should not observe Tashlich and, if they decide to do so, they should perform it modestly in front of the kitchen sink in their home and not with men in the public sphere. However, Rabbi Jacob Halevi Moelin, a Talmudist and *posek* (authority on Jewish law) particularly known for his codification of the customs (*minhagim*) of the German Jews, argued that the validity of the custom is binding as a vow and women would also be bound by it since they too need mercy. Moreover, because of the custom's obligation, there is no reason not to let them perform Tashlich in

the public sphere. Therefore, if they did not observe it on the first day of the first year, it must be completed later³.

As a response to gender inequality in traditional laws, Jewish feminine liturgy has developed in recent decades among diverse denominations that reflect and promote women's and LGBTQ people's willingness to take part in Jewish history (Ben-Lulu 2021a; Eger 2020). In her book *The Days Between: Blessings, Poems, and Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season*, Falk (2014) suggests a new ritual for Tashlich that is called 'Nashlich' נשליך, a Hebrew gender-inclusive verb meaning 'We will cast' rather than original verb, 'tashlich', 'You [God, masculine] will cast'. Instead of asking that God purge us of sin, "we seek in this declaration to free ourselves from whatever impedes our moving into the new year with clarity, lightness, and hope" (p. 52).

Another gendered Tashlich was composed by the Israeli Reform Rabbi, Orna Piltz. In this version (Lisitsa et al. 2011), the author describes the journey of a woman who is going through changing moods, remembering her childhood and adolescence. Here is an excerpt from the prayer:

I want to start this year . . . like a young girl whose sighs and sobs shake her body, sorrow floods her, and the tears wash over her face and pillow, until the crying weakens, the tears stop and she calms down and falls asleep as if all the pain has washed out of her . . . Water how good you are here . . . help me, there are things in me that I can no longer bear, my things with myself and with others . . . Carry them with you, return them to the abysses from which they came, so that they may not return to me. Please, return the year to me, washed and clean, open to the world, fresh and saturated, full of pain and sorrow. (p. 151)

Over recent years, Tashlich ritual has become one of the most popular practices among Reform, Conservative, and non-Orthodox communities in Israel, some of which are also led by female rabbis. I argue that this custom, as a gender performance observed in the public space, challenges Orthodox perceptions that are dominantly embedded in both secular and religious Jewish sectors.

The Jewish renewal movement in Israel performs this ritual and includes women as equal participants in the praxis. Werczberger (2017), who conducted field work in Israeli New Age communities, shows how during Yom Kippur, the member uses the community's power and Jewish sources to annually reaffirm who and what she is. Some of these sources are radical in their interpretation, and the individual goes through a powerful spiritual process using ceremonial elements borrowed from nearby cultures, especially from the East: chanting, and Shabbat receptions with sitar playing; dancing; meditation; and emphatic use of body, emotion, and experiential elements.

Another example that proves the desire of Israeli women to observe the Jewish tradition was expressed in a special Tashlich ceremony performed in August 2021 by a group of Israeli women. About 150 women dressed in white gathered at the beach of Rishon Letzion, a city in the center of Israel, to perform their own casting-off ceremony. One of the event's organizers said in an interview to the *Hashikma Rishon website*⁴: "It was an evening of feminine empowerment. We handed out slips of paper to the participating women. Each one wrote two notes, one note about everything that harmed us. We burned those notes in a bowl. On the second note, each participant wrote what they wished for us next year; we sent dozens of white balloons to the sky. I hope we will do the same next year".

This performance affirms Anson and Anson (1997, p. 381) who state that "religious holidays, then, have a different effect on the pattern of mortality of men and women, reflecting their different roles in the preparation and celebration of the holy day rites". All these initiatives demonstrate that the female performance of Tashlich ritual constructs and expresses social and liturgical changes, as well as reflects the intersection of religiosity/spirituality and Judaism. This micro-case may demonstrate postmodern configurations of Jewish identities and practices. The following ethnography expands this discussion and enlightens the way in which this custom is reconstructed by local and global gender/sexual politics and characteristics.

3. Field Description and Methods

This study is based on four ethnographic observations of Tashlich, which were conducted at two different sites: two observations were conducted at a Reform congregation in Tel Aviv as part of 3 years of fieldwork (2014–2017). In addition, as part of my short-term fieldwork (Sep.–Oct. 2021) during the Jewish High Holidays in NYC, I conducted an observation at a gay synagogue located in Manhattan⁵.

The Israeli congregation was established in 2010 by local residents who were interested in egalitarian and pluralistic Jewish rituals in the metropolitan area of Tel Aviv. Currently, the congregation comprises about 40 official members, but every week the number of participants changes. During the fieldwork, the congregation was led by a lesbian rabbi, who is a known activist in the Israeli LGBTQ community. Every week, the congregants gather to observe Shabbat services in a rented hall of a local community center for elderly residents. In addition, the congregation observes rituals for the LGBTQ local community, such as Pride Shabbat and a Memorial Shabbat service for the international transgender day (Ben-Lulu 2021d).

The second site, in NYC, has been known as the world's largest LGBTQ synagogue since the 1970s. Today, this congregation has well over 1000 individual members and offers a full schedule of Shabbat and holiday services, classes, social justice programs, and community-building social activities for LGBTQ people and their allies. According to Shokeid (2002), who spent 13 months of intensive fieldwork in this congregation in the 1990s, this synagogue provides a special Jewish landscape that exemplifies the intersection between sexuality, gender, and liberal religiosity. Cohen (2014) also sees this denomination as a pioneer in the history and liturgy of the queer Jewish community in North America.

Indeed, multi-sited ethnography inevitably produces knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities (Marcus 1995, p. 100). On the one hand, it allows me to identify differences and similarities. On the other hand, I am aware of the issues of multi-sited ethnography and its real challenges. For instance, I had less time in New York in comparison to the Israeli congregation, and I had fewer opportunities to become acquainted with people and to establish profound social relationships in ways that would have allowed me access to more existential fields of their experience. Perhaps, as Berg (2008, p. 15) claims, my "ability to see how people are constructing themselves, their families, their neighborhoods, localities, communities and the connections among them was more limited".

In addition to the four participant observations and spontaneous conversations, I conducted 20 informal interviews with the rabbis and the congregants, as well as maintained correspondences through email. All informants mentioned in this article remain anonymous. Some of the interviews were conducted in cafes in Tel Aviv and Manhattan and several were conducted in the congregants' homes. Most participants consented to have our conversations recorded, and only a small number preferred that I write rather than record key points. The fieldwork in Tel Aviv was conducted over a period of 3 years, and I participated in all the congregation's activities and services.

