

TWILIGHT PEOPLE

“STORIES
OF FAITH
AND GENDER
BEYOND
THE BINARY”

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WHO UNDERSTAND BOTH SIDES OF ME; THAT I'M

SHARON
(SHANON)

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BEING FULLY
AND TRULY WHO
GOD CREATED
ME TO BE
IS VERY MUCH
PART OF MY
FAITH JOURNEY
AS MUCH AS IT
IS PART OF MY
GENDER JOURNEY,
THE TWO GO
HAND IN HAND.
”

SEAN CURRAN
CO-CURATOR
(THEY/THEM/THEIR)

TWILIGHT PEOPLE



This groundbreaking project documents the lives of **TRANS** and **GENDER VARIANT PEOPLE OF FAITH** through photographs, oral histories and memorabilia. Gender variant people have always existed in all walks of life, including in religious communities. Twilight People aims to explore these intersections for the first time in the UK in a heritage context.

Curating narratives of people with marginalised identities presents a series of challenges, especially when those people have intersecting marginalised identities. Alongside these challenges come great opportunities for **TRANSFORMATIVE** and **RADICAL CURATING**; for **SUBLIMINAL ACTIVISM** that can educate, enlighten and wave the flag for pride and social justice.

In Twilight People two worlds meet in a peaceful and powerful crescendo, challenging the notion that trans and gender-variant identities are inherently at odds with faith. Gender identities can be **AFFIRMED**, **DISCOVERED** and **RENEWED** through religion, faith and spirituality, just as religious, faith and spiritual identities can be **REINVENTED**, **STRENGTHENED** and **CELEBRATED** through gender diversity.

Twilight seemingly represents an in-between place, thus this exhibition aims to show that a trans journey is not necessarily about a start point and a finish point, a before and after, but celebrates the **IN BETWEEN** as well, to show that the transformative moment of Twilight can indeed be the destination itself.

In highlighting the **FLUID** and **NON-BINARY** natures of faith and gender identities, curators have a great responsibility. It is essential to foreground the **VOICES** of the people in this exhibition. Oral history allows this, and museums and archives are increasingly realising that, aside from being interesting and engaging sources of his-and-her stories, oral histories serve a political purpose in filling in the gaps in historical records that so often exclude diverse voices such as these.

The accompanying portraits by photographer Christa Holka capture the faces and bodies behind the voices, and visualise the theme of **BODY AND RITUAL**. Physical transformations, including the rituals of faith and religious objects, serve as important markers of both faith and gender journeys. My own expectations of the stories we collected, and the beautiful portraits, were that they would focus on the trans body, and the rituals of faith, but they also reveal **BODIES OF FAITH** and **RITUALS OF GENDER**. The people of the exhibition are not merely subjects who have generously participated and shared their stories, they are also **STAKEHOLDERS OF A LANDMARK MOMENT IN LGBTIQI HISTORY**. We hope you are as moved, enlightened and excited by these stories and images as we are.



Twilight People is supported by
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RABBI
REUBEN
ZELLMAN

TWILIGHT PEOPLE PRAYER

“

As the sun sinks and the colours of the day turn,
we offer a blessing for the twilight,
for twilight is neither day nor night, but in-between.

We are all twilight people. We can never be fully labelled or defined.

We are many identities and loves, many genders and none.
We are in between roles, at the intersection of histories,
or between place and place.

We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination,
streaks of light swirled together. We are neither day nor night.

We are both, neither, and all.

May the sacred in-between of this evening suspend our certainties,
soften our judgments, and widen our vision.

May this in-between light illuminate our way to the God
who transcends all categories and definitions.

May the in-between people who have come to pray
be lifted up into this twilight.

We cannot always define; we can always say a blessing.

Blessed are You, God of all, who brings on the twilight.

”

**UMBER
IS A MUSLIM,
QUEER,
PAKISTANI-BRITISH FEMINIST.
FAMILY WAS
AN IMPORTANT PART OF
THEIR CHILDHOOD
AND ALTHOUGH
THEY EXPERIENCED SEXISM,
THEIR MOTHER
AND
GRANDMOTHER
WERE
STRONG FEMALE
ROLE MODELS.**

**GROWING UP,
UMBER
FELT THAT THEY
DID NOT IDENTIFY
AS FEMALE,
OR ANY OTHER GENDER.
THEY ARE
PASSIONATE
ABOUT ACTIVISM
AND COMMUNITY
ON A PERSONAL SCALE.**

“

Unlike a lot of young people raised Muslim,
I always thought of my religion as putting
women first. I think it's about what you
choose to teach – what readings you choose
to teach, which parts of the Qur'an you look at
harder, and I think on the whole, objectively,
I really do think the Qur'an is very feminist.

I think love between marginalised people is
very radical. I think that we need to imagine
futures together where we love each other
and where fighting for each other is a part of
that love rather than being so individualistic
about it. I think community doesn't exist
right now.

'Umbur' is a concept more than a person.
I'm like a series of identities that somehow
come together. At the same time as feeling
that, in this world, I'm a woman, I feel that
I'm not, I feel that I'm so beyond woman.

”



ELEN HEART

Elen Heart is 72 years old. She presented most of her life as male, but was always preoccupied with a desire to understand herself. This crystallised into research around gender identity, and later in life, into exploration of her own identity: "I didn't actually fully really come to terms with [my identity] until I was in my sixties, so most of my life I was trans, but didn't realise it."

Elen is married to Jenny-Anne, who is also a trans woman. Elen has three children from a previous marriage. They live in North Wales. Together, they work to support the trans community. Elen is secretary of a support group, and the couple also own a second property which they offer as a space for trans people to recuperate from surgery or try out living in a new gender role.

Christianity is central to Jenny-Anne's life, so the couple are an active part of a church community, which Elen appreciates. However, she is not formally a member of the church. While she is fascinated by the 'big questions' that religion engages with, and lives by many of the same values, she does not wish to subscribe to the 'dogma' of the church. As such, she does not consider herself a practicing Christian.

