

Exploring Judaism

Why You Should Host a Pride Shabbat



Recently, I was shopping at the local kosher market when a young man in his 20s came up to me with a big smile and said, “You don’t remember me, do you?”

Not having any idea who this young man was, but not wanting to embarrass him (or myself!), I stood there for a moment smiling, and then with a sheepish look on my face, apologized and admitted that I didn’t know who he was. He then said, “Your wife was one of my teachers... I mean your ex-wife.”

Once he told me his name, I was able to place him in the context of my synagogue community. He then proceeded to proudly introduce me to his boyfriend who was standing next to him, and who was obviously enjoying this interaction.

The congregation I belong to, and that this young man grew up in, is a mid-sized Conservative congregation in New England. It has been my home congregation for 22 years, most of the lifespan of this young man, and although my family and I joined that congregation 22 years ago, until very recently, I don’t remember the question of how welcoming we are to LGBTQ folks ever really being openly discussed.

Well... I guess that’s not completely true. When we first moved to town and submitted a membership application to the synagogue back in the Fall of 2000, we created quite a stir, since my wife and I had the chutzpah to apply for a family membership for us and our infant son.

A few days after submitting that application, I received a call from the synagogue's executive director, who apologetically told me that she couldn't accept our application to join as a family, but it would be fine if my wife and I joined as two separate individuals.

What followed was a months-long process led by the rabbi, to educate the community and change the bylaws to allow us to join as a family.

Fast forward to today, and that very same congregation is planning its first ever Pride Shabbat to recognize and celebrate LGBTQ members of our community, and will proudly display a Pride flag in front of the building.

When I mentioned that to the 20-something-year-old gay man in the kosher market, his eyes lit up.

When I told him of other young adults who grew up in the congregation and identify as [LGBTQ](#), he literally jumped up and down. I invited him to join us for Pride Shabbat and bring his boyfriend, and I think they may actually do just that. I have no doubt that 15-minute interaction in a local market made this guy's day.

When people ask you why your synagogue should host a Pride Shabbat, I hope you will think about this young man.

I hope you will think about what it must have been like for him, and others like him, to grow up in a congregation that wouldn't allow a same-sex couple to join as a family, and how amazing it must feel to see a Pride flag in front of that congregation today, along with a message welcoming everyone to celebrate Pride Shabbat.

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This article was written by Aimee Close when she was in her role as the Director of Synagogue Leadership & Innovation at USCJ, working with congregations across North America in the areas of strategic planning and leadership development. In that role, Aimee guided BHBE's Strategic Plan, working closely with Lia Goldfarb and Cynthia Lerner.

Aimee has spent her career working in various areas of Jewish communal life, including synagogues, JCCs, and national Jewish organizations. After spending the last eleven years doing strategic planning and leadership training for synagogues, Aimee now works for Prizmah: Center

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