My purpose was to fill a lacuna, the missing pieces of information hidden from the ethnographer during observations, and to clarify the participants' experiences. During the interviews I tried to extract the meaning attributed to the congregation, practices, and space, while focusing on the congregant's gender, and religious and spiritual contexts. Their varied references helped me analyze the tension between what the individuals stated they do, and what they actually do.

As an Israeli gay man, I felt empathy and solidarity with the liberal Jewish congregation's struggle for gender equality. I was always aware of my positionality and, since the informants knew that I was gay, in some cases they felt more comfortable to share their experiences with me (Lewin et al. 1996). I found that my sexual identity became a methodological advantage more than an obstacle and limitation, as sometimes happens in non-research arenas (Ben-Lulu 2022, pp. 308–9). As Browne and Nash (2010) remind us, queer methods can change the binary roles of interviewer and interviewee and may challenge the primordial, patriarchal research attitude between the researcher and the

field. Furthermore, I am familiar with the performance of Tashlich, and I usually prefer to perform this alone, as moment of personal meditation rather than a communal act.

My encounter with the American Jewish community as an Israeli was not my first. Over the years, I have worked in Jewish American organizations and lived in the US for a year. At the time, I participated in Reform and Conservative services. Regarding the New York gay synagogue, I have been following this congregation's activity in recent years, both virtually and physically, as part of further research. Following [Feldman \(2016\)](#), during my fieldwork I was aware of my positionality as a Jewish Israeli ethnographer who was observing American Jewry, as well as my obligation to reflect on national and religious boundaries, tensions, and changes.

4. Gender Impact: Liturgical Text and Language

On 7 September 2021, the day after Rosh Hashanah, approximately 30–40 congregants met for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak and gathered together on-site for a communal Tashlich service to cast off their sins by the Hudson River in NYC (See [Figure 1](#)). I saw a young man who wore a *kippah* and a mask with the Hebrew caption *Shanah Tovah* (Happy New Year) and held tiny cups with seeds inside. "Do you need any help?" I asked him. "Yes, it could be nice. Who are you?" he responded. I introduced myself and spoke about my fieldwork in NYC. He asked some questions and presented himself as a current rabbinical intern.



Figure 1. Tashlich at Hudson River, NYC.

Afterwards, he excitedly opened the ceremony and said: "It's the first time we are meeting in-person, after a year conducting the services online. So, first of all, everyone, take a look around you and say 'Shanah Tovah' to whoever is standing near you". This invitation created some embarrassment among the participants, since some of them followed social distancing regulations and wore masks, which made it difficult to hear their words. When this introduction was over, he introduced Tashlich custom and recited the traditional verses from Micha (7:18–20). At the end of Tashlich, he recited from the Bible verses from Isaiah 11:9, "*None shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the love of ADONAI shall fill the earth as the waters fill the sea*".

Liturgical decisions based on the traditional structure of the custom are not usually adopted among egalitarian congregations, particularly in North America where new blessings and prayers are regularly created ([Drinkwater 2019](#)). The rabbinical intern provided an instrumental explanation for this ritualistic reason, but also claimed that there is importance in reciting the traditional blessing in both languages:

"The texts we shared are the traditional texts shown from the community *Machzor* (special holiday prayer book) was using at the time. We chose not to do additional

readings because it would be hard for people to hear us [because of the surrounding noise]. We read the verses in English and Hebrew. From my experience, the congregants appreciate a mix of Hebrew and English in the liturgy, even with the gendered implications of the Hebrew language”.

Indeed, reciting translated verses in English may degenderize the Hebrew biblical version and allow all gender identities to feel part of the worship. Despite this, in a conversation with a one of the board members, he stated that reciting in English does not automatically lead to advancing gender equality in the Jewish sanctity:

“There is an expectation that as a gay synagogue we’d be less traditional in our communal worship. However, this is not necessarily true. We are actually quite traditional in much of our practice. Our communal services are not that different in form from any other egalitarian synagogue in New York and we make use of both the Reconstructionist and Conservative *siddurim* (regular prayer books) for Shabbat morning. The difference may come from the spirit of inclusion and joy with which we approach worship. The fact that the service is led by queer or queer-friendly clergy and interns, and the participants have diverse sexual and gender identities, has not necessarily made our worship less traditional. We do have our own siddur for Friday nights and have introduced new rituals and blessings, several of which are dedicated to LGBTQ people, but it depends on the event and the context”.

His clarification is not based on a temporal or sporadic “expectation because it’s a gay synagogue”. In fact, this expectation is valid and makes sense, considering the historical influence of the feminist and gay movements on Jewish liturgy by creating new feminine rituals that challenge patriarchal primordial sanctity (Adler 1998).

While the rabbinical intern reflected an eagerness to maintain the traditional form of Jewish liturgy, the Israeli rabbi who led the Tel Aviv congregation suggested a new textual version for the custom: a gender-neutral blessing that was composed by the Israeli Reform Rabbi Tamar Duvdevani (translation: Rabbi Dahlia Shaham)⁶. While the traditional Tashlich *nusach ha-tefillah* (the prayer version) focuses on the community (We/Our), this new blessing places the individual in the center of the liturgy and degenderizes the Hebrew (masculine) verbs. The word ‘my’ provides an individualistic orientation and expresses Reform Judaism’s theology, which sanctifies the individual’s needs and wants. The fluid gendered verbs also refer to a feminine divinity that might allow the worshipper to communicate and pray to ‘her’, rather than to ‘him’. This change could reconceptualize and create a new phenomenological experience among the individual, especially for women (Slee 2012).

When the first Reform Jewish congregations were established in Germany, they did not observe the custom of Tashlich at all (Sarason 2018). In recent decades, however, Tashlich has become common both in Israel and in the US. The ceremonial structure is flexible, and each congregation performs it differently.

Liturgical changes, perhaps, create and promote various interpretations among the participants, particularly when a female rabbi leads the ceremony. During Tashlich, one of the Israeli congregants closed her eyes and crossed her arms in a sort of self-hug, looking like she was collecting her thoughts and categorizing them. In an interview a few months later, she recounted how she found Tashlich “really liberating”, describing how it gave her closure for a complicated relationship experience that ended just prior to the ceremony:

“When I said the blessing and prayed using feminine language, I felt like I was dedicating the prayer to myself, really a self-prayer. I apologized to myself. I was reminded of this never-ending relationship. How the months went by until we actually managed to end the relationship. So, Tashlich was a kind of forgiveness of myself. It was also a broader breakup in a sense, a breakup from a concept of a relationship that wasn’t suitable for me: from the “other” (exemplifying the quotation marks with hand gestures) woman that I was”.