“
WHEN PEOPLE SAY,
‘GOD DOESN’T LIKE
TRANS PEOPLE’,
I ASK BACK,
‘WELL WHY DOES HE
MAKE THEM THEN?’
A GOD
WHO MAKES PEOPLE
EITHER
GAY
OR TRANS,
AND THEN SAYS,
‘YOU’RE WICKED
IF YOU EXPRESS THAT,
YOU’VE GOT TO
PRETEND YOU’RE NOT’.
NOW TO ME,
THAT’S JUST CRUEL,
AND
I CAN’T IMAGINE
ANY SORT OF DEITY
WOULD
ACTUALLY
BEHAVE LIKE THAT.
”

JENNY-ANNE IS AN ACTIVIST FOR TRANS RIGHTS WITHIN THE ORGANISED ENVIRONMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, WIDER COMMUNITIES AND IN CULTURE AS A WHOLE.

SHE IS AN INFLUENTIAL FIGUREHEAD WITHIN HER CHURCH, AS WELL AS BEING A STEWARD AND FRONT-RUNNER FOR MANY LGBT CAMPAIGNS ACROSS THE UK. JENNY-ANNE WAS AWARDED AN OBE IN 2014.

“
Some of my friends say, 'Oh, I'm not sure I could be an activist', and I say, 'You are; you're out there in the world, being trans and being openly proud of who you are'.

If we educate children properly, diversity will be celebrated in future generations. It's by changing the culture of the young people, that we'll permanently change the culture of society. I believe that life is full of opportunities, the trick is to try and take the opportunities that are going to cause change.

Being able to be myself at church, in many ways legitimised my identity; there was no longer this distance between, 'Yes, I should be Jenny-Anne,' and my faith in a loving God. I now feel it empowers me to help other people.

My church, my faith and my spirituality are very important in my life, because I believe in a loving God who welcomes everybody. Nature creates diversity; nobody is absolutely fixed in one gender or the other. We're going to move these twilight people into the spotlight and show what their lives and their thoughts are really about.

”



ISABELLA IS A PARTNER AT A NORTH LONDON ACCOUNTANCY FIRM. SHE GREW UP IN A TYPICAL WORKING CLASS JEWISH FAMILY, AND REMEMBERS EXPERIENCING GENDER DYSPHORIA AT AN EARLY AGE.

IT WAS ONLY IN HER 50S THAT SHE TOOK STEPS TO BEGIN HER TRANSITION FROM MALE TO FEMALE. HER BODY NOW MATCHES HER MIND AND SHE FEELS COMFORTABLE WITH HERSELF.

“It’s important to be aware that you don’t have to lose religion and faith when you come out as trans. I think one of the ways I live my life is being true to myself. If you’re struggling, be true to yourself and enjoy the journey.

One of my big fears when I transitioned was that I would lose my Jewish identity. Thankfully, I haven’t. My faith is as it was before, probably a little bit stronger.

Having been a member of United Synagogue for over 30 years, I wasn’t sure how they would react to my transition. I met with my Rabbi who was understanding. He suggested that I make a fresh start at another local synagogue, which I did. The new community welcomed me warmly and I feel comfortable and accepted.

Whilst I’m secular, I want to live my traditional Jewish lifestyle, and in my portrait I wanted to appear as someone who has a religious observance. That’s why I chose a headscarf, the candlesticks and the candles. It’s the Shabbat bride, and it sort of dawned on me that this is another stage in my journey, and it’s opening a new chapter, possibly in my way of thinking. Shabbat is a day of rest and starting a new week at the end of the Shabbat is like opening a new chapter – that was my thought process.

”



CJ BRUCE IS A 25-YEAR-OLD TRINIDADIAN WHO DRIVES TRAINS FOR A LIVING AND IS INVOLVED IN LGBT ACTIVISM. CJ GREW UP IN A RELIGIOUS CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD.

THEY FEEL LUCKY TO LIVE IN A DIVERSE CITY LIKE LONDON. ULTIMATELY, CJ WANTS TO GET MARRIED AND HAVE KIDS AND A FAMILY.

“I have a gender, it’s not male or female, I call it genderqueer, because it’s ‘just me’ otherwise.

I have spent a lot of time in the queer community over the last few years and it is really good but I know that a lot of my friends and a lot of others are very anti-faith and anti-religion and sometimes I feel that there aren’t many people who understand both sides of me; that I’m trans and queer and a Christian at the same time.

I think my faith is a really big part of my life, so it’s really cool to be able to share my story about that.

Luckily, I found a church that is really accepting and they’re not only accepting but they encouraged me to express myself. So, I decided to finally get baptised and I invited my whole family. That was really great.

I got my first tattoo on my wrist, a so-called Jesus fish, when I got baptised, because it was such an amazing experience for me. It’s a very small tattoo but I really like it because although it’s small, people can see it and ask what it symbolises but at the same time it’s not really visible. I feel the same way about my faith and my gender or sexuality: it is very much there for people to see if they want to and there for them to ask about, but also it’s not in your face all the time.

”



SARAH
“
**THIS IS
A LONELY PATH
THAT I AM WALKING.
THIS ISN'T ABOUT
BEING PART OF ANYTHING;
IT IS
WHAT I NEED TO DO
FOR ME.
I DON'T BASE MYSELF
ON ANYBODY.
ME IS ME.
THE ANGELS ARE
MY GUARDIANS,
MY RELATIVES
OR
PARTS OF MY RELATIVES
THAT HAVE BEEN LEFT
UP THERE.
MY GUARDIANS
ARE MY ANGELS
AND
ANY RELIGION
HAS GUARDIAN ANGELS
OF ONE SORT
OR ANOTHER
AND THAT IS
WHAT I THINK IT IS.**
”

Sarah is 61 years old and was born in Hampshire, UK. She agreed to participate in Twilight People because she believes that trans issues are far greater and more complex than people realise and she wants to make a difference.

Sarah comes from a very privileged background with private education, chauffeurs and gardeners. When she went to boarding school, she realised she was different from her fellow pupils. In the winter of 1962, the heating broke at the school and because of the cold she slept in the same bed with another male pupil, which she enjoyed. This experience was significant to her gender identity.

