Kehilat Hadar Gender-Inclusive Ritual Guidelines

May 2018 | Iyar 5778

Introduction

Kehilat Hadar is an independent, egalitarian community that meets for Shabbat and holidays on New York City's Upper West Side. We are committed to spirited traditional services, lay leadership, and a warm and welcoming environment. Some of our community members and guests at our services use gender-neutral pronouns in English and/or Hebrew.[1]

Hebrew is a gendered language, and before implementing these guidelines, we hadn't had a policy about how to modify the traditional text to offer honors (such as an aliyah, hagbah, and gelilah) without using masculine or feminine pronouns, as there is no gender-neutral equivalent to they/them in Hebrew.

As part of an ongoing commitment to increasing the inclusiveness of our community's egalitarianism, we began a process of researching gender-neutral language for ritual honors. Below, we share our new guidelines on providing honorees with three options for how to be called up, using either masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral language. We hope these new guidelines will be an important step towards the goal of making Kehilat Hadar a fully welcoming space to all. We've chosen to begin with this focus on ritual inclusion, and we welcome a continued conversation about additional inclusion initiatives. Please contact us if you'd like to share ideas or continue the conversation.

Our gender-inclusive ritual guidelines were inspired by the All Gender Torah Service Liturgy prepared by Rabbi Guy Austrian at the Fort Tryon Jewish Center in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan and was guided by our *mara d'atrah* (halachic advisor) Rabbi Ethan Tucker. Before sharing our plan with the community for feedback, we shared an earlier draft of these guidelines with specific members of our community who plan to use this gender-neutral language and with others experienced in developing LGBTQ inclusion training. We also shared the draft with our team of shamashim (ritual coordinators), who are charged with putting the guidelines into practice at our services.

Values and Principles

In developing these guidelines we seek to affirm and enact the following values in our community:

- Respect for each individual's gender identity and the way in which they'd like to be named in public
- Inclusion of participants and guests in ritual aspects of our services, both as individuals and as members of a couple or family
- Preservation of the existing gendered Hebrew language options with the addition of a neutral option
- Ease and fluidity of implementation by the shamashim

[1] For example, people who are non-binary and/or genderqueer "experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer." (This definition and many others can be found at Refinery29's Gender Nation Glossary.)

Language

1. Calling up a person for an aliyah, and other situations where a person's name is called

FEMININE

תַּעֲמֹד ____ בַּת ____, שְׁלִישִׁית	Ta'amod ___ bat ___, shelishit

Let _name_ daughter of _parent(s)_ stand *(ta'amod)*, the third [person to be called] *(shelishit)*.

NEUTRAL

נָא לַעֲמֹד____ מִבֵּית ____, לַעֲלִיָּה הַשְּׁלִישִׁית	Na la'amod ___ mibeit ___ la'aliyah hashelishit

Please stand, _name_ from the house of _parent(s)_ for the third aliyah.

MASCULINE

יַעֲמֹד ____ בֶּן ____, שְׁלִישִׁי	Ya'amod ___ ben ___, shelishi

Let _name_ son of _parent(s)_ stand *(ya'amod)*, the third [person to be called] *(shelishi)*.

For the gender-neutral option, we use the infinitive *na la'amod* which is not gendered, rather than a masculine or feminine gendered verb. Within the person's name, we use neutral *mibeit* rather than the gendered *ben* or *bat*. If the person having the aliyah prefers *mimishphachat*, *l'veit*, or another term to refer to their family instead of *mibiet*, we will use the term that the individual provides.

2. Calling up a child of a Kohen, before their name

FEMININE

בַּת כֹּהֵן קִרְבִי	Bat kohen kirvi

Daughter of a kohen, approach *(kirvi)*

NEUTRAL

N/A (do not say "*kohen kerav*")

MASCULINE

כֹּהֵן קְרַב	Kohen kerav

Kohen, approach *(kerav)*

The phrase *kohen kerav* is a reference to Leviticus 9:7, which says "Then Moses said to Aaron: Approach *(kerav)*..." It was modified for female children of Kohanim when they started to be called up for this aliyah, but it is not required and therefore the simplest change for the gender-neutral option is to skip the phrase.