For the congregant, Tashlich is a kind of personal rite of passage that connects the memory of the monogamous relationship that she experienced with the moments of self-compassion and self-acceptance. The structure of the custom, the moment of throwing the breadcrumbs into the water, and the accompanying prayer, created for her an operational possibility for self-compassion. The communal Tashlich helped in recognizing the loss of the relationship and contributed to coming out of the polyamory closet. Today, she feels comfortable declaring her polyamory, and since the breakup she had a new romantic experience. However, her decision to come out is still considered to be 'queer' (not in the sexual orientation context), since many polyamorous women do not feel comfortable exploring the possibility, as Santos (2019) reminds us. "The absence of formal recognition of consensual non-monogamy contributes to the narratives of intimate dissonance produced by LGBTQ intimate citizens for whom the polyamory closet is still very hard to break" (ibid., 710).

Performance of the traditional custom became a partner in the experience of liberation that the congregant sought for herself. Turning to God using feminine language and in the first person opened the way for her to ask for inner forgiveness and not just one that requires adjustment in the face of some higher power marked as masculine. From her statement, it seems that the direction of the prayer was to the self, and the choice of the female language helped to establish the experience. I find the word 'dedicating', as essential to understanding the focus of performance on self-dedication, and not necessarily on the sanctification of the Creator. The language of the prayer and its performance characteristics reveal Tashlich as a transitional ritual with therapeutic characteristics to affirm significant choices and decisions in her life.

The Jewish justification that the congregant provides for polyamory allows her to validate it religiously and culturally. Indeed, the 'Jewish reason' as a reference for approving the practice reflects a religious consciousness in Israeli society. All of the above conditions caused the congregant to experience Tashlich ritual as a kind of personal confession of the romantic infidelity and monogamous commitment she had previously known.

Furthermore, she had encountered difficult value-based questions that reveal that the concepts of trust, commitment, and betrayal are changing social constructions (Cook 2005; Davidson 2002, p. 8; Labriola 2011). The congregant's experiences attest to this reflexive positioning more than anything in her statement, "the other woman I was". The polyamorous relationship challenges not only the social structure, but also the self-perception of the subject. Perhaps the prayer and the emotions it aroused in her became partners in deciphering this ethic.

5. Let Her Hear Her Voice: Women and the Shofar

The practice of hearing a shofar or blowing it instigated controversy between the sages, as it is not a *mitzvah* but a custom. Some of the sages did not consider the blowing of the shofar by women to be problematic if it was not in public, while others saw it as a serious offense. Pianko (1974, p. 62) concludes that the slow development of the woman's obligation to hear the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah illuminates how the *halakha* responds to the needs of women. This matter among a non-*halakhic* Jewish congregation becomes irrelevant because gender equality is an accepted value.

At the Israeli congregation, before blowing the shofar, the rabbi explained to the participants that the sound is an 'opportunity for self-clarification': "The shofar symbolizes salvation, redemption, release from the constraints of life, from the narrow and stuck place to the open place, where our problems are solved". In addition to the rabbi, two congregants—a man and a woman—stood near her and held shofars in their hands. To the sound of loud cheers, the female congregant posed a challenge to the male member standing next to her: a competition to see who could blow the shofar the longest. They blew their shofars until the inevitable shout of victory. I propose understanding this shofar-blowing competition as a symbolic political performance that challenges the patriarchal gender roles in the religious tradition. More so, since seeing women blow the shofar is not a common cultural scenario in the Israeli public space.

In general, the performance of women blowing the shofar in a public space contributes to the undermining of the masculine and patriarchal interpretations given to the custom, such as those that support the conception that women should be barred from any Jewish practice. Shofar blowing is a testament to the representation of ‘male worship’, that is, the marking of the sanctity of Isaac’s life as it is written in the prayer: “*Akeidat Yitzchak leZaro beRachamim tizkor*”, or “Remember the Akeidah of Yitzchak mercifully”. In addition, the shofar is a reminder of Mount Sinai, in which the whole Jewish nation gathered to accept the Torah and proclaimed “*naaseh v’nishma—we will do and we will hear*” (Hermann 1983, pp. 39, 42).

Indeed, who are the people of Israel? Is it a people of only men? Were women present at Mount Sinai? According to the feminist theologian Plaskow (1991), women are invisible. The Jewish memory is masculine, and therefore the moment of the giving of the Torah is constitutive as the first moment when separation between men and women was declared in the people of Israel. Plaskow suggests recognizing that women were present in the important historical moment, but that for the Torah, their presence is not significant or relevant. If so, how does this interpretation hold water the moment a woman is the one who blows the shofar, and not a man? Is this an opportunity to contextualize new gender meaning into the biblical narrative? For example, the Israeli community’s rabbi provided a new feminist spiritual sermon in 2015 for blowing the shofar:

“Sages tell us of another reason why we blow the shofar: and that is the whimpers of the two mothers; Hagar’s whimpers, which were a result of Sarah’s request, and Sarah’s whimpers, caused by her fear for her son’s life . . . However, the sages mentioned the cry of another mother. The cry of Sisera’s mother, the commander who fought the children of Israel, and was murdered by Yael. This mother also cried for her son who would not come home anymore. The sound of the shofar is not only to awaken us and to encourage us to accept the kingdom of God over us . . . The sound of the shofar also has a more feminine, quieter side, which echoes the pain of motherhood, which does not differentiate between enemy and lover, and reminds us that between opponent and lover [in Hebrew] there is only one letter, the letter *H*, which shortens the name of God. Sages really invite us to open all the openings in human body on this day, as Rabbi Chaim Vital writes, to open our ears, our mouths, our noses, our hearts, and we will get to stand right here, with ears pricked up to hear the shofar: trumpets that call us to awaken, to awaken our hearts.

By simply presenting this interpretation in the performance, the rabbi suggests recognizing the traditional custom (*tekiyah*) as a political performance, and not just another folkloristic choice for the ‘complete’ execution of Tashlich. The shofar, which is often identified as the object of male exhalation, now serves as a tool in the possession of the woman whose exhalation is a sound of pain that is equal to any pain, without any normative or ethical justification. It is a voice that advocates a moral message that erases the distinction between enemy and lover. Her political interpretation, based on Rabbi Chaim Vital’s philosophy, places the body as a social agent for changing social reality, and the shofar as a means of triggering an actual behavioral response. Her non-mainstream interpretation can be considered a queer act that gives a voice to marginal and excluded voices in the public discourse.