She has seen a lot of hardship and struggle throughout her life. She has also had several near-death experiences: each time, she was brought back by luck and by the right people being in the right place at the right time. Each time she describes seeing white feathers around her bed, which she interprets a spiritual experience.

One day, before her transition, Sarah was walking to the tube when a passing child said to an accompanying teacher, “Look, that man has two angels behind him. Where are they coming from?” It left Sarah thinking that there must be something there indeed, such as guardian angels watching over her.



**SABAH
IS A BRITISH-PAKISTANI
ACTIVIST
WHO DESCRIBES
THEMSELF AS
'QUEER, TRANS
AND BROWN',
AND FEELS THAT THEY ARE
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN
MALE
AND FEMALE.**

**THEY FEEL
ONLY AT THE START
OF BEING ABLE
TO CALL THEMSELF
A MUSLIM AGAIN,
AND ARE TRYING
TO BRING ISLAM BACK
INTO THEIR IDENTITY
IN A WAY THAT FEELS
AUTHENTIC.**

“
My strongest relationship is with myself, in terms of listening to myself and giving myself time to come back to faith. I think that has been the hardest part of my identity to come back to. Out of gender, race and sexuality, it has been faith that's been the toughest.

It's a struggle. It's never going to be simple and easy. I'm always going to be questioning it. When I understood that, it did feel peaceful.

I want to be in a place where I can talk about parts of my identity as well as talking about faith, because I think that is still a taboo that needs to be broken in queer spaces and spaces for queer people of colour. We just don't talk about faith anymore.

”



CHRISTINA DESCRIBES HERSELF AS A WOMAN WITH A TRANSSEXUAL HISTORY. SHE IS A WRITER, AN ORDAINED PRIEST IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND A HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN WHO HAS WORKED IN PASTORAL MINISTRY FOR OVER THREE DECADES.

SHE HAS BEEN WITH HER PARTNER, NOW HER HUSBAND, FOR OVER 43 YEARS. THEY MARRIED IN CHURCH IN 2006, WHICH SHE SAYS WAS THE HAPPIEST DAY OF HER LIFE.

“ I like to quote my friend who says, ‘Transition is about spirituality from start to finish, because it is about making the outside reflect what is inside and what is inside is spiritual’. In 1997, I woke up in the early hours one morning and thought, ‘Actually, what you have to do is complete your PhD and look at your gender, as these are the two unfinished items of business in your life’.

I use saris for dancing, movement and contemplative prayer work, and I feel spiritual energies coming through. Friends then bought me a red sari with an elephant motif. I took it to a dance workshop and the facilitator asked for my ring and the sari. The leader then pulled the whole sari through the ring and said, ‘There is a whole lot of creativity, a whole lot of energy stored up for you and you just need to let it in, but all you need is for the tiniest little gap for it to get through and it will all come flooding through’. On reflection, I think that is what my transition has been: it has allowed the pent-up stuff to come out.

Exotic robes are gender-neutral, and many male as well as female clergy ‘enjoy’ exotic robes. When I was first ordained I was not overly preoccupied with vestments, but when I came out I explored them more, and at one stage I made a collection of them. There’s a close link between play and prayer.

I’ve been intrigued for a long time by suggestions that trans people are more interested in religion than other people – perhaps because of having to push boundaries and live on the edge?

LGBTQ people have to be these agents of transformation, it is about us, but at some point it is about other people and the society we live in and what we can do to make it better.

”

KOJI GREW UP IN A VILLAGE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND, AND NOW LIVES IN LONDON. SHE COMES FROM A BANGLADESHI MUSLIM BACKGROUND, BUT CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY.

“ Faith has been an important part of my gender journey and has had a positive impact. I actually don’t think I would have transitioned without my faith.

By joining the church, I definitely gained strength. When I’m feeling down I say a little prayer. I find going to church quite relaxing. Of course it helps to be part of an inclusive community like the Metropolitan Community Church. Some people belong to a religion that does not accept them. I don’t think we’re here to hate. Religion should be loving. I believe in a God that is inclusive of everything and everyone.

I didn’t always identify as trans. The reason for that is that 10 years back in our society it was seen as something weird. Today it’s become more accepted and more people are open about their gender identity. Growing up, I used to put my sister’s clothes on, but this sort of thing wasn’t socially acceptable in my community.

Now I live on my own, I can do what I please. I’m 34 now and I won’t live forever and transitioning is something that I want to do. I’m waiting to go to the gender identity clinic, and I might as well live my own life out as opposed to living somebody else’s life for them.

”

SHE WAS BAPTISED A YEAR AGO AND GOES TO THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH MOST WEEKS, WHICH SHE FINDS LOVING AND ACCEPTING. SHE IS AN ACTIVIST AND WOULD LIKE TO HELP FURTHER EQUALITY.



JANE
“
SHORTLY AFTER
I STARTED
LIVING AS A WOMAN,
I GOT INVITED
TO A SYNAGOGUE
IN NORWICH.
I SAT
IN THE LADIES SECTION
AND WAS MADE
WELCOME THERE.
SO,
EVEN THE ORTHODOX
ARE ACTUALLY
MORE TOLERANT
THAN THEIR THEOLOGY
WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE.
JUDAISM
IS ESSENTIALLY
THE EXPRESSION
OF A PEOPLE
NOT A FAITH
AND BECAUSE OF THIS
I GO ALONG
WITH THE RELIGION.
AS A TRANSGENDER PERSON
I CANNOT THANK GOD
FOR MAKING ME
THE GENDER
I WAS,
SO I SEE THAT MY BELIEF
IS LIMITED
BY MY EXPERIENCE
OF TRANSGENDER.
”

At the age of three Jane dressed her teddy bear as a girl, unable to say why that was. She was assigned male at birth and grew to be five feet, taller than her parents and that was good.

When Jane was 17 she read a series of newspaper articles about someone undergoing what was at the time called a ‘sex change’ and immersed herself in the details. Many years of struggle followed.

Jane got married and had a child, and things carried on outwardly as normal until suddenly she felt that she could not hold these feelings inside any longer. Jane felt sure that she could not present as a man and this caused her marriage to break down. Transitioning was a difficult process because the waiting time for treatment was so long.

