

Jewish Sources on Sex/Gender

Source 1: Breishit Rabbah 8:1



אמר רבי ירמיה בן אלעזר בשעה שבָּרָא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון, אנדרוגינוס בָּרָא, הָדָא הוּא דְכְתִיב (בראשית ה, ב): זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם.

Rabbi Yirmeya son of Elazar said: When the Holy One blessed be God created the first human, God created an *androgynous* (someone who is both male and female.) This is proven by the verse: “And God created the human in God’s image; in the image of God did God make it [or “them” (singular)]; male and female God made them.” (Breishit 1:27).

Source 2: Gender/Sex Categories in the Babylonian Talmud

Zachar (זָכָר): Refers to a male. The Talmud defines specific laws and responsibilities for men.

Nekeva (נְקֵבָה): Refers to a female. The Talmud defines specific laws and responsibilities for women.

Androgynos (אֲנֶדְרוֹגִינוֹס): term used to describe a person who possesses both male and female characteristics, which has unique legal implications in Jewish tradition. Mentioned 273 times in the Talmud.

Tumtum (טוּמְטוּם): Refers to a person whose sex is not clear or obscured. Mentioned 280 times in Talmud.

Aylonit (אֵילוֹנִית): A term for a female who does not develop the typical physical traits of a woman, often treated differently under Jewish law due to their unique biological status. An *aylonit* does not go through female puberty, does not develop a female body shape, and is not able to have children. Mentioned 118 times in the Talmud.

Saris (סָרִיס): Refers to a male who is sterile (unable to father children,) either by birth or by choice. A *saris* does not go through male puberty and therefore does not grow a beard, develop typical male body shape, and has a high-pitched or soprano voice into adulthood. Mentioned 253 times in the Talmud.

Journal Questions

1. Do you like the name you were born with? Why or why not?

2. Have you ever been called by the wrong name? How does that feel?

Source 3. Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 13a

תני בר קפרא: כל הקורא לאברהם "אברם" עובר בעשה, שנאמר: "והיה שמך אברהם". רבי אליעזר אומר: עובר בלאו שנאמר: "ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם".

Bar Kappara taught: Anyone who calls Avraham "Avram" breaks a positive mitzvah (a "thou shalt" commandment), as it is stated: "And your name will be Avraham" (Breishit 17:5.) Rabbi Eliezer says: One who calls Avraham "Avram" breaks a negative mitzva (a "thou shalt not" commandment), as it is stated: "And your name shall no longer be called Avram" (Breishit 17:5).