Another spiritual interpretation was given by Dian, one of the dominant members of the gay synagogue in New York, who has been blowing the shofar for 40 years. She stood along a Hudson River pier; her head covered by her rainbow *tallit* (prayer shawl). Her *tekiyah gedola* (long shofar sound) closed the Tashlich ritual. She shared in an interview that she does not define Tashlich or its shofar-blowing tradition as a queer act, but she does infuse spiritual meaning into the act of blowing the shofar in an open urban space:

“It’s [blowing the shofar] a form of spiritual communication directly with God. No rabbis, no words, and no buildings are needed or required; when sounding the shofar at the end of Tashlich, there is nothing between me and *HaShem* (God). I blow the shofar and it’s a direct line to God. This act connects me to my inner

self and to God. Unlike confession at Yom Kippur, when we hit our chest to declare and cleanse ourselves of our individual and communal sins, Tashlich is our own personal confession and provides us with a few moments of sacred time and space; it's just me and God".

While she insists that there is no political or gender aspect to her performance, during her interview she shared a personal disclosure; she shared a memory of gender-exclusion that demonstrates a patriarchal narrative in her childhood during the 1960s, when she was a member of her parents' Conservative synagogue in Queens, NY:

"When I was a young, a member of my parents' *shul* ('synagogue' in Yiddish), an old man sounded the shofar and I always feared that he might drop dead before he got the shofar sounds out. One year, my sister visited Israel and brought back a shofar for my younger brother; he kept it in his bedroom and forgot about it, but I didn't. And every day, when he was playing outside, I went into his bedroom and practiced. It took me forever to teach myself . . . When our old rabbi retired and moved to Israel and the *shul* hired a new rabbi who was younger and more progressive, I asked him if I could sound the shofar, and he refused. Years later, when I joined this synagogue, I saw and heard a woman sounding the shofar during the first Rosh Hashanah service I attended. There and then, I told myself, "Wake up and see the light!" At the end of services that year, I went to the leadership and said, "Next year—it's me" and I have enjoyed the *mitzvah* of sounding the shofar ever since". I went from not knowing how, to self-teaching and not being allowed to sound the shofar, to joining here and having the opportunity to perform this mitzvah year after year.

This description shows that the spiritual moment, a direct outcome of a connection with the elements of nature and the performance of the ritual outdoors, is also structured as a gendered experience and a political act, even if it was not clearly framed as such by the congregant. Her contemporary performative participation is a kind of compensation for those days in the past when her voice was silenced. The synagogue is perceived as a gender agency to empower gender equality in Jewish sanctity, and her role in the ceremony approved it de facto.

6. A Queer Glimpse of an Urban Religious Performance

Tashlich in the public sphere is a performance of cultural negotiation between the Jewish community and other social groups. In *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*, Taylor and Snowdon (2014) decipher how in 2001, a week after the attack on the World Trade Center, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), a secular Jewish organization, had performed a Tashlich ritual during that tense time. "We talked about friends who had died or narrowly escaped. We threw our fears into the Hudson River, along with the anti-Muslim racism we heard all around us and the more egregious sins of the US government and the mayor of NYC" (p. 31).

I thought to myself how the space blends with Jewish tradition that is an integral part of the urban landscape of NYC. This ritual, which has emerged as an historical controversial dialogue between different groups among Jewish communities, is now looked upon in a harmonious manner and has become integrated with the environment of the city. Following the rabbinical intern's instructions, the congregants began to scatter along Pier 64. Each person found a place to stand, and concentrating on the moment by themselves, threw into the water pieces of bread or seeds that represented their various sins. Several curious people stood around and watched this unusual performance. The seagulls that ate the pieces of bread thrown into the river proved how much the bread was an opportunity to allow life and existence for something else⁷.

Dina, the shofar-blowing congregant, challenged the ontological meaning of the sacredness by understanding the holy as a practice that people do:

“Usually, most of our rituals happen inside a synagogue or the home, but Tashlich is always held outdoors, in nature; and people, especially those of us living in urban cities, are always seeking to be in nature . . . Where we hold Tashlich is ‘The Place’ (*HaMakom*) and God is there. So, if another name for God is *HaMakom*, and the place of Tashlich is the Hudson River, then the Hudson becomes a holy place. Every place where Jewish rituals are performed is a holy place, whether it’s inside a synagogue or along the Hudson River. What makes it holy is our *kavannah* (purpose) for gathering there: the performance of Tashlich ritual”.

Unlike Otto (1958, p. 12)⁸, who introduces the word ‘numinous’ to indicate the state of mind that is reflected in the feelings of mystery and energy in the presence of the sacred, Dina suggests validating the ‘numinous’ also in non-holy places. The sacredness is embodied in the collective performance and not by unique reference to space, object, and notions. In addition, she drew a connection between the phenomenological experiences of being out of the queer closet and being out of the Jewish closet, in different times and spaces:

“Because Tashlich is always held in the open and we are an LGBTQ synagogue gathering in the open, that’s maybe another perspective for thinking about this ritual. As members of NYC’s LGBTQ synagogue, we no longer must hide ourselves. In Europe, during the World War II era, Jews had to hide; they couldn’t light candles in their homes, attend synagogue or sound the shofar. Sometimes, we hear stories of some brave soul who smuggled a shofar into a ghetto or concentration camp and sounded a shofar during Rosh Hashanah, risking his and the lives of all who heard the sounds—an act of ‘Jewish heroism’. To perform Tashlich, one needs to find a public space where you feel comfortable and safe, something not always easy to do for Jews—or members of the LGBTQ+ community”.

In her reference, Dina highlights the connection between this urban space and the LGBTQ community. Looking back on the queer history of New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to Chisholm (2005), the segregation of gay men in Greenwich Village created a fertile environment for the appropriation of the decayed piers along the Hudson River as arenas for sexual and social interaction. The rabbinical intern provided an interpretation that demonstrates how Tashlich supports LGBTQ Jewish experiences, but he did not connect the practice to the space:

“The location is not more than a random decision. Everything one does outside in NYC is, by nature, public . . . There are queer interpretations of Tashlich, like how queer people need to leave behind or cast-off what society expected them to be (heterosexual, married, with children) and instead form their own relationships and networks of chosen family. I also feel there is something about letting go of shame that could be a beautiful queer ritual, but this is reading into something we did not intend . . . I think all people, not just queer people, confess things to themselves . . . Queer people are just expected to share it more because we live in a homophobic society. I think this gives queer people a certain kind of emotional intelligence, actually, and makes moving through Jewish ritual an extension of our self-knowledge”.

