

Keshet's Answers to Tough Questions

Queers, Jews, Queer Jews, Antisemitism, and the War in Israel and Gaza

It has been a deeply painful and complex time for American Jews in the wake of the October 7th Hamas attacks, the ensuing bloodshed and suffering in Israel and Gaza, and rising antisemitism here in the U.S.

It also continues to be a dangerous time for LGBTQ+ people as we face growing attacks on our rights and protections across the country. Against this backdrop, **Keshet believes that remaining connected to each other across identities and movements is more important than ever.** Yet doing so hasn't been easy. We are seeing many people and groups doubling down on positions that don't allow room for the complexity and intersections of our experiences and needs as LGBTQ+ Jews. This dynamic has left many queer Jews feeling isolated and vulnerable on multiple fronts.

As an organization committed to the full equality of LGBTQ+ Jews, we know that we cannot ever separate these parts of ourselves and we do not tolerate homophobia, transphobia, or antisemitism. We want to help make sense of this painful moment as many of us navigate rupture, discomfort, and fear, whether in progressive political spaces, at protests, and/or in our Jewish communities.

In this moment especially, our **organizational values** guide us. Three in particular:

- **Justice.** We are committed to equality and social justice. As Jews, we have a responsibility to fight oppression, effect change, and repair the world. We see LGBTQ+ justice as part of a broader movement for justice for all people.
- **Pride.** We understand pride in identity as key to feeling whole. When LGBTQ+ Jews are encouraged to live our truths and participate openly and authentically in Jewish life, the entire Jewish community is stronger.
- **Human Dignity.** We lead with compassion and empathy. We celebrate—and strive to help others see and celebrate—the inherent humanity, worth, and dignity of all people.

Our values underscore these truths: **LGBTQ+ Jews exist and are an essential part of both Jewish and queer communities. We are committed to the liberation of LGBTQ+ people AND our liberation as Jews.**

This resource is intended to invite our community of queer Jews and allies to understand how our values inform our responses to the complexity, confusion, and pain of this moment.

We have heard some of the following questions in different contexts and offer these answers as tools for you and your communities.

"Why is the LGBTQ+ community antisemitic?"

Just like the Jewish community, the LGBTQ+ community is tremendously diverse, encompassing individuals from various racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, as well as political and ideological affiliations. Just as it would be inaccurate to generalize about any other large and diverse group, including Jews, it is incorrect to paint the entire LGBTQ+ community with the brush of antisemitism. Through our work at Keshet, we know that there are many LGBTQ+ non-Jews who actively work to combat antisemitism.

There have certainly been unacceptable and dangerous acts of antisemitism by LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations. Still, it is essential to distinguish between the actions of individuals and the beliefs or attitudes of an entire community. Our experience at Keshet working with secular LGBTQ+ people and organizations is that many have shown up as allies to Jews during this time.

For years, Keshet has worked hard to build relationships with LGBTQ+ groups both within and outside of the Jewish community. In this difficult time, we continue to invest in these connections, naming challenges, deepening allyship and partnerships, and addressing antisemitism when it arises in LGBTQ+ spaces.

"How can LGBTQ+ people support Palestine? Hamas kills LGBTQ+ people."

We recognize and deplore that under Hamas and the Palestinian Authority LGBTQ+ people have suffered human rights abuses, including execution. And we know that even in the face of such oppression, there are Palestinian queer activists who are working to advance LGBTQ+ safety and rights in their own communities.

There are a wide range of political positions that come under the umbrella of "supporting Palestine." Some queer people who hold such positions connect their commitment to Palestinian solidarity and their experiences as historically marginalized and oppressed LGBTQ+ people. Similarly, many Jews draw on their identities, values, and experiences as Jews in describing themselves as "Jews for environmental justice," "Jews for immigration reform," etc. No community is a monolith, and the LGBTQ+ community is no exception.

There are certainly LGBTQ+ individuals who have expressed antisemitism alongside their solidarity with Palestinians. And there are many LGBTQ+ people who support Palestinian rights, condemn Hamas, and are not antisemitic. And, there are also many LGBTQ+ people who support both Palestine and Israel, Palestinians and Israelis. We know from our own experience that one cannot make assumptions about the views and commitments of LGBTQ+ people when it comes to Israel and Palestine.

We hope for a day when all who call the land home—both Palestinians and Israelis—can live and thrive in dignity.