Jane believes that Judaism is essentially the expression of a people, not a faith, and she goes along with the religion because of this. As a transgender person she cannot thank God for making her what she was, and sees that her belief is limited by her experience of transgender. She does not see herself as orthodox but will go to an Orthodox synagogue as long as she can sit in the ladies gallery.

During her transition she was in contact with a conservative synagogue in Norfolk who invited her to give a historical tour of the city. She was specifically rung up and invited to come along to synagogue events and made to feel welcome. Her experience of how the Jewish community reacted to her gender transition has been nothing but positive. She is now Vice Chair of a Progressive Synagogue in South West England.

PETA
IDENTIFIES AS
GENDERQUEER,
THAT IS,
NON-BINARY.
FOR THEM
THEIR CALM FAITH CENTRE
HAS BEEN
CRUCIAL
IN THEIR LIFE JOURNEY,
WHICH HAS BEEN
VERY CHALLENGING
AT TIMES.

“
 Apart from one period at university, faith was always an ally of my gender journey. I knew that God was completely happy with me the way I was.

The moment of communion creates one meal that everyone shares. St Paul says, ‘The eye can not say to the hand I don’t need you’, so the straight can’t say to the queer, ‘I don’t need you’, and so that moment of the sharing is just hugely important to me. It’s a way of saying that what unites us is so much bigger and more important than what divides us.

One of the really wonderful moments was when I changed my name. I had a baptism ceremony with my church. The minister announced that I had entered the water as my old name but that when I came back up out of the water it would be as Peta, and that was a wonderful moment because it really affirmed that name and my identity in a hugely symbolic and significant way.

I took a good hard look at the binary and I am having none of it. The more I see gender, the more artificial it seems and the less I can be bothered with it. It’s so unnecessary to me.
”

THEY ARE
A MEMBER OF THE
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY
CHURCH
AND ARE TRAINING
TO BE A PASTOR.
PETA
ALSO LOVES
AND CREATES ART,
SOME OF WHICH RELATES
TO SPIRITUALITY,
AND
SOME TO GENDER.



CAROLE
“STRANGELY ENOUGH, I DON’T SEE A LINK BETWEEN FAITH AND GENDER. I SEE THEM AS TWO SEPARATE THINGS. ALTHOUGH THE TWO EVENTS OF TRANSITIONING AND LEAVING CHURCH COINCIDED, THEY COINCIDED BECAUSE OF THE WAY LIFE IS IN CHURCH. I HAD TO PURSUE MY PATH. AND IT WAS IRRELEVANT TO MY BELIEF.”

Carole was born in London in 1951 and began to wear her sister’s dresses when she was four years old. Assigned male at birth, she continued to experiment with cross-dressing as a teenager – although she does not like using that phrase – but stopped when she started being intimate with women. She got married, but could not deal with the traditional male/female roles assigned to the relationship. After separating, she began living as Carole. It was her first real attempt presenting as a female, although she didn’t really know what she was: ‘I just was doing what I felt was right.’

Carole married again, happily, and presented as male for 25 years, having twin daughters. Eventually, Carole could not hold back her need to come out, and began her transition. ‘I actually thought I would be able to fight it off to my grave. Nobody would be any the wiser and I would take it with me’. She moved out of the family home, but maintained a good relationship with her children and ex-wife, whom she describes as her soul mate.

Carole had been attending an Anglican High Church, and then a Pentecostal Church nearby, but at the point of transition Carole left the church completely as she had seen too much bigotry in organised religion, which did not feel right to her. However, she feels she remains a spiritual person and may reconnect with the church in the future.

Carole has recently undergone her final gender reassignment surgery and is in recovery. Although she feels as though she has led a ‘stealth life’, disappearing from all her previous communities and focussing on building a new persona, a new life, a new identity, she thinks that she would like to give something back to the community that helped her so much. ‘My journey has made me get to where I am, where I can just be myself in the world. So many people can’t be, so many people who transition just can’t be and I think that’s tragic, and it’s wonderful being able to just be yourself, all the time’.

ANON UNDERWENT A LONG JOURNEY OF SELF-EXPLORATION. THEY FEEL THAT FLUIDITY IN GENDER AND IDENTITY IS INTEGRAL TO THEIR LIFE. THEIR IDENTITY AS PAN-ROMANTIC, DEMI-SEXUAL AND GENDERQUEER INTERTWINES WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE OF FAITH.

“You are one whole person regardless of what other people say, regardless of what you’re prescribed to be and your faith is a part of you. Learning to be happy and to be ok with all of yourself is so important and is doable. Every different culture, every place, every group of people, every community sees gender differently, they express their gender differently. I think it’s really important to see that and learn that and realise that actually the bubble that you grow up in is not all that there is, there is so much more out there.

When I was young I didn’t fit the prescriptions for who I was supposed to be, it was really difficult to fit into both worlds that I wanted to fit into, and to be the person that I was expected to be.

I realised that I could have my gender identity and I could have my faith identity and although they might be separate, they intertwine so much. When I reconciled that I needed something to symbolise that to remind me of that every day, so I got a tattoo. It’s a pair of wings designed to include the intricacies of a lot of different cultures. There’s a lot of geometry, a lot of symbolism a lot of precision in my religion and I’ve tried to embody that in this tattoo. Wings symbolise emerging, power, strength.

”

BORN INTO A SHIA MUSLIM LINEAGE, FAITH REMAINS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR LIFE EXISTING BEYOND SET SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL CONSTRUCTS.

NOW RUNNING A CHARITY AND WORKING WITH YOUNG LGBTQIA PEOPLE OF INTERSECTING MINORITY IDENTITIES, ANON USES THEIR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, PROMOTE OPPORTUNITY AND EMPOWER OTHERS TO DO SO.



VIDA BEGAN HER JOURNEY OF EXPLORATION AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL UPHEAVAL OF THE 1960S, WHERE REBELLION, ANDROGYNY AND GENDER VARIANCE CHALLENGED TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF IDENTITY.