The rabbinical intern stated that although there is no clear intention to title Tashlich as queer, it may be a ritual that signifies symbolic transitions in the lives of LGBTQ people. From concealment to appreciation, experiences of shame and guilt transform into experiences of pride and connection to Jewish tradition. In addition, he implies that the otherness and alienation that the LGBTQ people traditionally particularly feel in religious communities and in the general society are outcomes of LGBTQphobic responses. Therefore, this religious performance is a sort of manifestation of gender acceptance and sexual recognition.

Moreover, the public performance does not only illuminate new contemporary tendencies in Jewish ritualization, but it also exposes global political intersections. Karin, one of the congregants I spoke to, had been participating in the services for almost 10 years. She has lived in NYC for almost 20 years and her exposure to the gay synagogue is compensa-

tion for her unaffiliated Jewish socialization. She considers the importance of conducting the ritual in the open urban space, not only to connect to herself and to her friends in the community after a year of pandemic restrictions, but also as a statement to express her pro-Israeli agenda:

“The ritual caused me to feel connected to myself and to my lovely congregation. I really miss people whom I haven’t seen because of the pandemic. The fact that we’re here today, together, and not on Zoom—it’s a miracle. For me as a Jewish gay woman, this moment is so powerful. Yes, you can say that ‘it’s Manhattan, so being gay and Jewish is the norm here’. But we know that in fact that’s not totally true. The BDS movement, particularly in queer spaces, is not something rare. BDS is antisemitism, I do not separate between anti-Israel and the ‘classical’ antisemitism. So, being here today, as a gay Jewish community, it’s also a support announcement for Israel—not only in our synagogue, but also here, where everyone can see that being gay does not necessary mean being anti-Israel”.

For her, the communal Tashlich is a queer Jewish performance in the urban space, which publicity demonstrates the intersection between sexuality, gender, and religion. However, it is an act to support Israel as well, especially when it comes to perceiving the gay community as BDS supporters. In recent years, International BDS⁹ organizations and other Queer NGOs fight against the Israeli Occupation (Garmon 2010). For example, Somerson (2010) documented how, during the High Holy Days in 2006, the Seattle chapter of the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) advocated for an end to Israeli occupation by performing a Tashlich ceremony to raise awareness of the complicated intersection of antisemitism and anti-Occupation work. “On a beautiful sunny day near Lake Washington, we led a Tashlich *L’Tzedek*—a social justice casting-off ceremony. We decided to cast off the sins of the Occupation, naming each sin as we threw our rocks into the lake” (p. 73).

Consequently, LGBTQ Jews perhaps do not feel comfortable expressing both of their identities in these spaces and sometimes their solidarity with Israel is not recognized (Fox 2019). Her words reflect that queer spaces, perhaps, are not safe spaces for all LGBTQ identities and also exclude other categories such as ethnicity, race or religion (Manalansan 2003; Petzen 2004)¹⁰. Theoretically, this response shows the collapse of queer intersectionality into an arena of armed conflict that cannot really provide a sense of belonging for all LGBTQ people. This is a moment that proves that the intersectionality becomes obsolete, as it shatters the expected solidarity from the queer community and reveals that the queer Jewish community is situated in a complicated socio-political positionality.

In the US, some queer spaces are associated with anti-Israel rhetoric, and in Israel, queerphobic responses (especially in religious spaces) still exist. Every year, when thousands of gay tourists come to Tel Aviv, the municipality offers cultural, health, and social services for the community (Misgav 2016; Hartal and Sasson-Levy 2017). The fact that some of the Reform congregants in Tel Aviv are LGBTQ and that the congregation was led by a queer butch rabbi demonstrates the city’s impact on the local religious market. However, reality is not quite so rosy and LGBTQphobic events happen and are published in the news. In September of 2015, the Tel Aviv congregation performed Tashlich and discovered that the safe zone is not truly a sterile and neutral area, as Gali, a lesbian woman congregant recalls:

“Every year we conduct Tashlich in front of the fountain that is just outside the congregation structure. Everything outside is so beautiful and pastoral. We sang songs, threw some bread into the fountain, and each person placed themselves in a corner and prayed. Toward the end, two young ladies watched us by the fence. When I approached them, they were interested in what we were doing and asked questions about our (male) rabbi. I told them it was a female rabbi and they were surprised and said, ‘I’m sorry that I asked’. I told her, ‘It’s OK, it’s better than not asking’. Then, we conversed about the gay community afterwards.

It's evident that going outside into the public space meant everything to me. It is our coming out of the closet. As a lesbian, it's very essential for our lesbian presence, even in Tel Aviv—the 'paradise' of the gay community. Even in the local LGBTQ community, butch lesbians are not mainstream, and gays have a big problem with their visibility".

Conducting the festive holiday outside created a spontaneous encounter with interested responses among Israeli publics (Ben-Lulu 2021b; Ben-Lulu and Feldman 2022). Gali emphasized the importance of the visibility of lesbian women in the public sphere to stimulate conversation on sexuality and gender performances. Thus, the public ritual exposes the public not only to Reform Judaism, but also to a butch lesbian performance, which is too often excluded and criticized even among LGBTQ people (Eves 2004). Thus, Reform congregations' public rituals fight against both internal and external LGBTQphobia. The recent descriptions demonstrate that Israeli discourse is embodied by heteronormative and homonationalistic values. Pinkwashing propaganda that shows Tel Aviv as a rare haven in the Middle East is disputed by LGBTQphobic responses, particularly by those who support the Jewish Orthodox perceptions in the Israeli public sphere.

7. Discussion: Gendering and Queering Tashlich

This study shows how Tashlich ritual creates social environments through communal participation that permit the congregants to be freely and openly gay Jews in the urban space of Tel Aviv and NYC. By suggesting different kinds of liturgical texts, changing the ritual's traditional structure and symbols, creating gender and queer interpretations for the custom, and offering new roles and meaning for the urban space, the practice contributes to the participants' sense of belonging to the Jewish tradition. LGBTQ participation in the custom shows how changes and new interpretations of the ritual are conducted on the structure itself. Their participation demonstrates engaging with inclusion practices that uphold normativity and challenge previous research that focuses on queer people attempting to reinterpret and expand tradition to establish inclusive Judaism (Ben-Lulu 2021c; Crasnow 2017).

