

TAKING PRIDE IN DERECH ERETZ

Much progress has been made in the push for equal rights and inclusion in the LGBTQIA+ community; however, work remains to be done. Studies show that LGBTQIA+ adults are twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a mental health condition (NAMI). In a recent survey of LGBTQIA+ youth, nearly 75 percent 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, 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.

The impact of this kind of exclusion and separation from the community at large has clear, dramatic effects on the mental health of its LGBTQIA+ members. And while we may not be able to solve problems as large as discrimination in the workplace and healthcare system, we can embody the mental health middah (Jewish value) of kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh (all Jews are responsible for one another) and improve our practice of basic "derech erez" (common decency) to create, safer, more sensitive, inclusive communities, ensuring everyone's mental wellness.

Derech erez and the inclusion of others is an essential part of the Torah and Judaism.



Ben Azzai teaches in Pirkei Avot (4:3), "Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything, for there is no person who does not have their hour, and there is nothing without its place in the sun."



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Derech erez speaks to the capacity to know, understand and value oneself and others as well as to our mental health middot. While we know understanding others takes on many forms, building a world where LGBTQIA+ people are affirmed and valued without question will take work. By embracing the **derech erez** of affirmation and of valuing all people, we can advocate for a world where **everyone** 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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