VIDA'S EXPERIENCES WERE SHAPED BY A MIXTURE OF SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS AND HER OWN INQUISITIVE NATURE, FROM THE PROGRESSIVE SCENE IN MANCHESTER TO THE INCLUSIVE AND SPIRITUAL VALUES OF MEVLEVI SUFISM.

“

I was drawn to Manchester Concord (a social club for trans people) and I remember having a real sense that I'd found a home, and through meeting people I had found a place for myself in a community, in my community.

Now I feel like I've found two places to be myself, I've found two homes, and there is a connection between the two. We're on a path together, on a spiritual journey and we're all at different points. For me it's important that I'm with fellow travellers. I've come to really appreciate the importance of having a process or ceremony, with other people.

The idea of evolving an image of myself that would reflect my beyond-the-binary gender personality is coupled with my interfaith desire creating 'Vida' in a different mode. So in a way it was a very creative process that I'd gone through and that I'm continuing to go through, and what's exciting is that it will develop and reach a point where hopefully I'm comfortable in the world, within my faith group, to express my faith and convictions as Vida.

Perhaps most of us, if not all of us, have parts of ourselves or impulses, needs, legitimate natural needs in different areas of ourselves that can easily become divided and we can become less integrated. If we can find somewhere, a place even within ourselves, and accept all elements of gender, and that we all have a need for faith – if we can harmonise those things, then it's going to benefit ourselves and the people we know and go on to meet as life unfolds.

”



REUBS IS A GENDERQUEER TRANS WOMAN.

FROM AN EARLY AGE REUBS WAS INTERESTED IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION (SPECIFICALLY METHODISM) AND EXPRESSED FEELING 'LIKE A GIRL', WITHOUT NEEDING TO BE ONE.

REUBS IS A NEUROSCIENTIST (MSc), WORSHIPS AT AND IS A BOARD MEMBER OF THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH. SHE IS ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED.

“

God doesn't make mistakes. The part of me that is a woman and the part of me that society misinterprets as being male are both very, very intentional. God gave me this gender identity experience.

I want to do God's work and that's still what defines and motivates me. All people are created by God and God has a plan, not a plan of the sort that I might write as a scientific experiment, but a plan that only God could come up with, and this plan includes things that affect gender.

Gender is an incredibly powerful force in determining people's role in the world. There is a difference between being a cis woman and being a trans woman. They are both women in exactly the same ways but their experiences of gender in relation to the social constructs and social phenomena of gender are different and so God needs trans women, and God needs genderqueer people, and God needs trans men, and God needs cis people.

”

FAYE
“**WHEN I STEPPED INSIDE CHURCH FOR THE FIRST TIME AS MYSELF, I FELT THAT I BELONGED. I WAS REALLY STARTING MY JOURNEY. THE VICAR SAID THAT I HAD A GLOW IN MY EYES THAT I NEVER HAD BEFORE.**”

Born in Croydon in 1993, Faye loves the area she has grown up in. Faye has only recently come to terms with being trans, but feels that it has been there her whole life. She now acknowledges that she always was a very feminine child. She would bring Barbies to school and found primary school aged children to be particularly judgemental towards gender norms. However, her parents were accepting of how she chose to act at home. She would wear tights on her head, making her feel as if she had 'got long hair'.

Describing herself aged around six or seven, Faye says, 'Whenever I went out, I'd always be "Faye". And I wasn't really sure who Faye was, at the time.' School slowly enforced a feeling of wrongness, pushing Faye's identity back for some time, until she discovered musical theatre. Performing was a way to feel like she belonged; she describes it as a way of escapism. Her faith is also reinforced through music.

Faye had a brief stint as drag performer, but feels this was just a way to wear women's clothing. It was only a few months ago when she realised that she couldn't keep living that way, and understood herself to be transgender. She attended Pride and the realisation hit: 'I need to be feminine for the rest of my life. I just can't hide behind someone else'.

Transitioning has been a positive experience for her. She doesn't always feel the need to disclose, and people are generally accepting and supportive. Her parents are involved in the local Church of England, which has always been very welcoming of anyone regardless of gender, race or sexuality. She feels that God has been an important part of her journey, like a friend. She says, 'If I get to a point of loneliness then I know that God is always here on my side'.

ABI IS AN INTERSEX MEMBER OF THE TRANS COMMUNITY. HER FAITH IS GUIDED BY BOTH JUDAISM AND SPIRITUALITY, CLAIRVOYANCE, MEDIUMSHIP, TAROT READING AND CRYSTAL HEALING.

SHE HOPES TO BE AN ACTIVE EXAMPLE FOR THE TRANS-FAITH COMMUNITY, AND STRONGLY ADVOCATES TELLING HER PERSONAL STORY AND COMMUNICATING AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGE.

“You have to have something to believe in, because trans people often go through a life of trouble, and sometimes you don't know who or what to turn to. Having something spiritual to turn to can really help.

I like to go into synagogue, be a proud person, sit down and be happy to wave the flag for the trans community within the Jewish community. I think there is a place there for us to make a statement and become, in our own right, members of the community.

I have a family member who I go to, we do yoga mantra chanting, breathing exercises, self-healing the mind. She's supported me along the way and she's also someone who likes rose quartz. The rose quartz heart in my portrait was given to me by my cousin's mother who's also been helping me. It represents her love and affection for me. It's more than just a crystal because she gave it to me.

I've had some very strange experiences throughout the course of my life, a bit like clairvoyance, voices telling me, 'You're going to find something quite beautiful later on in your life, but in the meantime just be patient, and eventually your life will intersect and certain things are going to happen to you that will explain everything else that went on in the past'. I feel almost complete now.

The journey is still ongoing. I think it's now my chance to help others, I think that's the next part of my evolution.

”



FRAN
“
**REFLECTING BACK
ON THE ROLE OF FAITH
FOR PEOPLE
WHO ARE TRANSITIONING,
I BELIEVE
IT HELPS TO
BRING ABOUT PEACE -
REPAIRING THE WORLD,
REPAIRING BODIES
AND REPAIRING SOULS**
”

Fran spent 30 years of her professional career working to support trans and gender variant people. She was the first clinical nurse in the UK to specialise working with transgender clients. In the early 1990s, Fran became chief executive of Gender Dysphoria Trust, which later became Gender Dysphoria International; she ran the organisation with trans people, and was one of only two cis women within the organisation.