Tashlich is considered a communal ritual but, de facto, the fluid structure of the custom in liberal Jewish communities constructs the ritual as a moment of the gendered self. This fluidity can be seen in the language and renewal of the traditional text, its content, and performative acts such as shofar blowing. The ritual is not necessarily only focused on God or on the other, but rather focuses on the self. By using the liturgical text, material objects, and voice, the individual breaks these sensory components, and re-constructs and expresses their religious, gender, and sexual identities and performances.

Unlike the Catholic ritual of confession where the individual describes his own recent sins to a priest—a performance which causes diverse self-presentation formulations (Baumeister and Hutton 1987)—in Judaism there is no player but the worshipper themselves. I conclude that gendering and queering Tashlich strengthens its individualistic aspect, particularly among women and LGBTQ people who sometimes feel guilt and shame in different gender and sexual experiences. Therefore, I suggest that the tendency of subjectivization, which is, in particular, visible in its emphasis on (personal) experience, is not only a character of contemporary spirituality (Versteeg and Roeland 2011), but is also grounded in liberal religious communities.

However, Tashlich is not only an individual moment, but also a political one. The rituals are constructed as an ideological performance that transcends boundaries, spaces, and time of execution, and as a political act signaling the desire of women to be heard and to remove any doubt as to permission of participation in the ritual. Queering and gendering Tashlich demonstrates Fishman's argument that "the religion must be capable of cultivating emotional and rational individualism, as well as of sustaining and legitimating the communal structure as both an extension of psychic unity and an empirical collectivity in its own right" (Fishman 1987, p. 782).

Queering and gendering Tashlich, performed by women, is an attempt to strengthen their place in the religious arena and in the social order. The ceremonial structure is open and subject to changes and additions, which contain new liturgical texts and practices. The community leaders acknowledge the equal place of community members in conducting the ceremony and allow them to experience blowing the shofar, providing a gender-spiritual interpretation of this practice.

The Israeli Congregation's Tashlich ritual did not take place in a foreign public space or on a crowded beach, but near a fountain located in the courtyard of the building where the community holds its prayers. Perhaps this provided members of the community with a sense of comfort in performing gestures that could be construed as an 'exception' in another public space, such as the blowing of a shofar by women. The blowing of the shofar in the Reform congregation by women is not only a folkloristic practice for establishing the atmosphere of Tishrei holidays; it is a political practice that sanctifies the value of gender equality.

The performance of Tashlich in the congregations I visited supported the dissolution of traditional heteronormative perceptions that shape not only the religious field, but also the gender field. The view of LGBTQ people practicing a Jewish ritual in the public sphere, be it Diasporic or ethno-national, and lesbian women who blow the shofar in the public sphere, have different radical meanings: In Israel, this performance challenges Orthodox perceptions; in the US it might be prompting calls of antisemitism/anti-Israel and weakening the sense of belonging among LGBTQ Jews to the non-Jewish queer community. As both spaces promote pluralistic Jewish and queer visibility, I suggest a parallel between these two communities.

In the context of religious practice that is performed outside, space is also read as an urban place, such as these two Jewish congregations—one of them in Diasporic space, and one of them in the ethno-national space. The space influences not only LGBTQ experiences of recognition, but also Jewish presence in the public sphere. Thus, I suggest a parallel between these two communities. As the descriptions above show, I argue that self, community, and space are inherent categories in the inquiry of Jewish and LGBTQ communities. This typology is grounded in the ethnographic analysis of women and LGBTQ people participating in the ritual of atonement. In this ethnographic inquiry, I conclude that sexual, gender, and religious identities are affiliated with community practices since these communities are a safe space, empowering their otherness and respecting their values.

According to [Myslik \(1996\)](#), queer space has emotional, cultural, and important symbolic and political power over a place that makes one feel safe in that place: "Queer spaces such as San Francisco are for gay people more akin to what Jerusalem is for Jews: most of us live somewhere else, fewer of us make the pilgrimage than in the past, our political power has moved elsewhere, but the cultural and emotional significance of the people cannot be overestimated" (p. 167). The congregants' perceptions showed how space and place compel ideas around which to develop the political nation of citizenship, peoplehood, and belonging.

Therefore, following previous researchers that have mapped the historically resonant intersections between Jewishness and queerness, between homophobia and antisemitism, and between queer theory and theorizations of Jewishness ([Boyarin et al. 2003](#)), I conclude that Tashlich ritual expresses how LGBTQ Jews illuminate the marginalization of Jews in queer spaces. Although Jewish American identity is often still popularly understood to be synonymous with whiteness and its privileges ([Crasnow 2020](#), p. 1032), it has still been criticized for inherent solidarity with Israel, even in queer communications. [Magelssen \(2015\)](#) reminds us that "the question of how we perceive the boundaries between the 'religious' and the 'public' seems perpetually timely, particularly in, say, Western secularized democratic nations" (p. 67). Following his argument, my goal was not only to inquire about the relationship between Judaism and the public sphere, but also the ways each one constitutes, troubles, and blurs with the other. In addition, following [Giordan \(2011\)](#),

p. 79) who claims that “the relation between religion and politics can play out in the acknowledgement, negotiation, and negation of places of prayer”, (p. 79) I would like to add that this expression is not only relevant regarding formal and institutional places, but also spaces of religious performance, such as urban places. Struggling for gender equality in religious communities not only happens in the prayer house (Nyhagen 2019) or in private spaces (Shahar 2018), but also in the public sphere, and thus, challenges the binary between public space and the communal one.

In conclusion, Tashlich ritual shows how contemporary Jewish denominations demarcate and revise their boundaries, as demonstrated in the cases above. The ritual also exemplifies ways in which the religious and the public are ‘imbricated’ in one another. Tashlich is not only an educational ritual to develop Jewish habitus and maintain inclusive socialization (Roso 2013), or a practice to raise awareness of global climate change and global warming¹¹. I conclude that queering and gendering Tashlich is an attempt to assimilate liberal values in Jewish tradition, a resistance performance against patriarchal values, and supports the LGBTQ agenda.