"How can LGBTQ+ people support Israel?"

Support for Israel is expressed in a broad range of ways by LGBTQ+ people and others: attachment to the history, land, and people; connections with Israelis who are friends and/or family members; solidarity with the Israeli LGBTQ+ community; connections with Israeli arts and culture, among others.

It is possible, and even common, for people to support Israel while critiquing the actions of the Israeli government and opposing the Occupation. Keshet has long held relationships with our counterparts in the Israeli LGBTQ rights movement and in Israeli progressive communities more broadly. We were inspired to see how until 10/7/23, hundreds of thousands of Israelis regularly filled the streets to protest the right wing government. And we are heartened by many who are now back in the streets, advocating for the Israeli government to prioritize bringing the hostages home and negotiate an end to the bloodshed.

While it may feel like there are two distinct sides, the reality is that there are many LGBTQ+ people who support both Israel and Palestine, Israelis and Palestinians.

"How has Keshet navigated this painful and complex time since October 7th?"

We were horrified by the Hamas attacks on October 7th and immediately condemned them. We have continued to pray that every single hostage comes home safely. As the Israeli bombing of Gaza has escalated and as the humanitarian crisis has worsened, we have been heartbroken by the suffering of Palestinian civilians and the tremendous loss of life in Gaza. We fervently hope for a day when there is no more war, a day when Israelis and Palestinians can both live in safety and dignity.

While Keshet does not advocate for specific international policies, we understand that these policies impact us as LGBTQ+ Jews here at home. Given the nature of our work, Keshet is skilled in providing education and training to people with a wide spectrum of perspectives. We know how to engage in difficult conversations with community members, partners, and even critics, resulting in stronger relationships and more powerful movements. In this moment of pain and division, we believe that advancing our mission is how we can most effectively help build a more just world.

Our Mission: Keshet works for the full equality of all LGBTQ Jews and our families in Jewish life. We strengthen Jewish communities. We equip Jewish organizations with the skills and knowledge to build LGBTQ-affirming communities; create spaces in which all queer Jewish youth feel seen and valued; and advance LGBTQ rights nationwide.

"What is Keshet's response to antisemitism in general and to the rise in antisemitism around the world since October 7th?"

Keshet unequivocally condemns antisemitism regardless of the source or context. We are committed to fighting antisemitism for the sake of Jewish liberation as well as part of broader movements for freedom, equality, and justice for all people. We believe in responding to antisemitism in ways that build bridges between the Jewish community and other communities rather than retreating into an isolated protective position.

As LGBTQ+ Jews, we often see similarities and intersections between anti-LGBTQ bias and antisemitism. Those connections enable Keshet to engage our non-Jewish LGBTQ+ colleagues in the fight against antisemitism as part of our shared commitment to justice.

We have been deeply shocked, saddened, and angered by expressions of antisemitism since October 7th. We condemn and consider antisemitic the minimization or denial of the Hamas attacks, including sexual violence. Additionally, we believe that there is no justification for the antisemitic targeting of Jewish college or high school students.

To be clear, we do not see criticism of Israel's war in Gaza or the Occupation as antisemitic. For an excellent, more in depth discussion of distinctions and overlap between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, we recommend [this resource from our partner T'ruah](#).**

"What does the Jewish LGBTQ+ Pride flag symbolize?"

The Pride flag emblazoned with a Star of David in the center symbolizes queer Jewish pride and the intersections of our identities.

At times, this flag has been a controversial flashpoint at Pride marches as some have seen it as equivalent to the flag of the State of Israel. We reject this view as well as attempts to censor its use. The Star of David has been a symbol of Jewish identity far before the State of Israel's formation. We support LGBTQ+ Jews who want to march with this flag at Pride and believe that all should be able to display this flag publicly without fear of disruption or harassment. It is important to note that for Keshet contingents at Pride marches this year, we are discouraging participants from marching with national flags given the current political climate.

**According to T'ruah, certain acts and speech that utilize classic anti-Jewish tropes are antisemitic, such as:

- Using anti-Jewish tropes to describe Israel or Israelis
- Using the word "Zionist" as code for "Jew" or "Israeli," or "Zionist Entity" rather than "Israel"
- Denying Jewish history
- Denying the humanity of Israelis
- Assuming that the Israeli government speaks for all Jews
- Demanding that Jews disavow Israel or Zionism