Fran converted to Liberal Judaism late in life. She experienced a difficult upbringing due to her family's strict Christian faith; she was desperate to leave home and wanted to study in London; and she wanted to study psychiatry, in order to understand how to help people suffering from both physical and psychological issues.

She describes how being transgender was viewed in those days: the advice was 'move away, don't tell anyone who you are, what your background is, just move on and start a new life as the person you are going to be'. She campaigned to change public perception of trans people, and became aware there was a need for a specialised service to support not only transgender but also people who were, in her words, 'on the transgender spectrum'. Fran feels strongly about the inequalities in the medical system for trans people, including waiting lists for gender alignment surgery, and the high suicide rate of transgender people during the referral process.

Fran has helped a large number of trans people coming from a Catholic background, and she notes that there is a lack of public support within many other faith denominations. She believes that faith support needs to be available for trans people, for example, special ceremonies. For Fran, these rituals are important, and she has encountered her own clients devising personal rituals to mark their transition. Fran believes that faith helps to bring about peace, and describes her work as enabling people to find themselves, to be happy and productive individuals.

**HARMONIE
IDENTIFIES AS
A FAERIE
AND A TRANS WOMAN.
FOR MUCH OF HER LIFE
SHE STRUGGLED
WITH HER IDENTITY.
HOWEVER,
THROUGH HER FAITH,
INQUIRY
AND
THE SUPPORT
OF A FEW CLOSE FRIENDS
SHE HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACCEPT
AND
BECOME THE REAL HER,
HARMONIE.
FOR HARMONIE,
PLAYING HER DRUM,
NOOMI,
IS AS MUCH
A PART OF HER TRANSITION
AS HER FAITH.**

“
My transition gives me the ability to have a more spiritual outlook on life and not to be ashamed or embarrassed about what or who I am or who I believe in.

It had come to me in some journeying meditation that I could actually bury the male part of myself. I needed to let 'him' go and let 'her' grow. So I dug a grave in my garden and decided to bury the good memories as well as the bad memories, and let him have a resting place.

I am a faerie. I was a hidden person and that is why I can tap into that very easily – faeries being hidden people. When I do meditation I really link into my faith, and I journey-meditate, I go to places, to another dimension. I become a spiritual being. I am here to live this life to find out who I should have been. I am here to help other people. I do like to dress in that faerie role. It is a very individual faith.

I didn't choose Noomi, the drum (pictured). Noomi chose me. I see her as like myself. I call her 'her' and I guess she sounds as if she is female, but if you were to look at her there's a masculine face actually carved on her. She is a big part of who I am and me playing Noomi is part of my transition.

”



SHARON (SHANON) IS 57 AND WAS BORN IN MIDDLESEX. THEY ARE A MINISTER WITH THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH AS WELL AS A LEADER OF SEVERAL LGBTQI CHRISTIAN AND MAINSTREAMING ORGANISATIONS.

“ I don't see myself as a male or female, and this project is about people of faith who transgress the binary in some way. It's not definite or clear cut when it comes to my gender identity, it's always about exploring. Even nowadays I am exploring and it changes; you can say both genders are fitting for me, depending on the time of the day or whatever. I have become more comfortable in thinking of myself as gender fluid.

It's quite sad, there is as much discrimination in the LGBTI community because of my faith as I experience in faith organisations because of my sexuality and gender identity. Many LGBTI people think that faith is against them, some think you must be mad to go to church and accept your sexuality but I want to get across to people that you don't have to separate these things, it's not either/or. The church says all sorts of terrible things but that's not God, that's the church, those are human beings.



The Communion Host represents the body of Christ, which is the queerest thing you can imagine because although Christ is presented as male in this world, there is no way they could be male. The Christian understanding is that Mary was the only human involved in the creation of Christ so only the female genes, could have passed on to Jesus. To me Christ appears to be genderqueer.

I have always known God. I don't know a time in which God was not part of my life. Being fully and truly who God created me to be is very much part of my faith journey as much as it is part of my gender journey. The two go hand in hand. I can't know God better if I don't know myself better.

”

ROBIN, 43, GREW UP IN RURAL SWITZERLAND AND STUDIED THEOLOGY BEFORE MOVING TO ENGLAND TO WORK AS A HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN. HE TRANSITIONED LATE IN LIFE, DESPITE IDENTIFYING AS MALE FROM AN EARLY AGE.

“

I would be asked, 'Why do you want to be a man', but for me it was, 'I don't want to be a man. I just am'. One of the struggles about being trans is that it becomes a very public event. The decision to transition is a very personal, private, intimate decision.

I often say I am a trans man. It feels the most accurate. Just saying I'm a man denies the fact that I was not born male and that I've had to work hard to become the man that I am in a visual way. I don't take things for granted when people now call me 'he' or refer to me as 'him'. These are things that I have made happen. Being a vicar was a kind of gender-neutral role, and I thought it would be quite an asexual job. And that suited me down to a tee.

Am I Swiss? Am I English? Am I male? Am I female? It's like a thread going through my life. There is always a tension, which I think I am just intensely drawn to. What scares me more is the mundane.

The 'amulet' I brought to the photoshoot is a piece of coral I found on a beach that I felt connected with. I threaded a piece of red ribbon round it. The red is hugely important to me. That was one of the key colours that became important to me once I started to take testosterone. It signifies something around the heat that I feel in my body. I think that is an expression of my spirituality, of being curious and of being tactile. Perhaps I will put it down again. I don't know.

”

ROBIN FEELS TRANSITION HAS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS, AS WELL AS A PHYSICAL SIDE. HE FEELS THAT TRANSITIONING IS LIKE TRAVELLING AND HE DOESN'T KNOW IF HE EVER WANTS TO REACH POST-TRANSITION.



