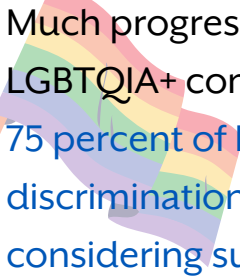




TAKING PRIDE IN DERECH ERETZ



Much progress has been made in the push for equal rights and inclusion in the LGBTQIA+ community; however, a great deal of work remains to be done. Nearly 75 percent of LGBTQIA+ youth surveyed in a recent study reported having faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, and 42 percent reported seriously considering suicide in the past year (The Trevor Project).

Among adults, studies have shown that in 2021, 20 percent of LGBTQIA+ Americans have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity when applying for jobs, and 22 percent have not been paid equally or promoted at the same rate as their peers. (Catalyst, Workplaces that Work for Women) Additionally, members of the LGBTQIA+ community experience stigma that interferes with their ability to access medical care for both physical and mental health concerns.

We might not be able to solve problems as large as discrimination in the workplace and healthcare system, but there are some things we can do. Let's start with ourselves, our embodiment of the mental health middah (Jewish value) of *kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh* (all Jews are responsible for one another) and our practice of basic "derech eretz/common decency" in creating, safer, more sensitive, inclusive communities for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to ensure their mental wellness.

Derech eretz is an essential part of the Torah and Judaism.



Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah teaches in Pirkei Avot (3:17), "Without the study of Torah, there can be no derech eretz; without derech eretz, there can be no Torah."



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A strength that applies to the intersection of mental health and the LGBTQIA+ community, **derech erez** speaks to the capacity to know and understand oneself and others as well as to our mental health middot. While we know understanding others takes on many forms, we must work to build a world where LGBTQIA+ people are affirmed and valued without question. By embracing the **derech erez** of affirmation and of valuing all people, we can advocate for a world where people can bring their full selves into their mental health care without encountering barriers.

Here are two ways you can practice derech erez in your community.

1. **Talk things out:** Conversations about sensitive subjects can be challenging, but only by affirming and understanding each other's experiences can we be more inclusive.
2. **Create safe spaces:** Be explicit in your support, love and care for others, and make your synagogue, school, organization and home places where everyone can feel respected and valued.



What can you do to practice derech erez in your community and home to create safer, more respectful and more inclusive spaces for everyone?

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