Funding: A training research grant—part of this comparative research (my fieldwork at New York) was supported by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Israel.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Ariel University (AU-SOC-EBL-20220823).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Orit Avishai and Magda Teter and the Center for Jewish Studies at Fordham University for hosting me.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Rosh Hashanah is observed on the first day of Tishrei and has a different position since it signals the beginning of the Jewish year. However, there is an argument regarding the holiday’s timing. Although Rosh Hashanah is a holiday from the Torah, it is not mentioned as the beginning of a new year, while the Torah explicitly states that the first calendar month is Nissan, and that Tishrei is the seventh.
- ² In addition, Gussin (1972) argues that for the Jewish community in India, Tashlich’s popularity may be ascribed to its resemblance to Hindu purification rites, whereby devotees physically and symbolically wash away their sins in a river. The notion of self-purification through various measures involving oil, water, or other liquids is a common theme in virtually all faiths. Resemblances found between Hindus and Jews should not be taken as proof of religious assimilation into Hinduism or other faiths that exhibit similar ritual-cleansing acts.
- ³ [https://www.yeshiva.org.il/wiki/index.php/%D7%93%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%99:%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9A_%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9D_\(Zvi_Ryzman\)](https://www.yeshiva.org.il/wiki/index.php/%D7%93%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%99:%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9A_%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9D_(Zvi_Ryzman)) (accessed on 23 September 2021).
- ⁴ <https://www.hashikma-rishon.co.il/news/42536> (accessed on 19 July 2022).
- ⁵ Due to the ethical circumstances that characterize the fieldwork, the names of the communities are not mentioned in this article, according to the approval of the Ethics Committee for Non-Medical Studies, Ariel University.
- ⁶ My God and God of all generations
Forgive all my transgressions
And cast to the depths of the sea
All my misdeeds
Please God
Just as bread dissolves in water
dissolve the aches and failures
Of the passing year
Just as water flows and goes
Give me the strength
to be renewed
In your world
Each and every day
With the greatness of your compassion
Grant me longevity
A life of peace
A life of goodness, a life of grace
A life of proper livelihood
A life without shame or disgrace
A life of prosperity and respect
for your work
A life filled with love of Torah
and awe
A life fulfilling the loving wishes
of my heart
And remember me unto life,
King who delights in life
For your sake, God of life
Blessed are you Lord
who listens to prayers
- ⁷ There is a halakhic discussion about throwing crumbs to the fish on a holiday, as this is a practice that is forbidden. There are ultra-Orthodox communities that still strongly oppose this practice today.
- ⁸ Otto’s understanding of the holy was that the identification with a religious object can invoke varied feelings or expressions, such as passion, excitement, vitality, and impetus.
- ⁹ The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is a Palestinian-led movement promoting sanctions against Israel.

- ¹⁰ Portrayed as a space of tolerance and acceptance, queer space is imagined to be safe (David et al. 2018, p. 2). However, in some cases, queer spaces reproduce power relations, recreating hierarchies and exclusion (Brown et al. 2007; Oswin 2013). The metaphor of safe queer spaces plays a major role in constructing LGBT spaces (Hanhardt 2013).
- ¹¹ For more information see “Reverse Tashlich”, an inexpensive, easy, and positive program that can raise awareness about the environment among your students, congregants, and community. <https://www.repairthesea.org/rt-teams> (accessed on 25 September 2021).