ANON
“
BEFORE, I HAD BEEN VERY CAUTIOUS ABOUT SHARING WHAT I’VE BEEN UP TO IN REGARDS TO FAITH AND GENDER. IT’S IMPORTANT FOR ME TO SHARE MY STORY WITH TWILIGHT PEOPLE, BECAUSE IT WILL BE ARCHIVED AND USED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO SEE WHAT WE DEALT WITH IN THE EARLY DAYS OF UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDER ON ALL SOCIAL LEVELS INCLUDING RELIGION.
”

Anon kindly donated Tefillin, a Tallit and a Kippah to the Twilight People collection. Tefillin are a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah, which are worn on the arms by observant Jews during weekday morning prayers. A Tallit is a prayer shawl. In some communities, it is first worn after the Bar Mitzvah, a Jewish coming of age ritual, which happens during early teenage years. A Kippah is a skullcap worn as a sign of respect and reverence for God.

“
Why did I donate them? At first, I couldn’t get rid of them. They have too much attachment to my roots, family history that the bond is quite difficult to break. Despite having cut off all ties with my father, and therefore his religion, which was his decision, I find these religious items too difficult to cut away from myself.

But consider for a moment that these religious items are to be worn by men, and so they are symbolic in that the person in possession of them is male. Obviously I’m aware of the body I was born into, but being transgender can be a difficult emotional journey and so I’ve wanted to have them out of my life for that reason.

I thought the best solution would be to donate them to a synagogue or a worthy cause where they can be used. However, I am aware of the difficulties transgender males face, too, for example perhaps not having a Bar Mitzvah but wanting to wear Tefillin much later in life. I see trans men as taking the complete opposite journey to me and I had hoped that a trans man could pick up the Tefillin from me, from where I said goodbye to them at the mid-point of my transition. I hope that they might become useful to a person in their life for what they were intended for.

”



LAYLA IS A 31 YEAR OLD TRANS MUSLIM WOMAN, ACTIVE ACROSS A SPECTRUM OF GROUPS CONCERNED WITH EQUALITY AND TRANS ISSUES. SHE HAS STRUGGLED SINCE YOUTH TO BE ACCEPTED FOR HER TRUE SELF.

SHE IS A CARING COMPASSIONATE HUMAN BEING WHO CONTINUES HER ACTIVISM FOR ALL HUMANITY.

“
Lots of people, including many Imams, think transgender people don’t exist in faith but they do, and it’s OK to be trans in any religion or faith.

Religion is important because it’s like ballast. It stabilises you and it gives you something to believe in, be a part of. It makes you strong inside. Some people and some faiths have a problem [with transgender people]. In this day and age this shouldn’t be a problem.

I’m active with Imaan, a UK Muslim Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Support Group. But also I have my own LGBT Muslim Support Group.

I use to go on about the concept of being Sunni Islam, but nowadays I don’t bother anymore, because if you put Shia, Sunni or Sufi it segregates each strand. I just try to put it under one bracket, ‘Islam’, because it’s better that way.

I want rights for trans people to progress, so they can live a better life and not have the same issues as trans people now.

”

SURAT-SHAAN HAS STRUGGLED FINDING HIS AUTHENTIC SELF, NOT KNOWING WHAT WAS MISSING, BUT NOW FEELS HAPPY AND PROUD WITH HIS NON-BINARY TRANSMASCULINE IDENTITY.



SHAAN RUNS THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE PROJECT THROUGH LIBERAL JUDAISM, ALONGSIDE OTHER INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS FOR TRANS PEOPLE, WITH HOPES TO INSPIRE MORE PROJECTS EXPLORING INTERSECTIONS OF FAITH, SPIRITUALITY AND GENDER.

“Realising I can be a transgender Jew was just fantastic. I can’t be just trans, and I can’t be just a Jew. It had to be both.

When I was younger, growing up in a secular environment, no one ever told me I was a girl, no one told me I was a boy. I knew nothing about gender. I knew nothing about faith.

Finding out who I was; my faith, my spirituality, my community but also finding my gender, they were parallel. It almost happened at the same time, and all things influenced each other.

I’m ready to go, ready to get on with my life and my faith and my gender, and my projects, which are probably more important than anything now.

The Rainbow Jews project that I founded helped me with my coming out, and Twilight People is really important for me too, as it’s about the layers of our identity – body, mind, spirit and more. Other people’s stories and experiences really resonate, no matter how different they are. Hearing other people’s stories and finding my faith, led me to not just say I’m trans, but to start doing trans.

I wear the trans pride flag like a Jewish prayer shawl. This is exactly what I looked like at Tel Aviv Pride 2015, which was dedicated to the trans community.

I would really like the younger generation to see it’s possible, and I want them to see it doesn’t have to be hard. I want to be part of that journey of learning what we really are all about. So it’s a spiritual quest, being transgender and a person of faith, and it’s a quest to find true humanity. I feel really privileged, and I hope more people come on board to explore this with me.

”

CHRISTINA

“**TRANSITION IS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY FROM START TO FINISH BECAUSE IT IS ABOUT MAKING THE OUTSIDE REFLECT WHAT IS INSIDE AND WHAT IS INSIDE IS SPIRITUAL.**”

GLOSSARY



AGENDER

An agender person is somebody who identifies as not having a gender, or as having a neutral gender.

CISGENDER

Cisgender is a term that refers to people whose gender identity is aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth; in other words, people who are not trans.

GENDER

Gender is often mistaken for being the same as sex. In fact, sex refers to the biological characteristics you are given at birth, whereas gender is a conscious part of your identity. Society often refers to only two gender options: male and female. Gender is a spectrum, and there are many more identities than simply male and female.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

Gender dysphoria is the feeling of discomfort or distress when a person becomes acutely aware of the difference between the gender they were assigned at birth and their gender identity. Not all trans people feel this, and it is not the only indicator of being transgender.

GENDER IDENTITY

Someone's concept of themselves as male or female or both or neither is referred to as their gender identity, this includes how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different than that which was assigned at birth.

GENDER VARIANT (ALSO REFERRED TO AS GENDER NONCONFORMING)

Gender variance, or gender nonconformity, is behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine and feminine gender norms.

GENDERFLUID

A genderfluid identity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, where a person's gender is never fixed. Genderfluid people may identify as a variety of different genders at different times.