3. Maftir aliyah, after their name

FEMININE

מַפְטִירָה	Maftirah

The one who will read the Haftarah *(maftirah)*

NEUTRAL

לִקְרִיאַת הַהַפְטָרָה	Likriyat hahaftarah

For the reading of the Haftarah

MASCULINE

מַפְטִיר	Maftir

The one who will read the Haftarah *(maftir)*

4. Hagbah and Gelilah

FEMININE/FEMININE

תַּעֲמֹדְנָה הַמַּגְבַּהַת וְהַגּוֹלֶלֶת	Ta'amodnah hamagbahat v'hagolelet

Stand *(ta'amodnah)* the lifter *(magbahat)* and the wrapper *(golelet)*

FEMININE/MASCULINE

תַּעֲמֹד הַמַּגְבַּהַת, יַעֲמֹד הַגּוֹלֵל	Ta'amod hamagbahat, ya'amod hagolel

Stand *(ta'amod)* the lifter *(magbahat)*, stand *(ya'amod)* the wrapper *(golel)*

NEUTRAL

נָא לַעֲמֹד לְהַגְבָּהַת הַתּוֹרָה וְלִגְלִילַת הַתּוֹרָה	Na la'amod l'hagbahat haTorah v'li'glilgat haTorah

Please stand *(na la'amod)* for the lifting of the Torah and for the wrapping of the Torah
[The neutral language is to be used when either or both honorees use gender-neutral language.]

MASCULINE/FEMININE

יַעֲמֹד הַמַּגְבִּיהַּ, תַּעֲמֹד הַגּוֹלֶלֶת	Ya'amod hamagbiah, ta'amod hagolelet

Stand *(ya'amod)* the lifter *(magbiah)*, stand *(ta'amod)* the wrapper *(golelet)*

MASCULINE/MASCULINE

יַעַמְדוּ הַמַּגְבִּיהַּ וְהַגּוֹלֵל	Ya'amdu hamagbiah v'hagolel

Stand *(ya'amdu)* the lifter *(magbiah)* and the wrapper *(golel)*

5. Divrei Torah

ALL

We will now hear a d'var Torah from __name__.

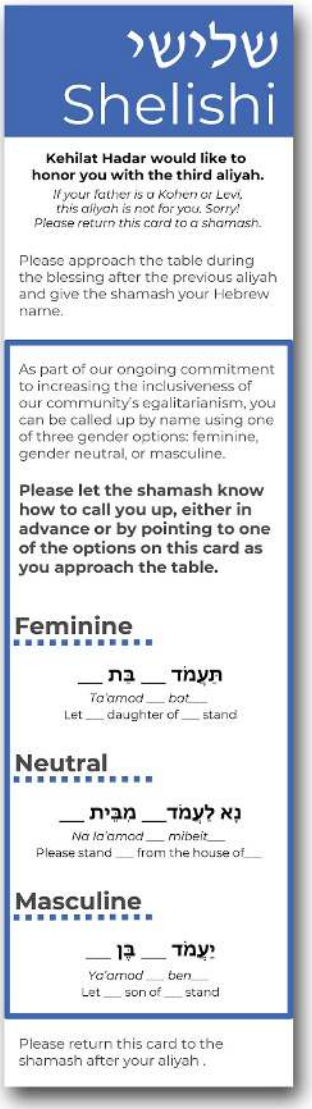
There was no ritually significant reason that our previous language of "Our darshan/darshanit this morning is __name__," was gendered in the first place, so we've elected to switch to a gender neutral version for all people who give a d'var Torah.

6. Other Cases

We look forward to the opportunity to address other instances of gendered ritual language, such as marriages, births, and other special occasions, as they arise.

Implementation

We must also consider the way in which a person is made aware of the options available to them and asked which one they'd like to use, as a person's choice of pronouns is often a very personal issue of identity. We are also sensitive to the possibility that some people may use different pronouns in Hebrew than in English. To avoid inadvertently making a guest uncomfortable by asking such a personal question, shamashim will focus on the practical matter of the aliyah, not their identity more generally.

Once the new option has been announced, Shabbat morning regulars will have the opportunity to inform shamashim if they would like to switch the language they use. We expect that the shamashim can learn the pronoun choice of Shabbat morning regulars, just as they know who among them are children of Kohanim and Leviim. When a shamash offers an aliyah to someone whose pronouns are not known to that shamash, they will point out the three options listed on our aliyah cards and ask how the person would like to be called up. For example, "Shabbat shalom! Would you like an aliyah?" and if yes, "We have three options for language when calling up people for a aliyot. Please let me know how you would like to be called up." The shamash can explain further that we have 3 options: feminine *(ta'amod)*, gender neutral *(na la'amod)*, or masculine *(ya'amod)*, if the person isn't sure what that question means.

In addition to the explanation on the aliyah cards, we will also indicate these options on the page number handouts that go on the seats, so that people who are not offered aliyot that week are nonetheless made aware of the possibilities.