References

- Adler, Rachel. 1998. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Anson, Ofra, and Jon Anson. 1997. Surviving the holidays: Gender differences in mortality in the context of three Moslem holidays. *Sex Roles* 37: 381–99. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Avishai, Orit. 2020. Religious queer people beyond identity conflict: Lessons from orthodox LGBT Jews in Israel. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59: 360–78. [CrossRef]
- Baumeister, Roy F., and Debra G. Hutton. 1987. Self-presentation theory: Self-construction and audience pleasing. In *Theories of Group Behavior*. New York: Springer, pp. 71–87.
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2021a. “Teach Your Daughters to Wail and One Another to Lament”: Jewish Prayers and Liturgical Texts for Female Victims of Sexual Assault. *Open Theology* 7: 631–53. [CrossRef]
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2021b. Who has the right to the city? Reform Jewish rituals of gender-religious resistance in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. *Gender, Place & Culture* 29: 1251–1273.
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2021c. “Who will say Kaddish for me”? The American Reform Jewish response to HIV/AIDS. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 20: 70–94. [CrossRef]
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2021d. “Let Us Bless the Twilight”: Intersectionality of Traditional Jewish Ritual and Queer Pride in a Reform Congregation in Israel. *Journal of Homosexuality* 68: 23–46. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar. 2022. The sacred scroll and the researcher’s body: An autoethnography of Reform Jewish ritual. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 37: 299–315. [CrossRef]
- Ben-Lulu, Elazar, and Jackie Feldman. 2022. Reforming the Israeli–Arab conflict? Interreligious hospitality in Jaffa and its discontents. *Social Compass* 69: 3–21. [CrossRef]
- Berg, Ulla D. 2008. Practical Challenges of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Anthropology News* 49: 15–15. [CrossRef]
- Boyarin, Daniel, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, eds. 2003. *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brown, Gavin, Kath Browne, and Jason Lim. 2007. Introduction, or why have a book on geographies of sexualities? In *Geographies of Sexualities*. Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 1–18.
- Browne, Kath, and Catherine J. Nash. 2010. *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- Chisholm, Dianne. 2005. *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cohen, Ayelet. 2014. *Changing Lives, Making History: Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. The First Forty Years*. New York: Congregation Beit Simchat Torah.
- Cook, Elaine. 2005. Commitment in Polyamorous Relationships. Master’s thesis, Regis University, Denver, CO, USA.
- Crasnow, Sharon J. 2017. On transition: Normative Judaism and trans innovation. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 32: 403–15. [CrossRef]
- Crasnow, Sharon J. 2020. “I Want to Look Transgender”: Anti-Assimilation, Gender Self-Determination, and Confronting White Supremacy in the Creation of a Just Judaism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88: 1026–48. [CrossRef]
- David, Yossi, Gilly Hartal, and Lital Pascar. 2018. The Right to Jerusalem: The Danger of Queer Safe Spaces. *Borderlands* 17: 1.
- Davidson, Joy. 2002. Working with polyamorous clients in the clinical setting. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 5: 465.
- Drinkwater, Gregg. 2019. Creating an embodied queer Judaism: Liturgy, ritual and sexuality at San Francisco’s Congregation Sha’ar Zahav, 1977–1987. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 18: 177–193. [CrossRef]
- Eger, Denise L. 2020. *Mishkan Ga’avah: Where Pride Dwells*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press.
- Eves, Alison. 2004. Queer theory, butch/femme identities and lesbian space. *Sexualities* 7: 480–96. [CrossRef]
- Fader, Ayala. 2007. Reflections on queen Esther: The politics of Jewish ethnography. *Contemporary Jewry* 27: 112–36. [CrossRef]
- Falk, Marcia. 2014. *The Days between: Blessings, Poems, and Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press.
- Fedele, Anna, and Kim Knibbe, eds. 2013. *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality: Ethnographic Approaches*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Feldman, Jackie. 2016. *A Jewish Guide in the Holy Land: How Christian Pilgrims Made Me Israeli*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fishman, Aryei. 1987. Religion and communal life in an evolutionary-functional perspective: The orthodox kibbutz-zim. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29: 763–86. [CrossRef]
- Fox, Peter. 2019. Being Gay Used to Be Terrifying. Being Jewish was Easy. Now It’s the Opposite. Available online: <https://forward.com/opinion/423573/growing-up-being-gay-was-terrifying-but-being-jewish-was-easy-now-its-the/> (accessed on 19 July 2022).
- Frankel, Ellen, and Betsy Platkin Teutsch. 1992. *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Garmon, Savannah. 2010. Queers Against Israeli Apartheid refuse to be silenced. *Turning the Tide* 23: 8.
- Giordan, Giuseppe. 2011. Toward a sociology of prayer. In *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 77–88.
- Goodman, Philip, ed. 1970. *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Gussin, Carl Mark. 1972. *The Bene Israel of India: Politics, Religions, and Systemic Change*. New York: Syracuse University.
- Guzmen-Carmeli, Shlomo. 2020. Texts as Places, Texts as Mirrors: Anthropology of Judaisms and Jewish Textuality. *Contemporary Jewry* 40: 471–92. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hanhardt, Christina B. 2013. *Safe space: Gay neighborhood history and the politics of violence*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hartal, Gilly, and Orna Sasson-Levy. 2017. Being [in] the center: Sexual citizenship and homonationalism at Tel Aviv's Gay-Center. *Sexualities* 20: 738–61. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hermann, Bennett M. 1983. *Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year*. Chicago: CCAR Press.
- Kaplan, Dana, and Rachel Werczberger. 2017. Jewish New Age and the middle class: Jewish identity politics in Israel under neoliberalism. *Sociology* 51: 575–91. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Katz, Maya Balakirsky. 2009. Trademarks of faith: "Chabad and Chanukah in America". *Modern Judaism* 29: 239–67. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kozodoy, Ruth. 1997. *The Book of Jewish Holidays*. Millburn: Behrman House, Inc.
- Labriola, Kathy. 2011. *Love in Abundance: A Counselor's Advice on Open Relationships*. Gardena: SCB Distributors.
- Lewin, Ellen, William L. Leap, and William Leap, eds. 1996. *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Lisitsa, Alona, Dalia Marx, Maya Leibovich, and Tamar Duvdevani, eds. 2011. *Parashat Hamayim: Immersion in Water as an Opportunity for Renewal and Spiritual Growth*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.
- Magelssen, Scott. 2015. Performing Religion in Public. *Ecumenica* 8: 67. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Manalansan, Martin F., IV. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95–117. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Milligan, Amy K. 2013. Colours of the Jewish rainbow: A study of homosexual Jewish men and yarmulkes. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12: 71–89. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Milligan, Amy K. 2014. Expanding sisterhood: Jewish lesbians and externalizations of Jewishness. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 18: 437–55. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Misgav, Chen. 2016. Gay-riatics: Spatial politics and activism of gay seniors in Tel-Aviv's gay community center. *Gender, Place & Culture* 23: 1519–34.
- Myslik, Wayne D. 1996. Renegotiating the social/sexual identities of places—Gay communities as safe havens or sites of resistance? In *Bodyspace—Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. Edited by Nancy Duncan. New York: Routledge, pp. 155–68.
- Needel, Yale M. 2008. Rethinking "Sephardic": Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Observances among the Jews of Bombay. *Shofar* 26: 59–80. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Nyhamen, Line. 2019. Mosques as gendered spaces: The complexity of women's compliance with, and resistance to, dominant gender norms, and the importance of male allies. *Religions* 10: 321. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Otto, Rudolf. 1958. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oswin, Natalie. 2013. Geographies of sexualities: The cultural turn and after. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*. Edited by Johnson Nuala Christina, Richard H. Schein and Jamie Winders. Chichester: Wiley, pp. 105–117.
- Pianko, Arlene. 1974. Women and the Shofar. *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 14: 53–62.
- Plaskow, Judith. 1991. *Standing again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Petzen, Jennifer. 2004. Home or homelike? Turkish queers manage space in Berlin. *Space and Culture* 7: 20–32. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Roso, Calvin G. 2013. Culture and character education in a Jewish day school: A case study of life and experience. *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22: 30–51. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Santos, Ana Cristina. 2019. One at a time: LGBTQ polyamory and relational citizenship in the 21st century. *Sociological Research Online* 24: 709–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sarason, Rabbi Richard. 2018. *Divrei Mishkan T'filah: Delving into the Siddur*. Chicago: CCAR press.
- Schwartz, Shira. 2013. Performing Jewish Sexuality: Mikveh Spaces in Orthodox Jewish Publics. In *Performing Religion in Public*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 237–55.
- Shahar, Rivka Neriya-Ben. 2018. The amen meal: Jewish women experience lived religion through a new ritual. *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 33: 158–76.
- Sherbondy, Maureen A. 2003. Tashlich. *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 36: 144–44.
- Shokeid, Moshe. 2002. *A Gay Synagogue in New York*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shoham, Hizky. 2017. *Israel celebrates: Jewish holidays and civic culture in Israel*. Leiden: Brill.
- Slee, Nicola. 2012. Visualizing, conceptualizing, imagining and praying the Christa: In search of her risen forms. *Feminist Theology* 21: 71–90. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Somerson, Wendy Elisheva. 2010. The Intersection of Anti-Occupation and Queer Jewish Organizing. *Tikkun* 25: 58–73. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sperber, Daniel. 1990. *Israel Traditions: Sources and Roots*. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook.

- Stone, Earl Stanley. 1939. *Tashlich: A Chronological Arrangement of Rabbinical Utterances on the Rite from Early Talmudic Sources Up to the Present Day*. Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY, USA.
- Taylor, Yvette, and Ria Snowdon, eds. 2014. *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*. New York: Routledge.
- Versteeg, Peter G. A., and Johan Roeland. 2011. Contemporary spirituality and the making of religious experience: Studying the social in an individualized religiosity. *Fieldwork in Religion* 6: 120–33. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wanless, Claire. 2021. *Individualized Religion: Practitioners and Their Communities*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Werczberger, Rachel. 2017. *Jews in the Age of Authenticity. Jewish Spiritual Renewal in Israel*. New York: Peter Lang, p. 180.
- Werczberger, Rachel. 2021. The making of Jewish authenticity: The hybrid discourse of authenticity of New Age Judaism and the complexities of religious individualization. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 50: 50–66. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wilcox, Melissa M. 2009. *Queer Women and Religious Individualism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.