GENDERQUEER

Genderqueer is a gender identity that does not fit the restrictions of strictly male or female, but is rather a blend of both genders, neither gender, or something in between.

LGBTQI AND LGBTQIA

A common abbreviation for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Queer/Questioning and Intersex. Sometimes 'A' is added to stand for Asexual.

NONBINARY

Nonbinary identity means a gender identity that falls outside of the binaries of male or female.

PRONOUNS

Pronouns are how you refer to somebody in the third person. As well as 'he' and 'she', there is also the singular form of 'they', which is sometimes used by a person who feels that the binary choices do not fit their identity. The pronouns used by transgender and gender non-conforming people can vary widely beyond these, and it is better to ask somebody's pronouns instead of assuming them.

TRANSGENDER (SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS 'TRANS')

Transgender is a general term to describe someone whose authentic gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth. Many gender identities exist within the spectrum. The terms listed below are by no means an exhaustive list, and all definitions are fluid and contested.

TRANSITION

Some transgender people choose to alter themselves to closer fit their true gender – this process is called transitioning. These changes include changes to what they wear, their preferred name and pronoun (he/she/they), and medical adjustments, such as taking hormones or undergoing surgery.

There is no hierarchy when it comes to achieving personal identity, and not everybody sees all options available to them as personally necessary. Everyone is an individual when it comes to transitioning and what measures to take. It can be quite a personal subject matter for people who identify as trans.



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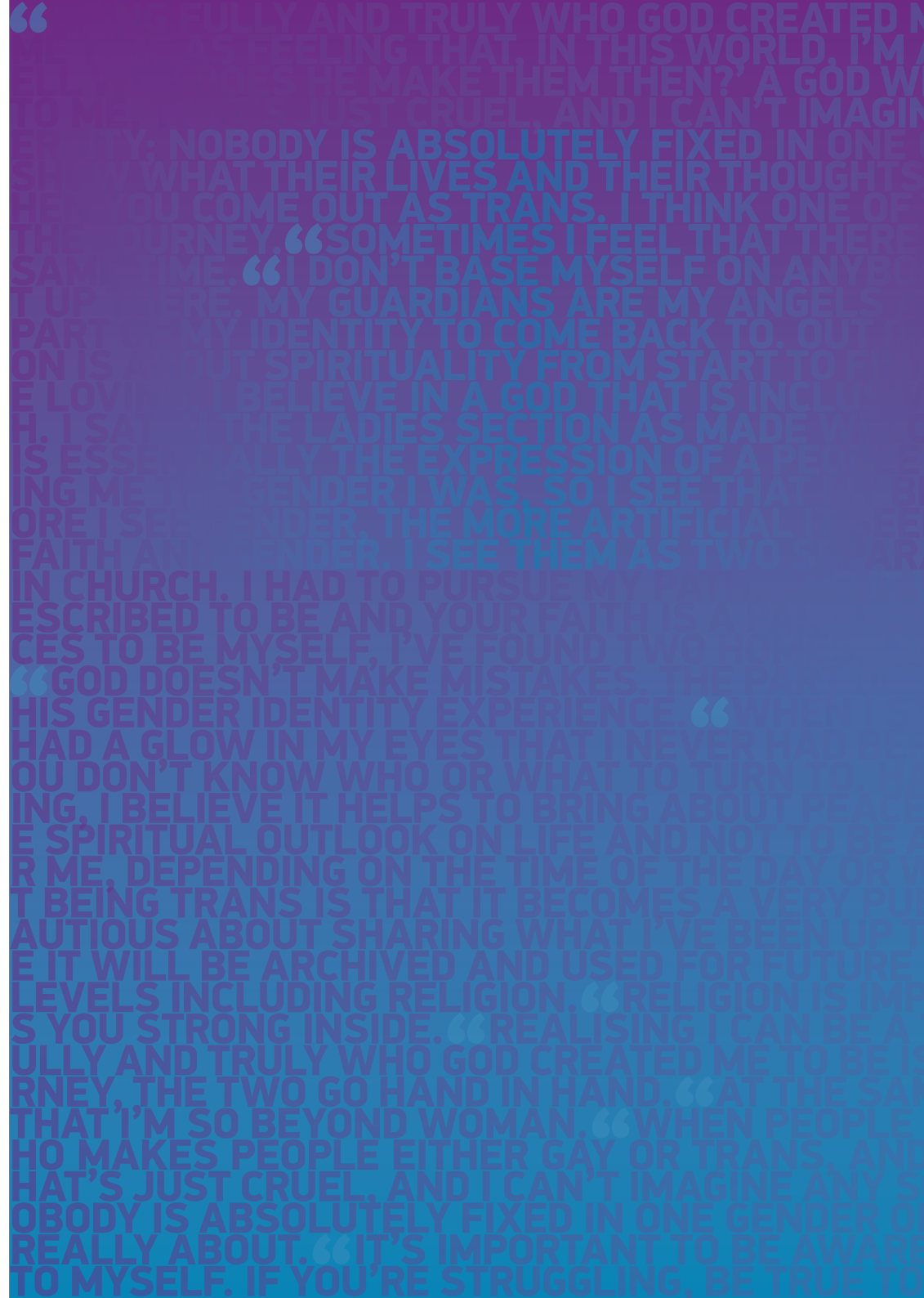
**THE PROJECT TITLE
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WRITTEN BY RABBI REUBEN ZELLMAN.**

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WE THANK ALL OUR PROJECT ASSOCIATES FOR THEIR KIND SUPPORT.**

**SURAT-SHAAN KNAN
PROJECT MANAGER,
TWILIGHT PEOPLE**



Proud to host Twilight People



THIS
GROUNDBREAKING PROJECT
DOCUMENTS
THE LIVES OF
TRANS
AND
GENDER
VARIANT
PEOPLE OF FAITH
THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS,
ORAL HISTORIES
AND MEMORABILIA.
GENDER
VARIANT PEOPLE
HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED
IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE,
INCLUDING IN
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.
TWILIGHT PEOPLE
AIMS
TO EXPLORE
THESE INTERSECTIONS
FOR THE
FIRST TIME
IN THE UK IN
A HERITAGE CONTEXT.

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MUCH P
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