

Ellen Orzoff
Shabbat Sh'lach L'cha 5779

Shabbat shalom, my name is Ellen Orzoff. I'm 13 years old and I use she/her pronouns and I do identify as queer.

I remember when I went to Hebrew School, I would usually start the Amidah thinking, "what am I supposed to do here?" No one gives you instructions! People say "Now it's time for the Amidah," but they don't say what we're supposed to do. I started being in my own head, talking to myself, creating my own prayers because the prayers on the page didn't fit for me. It got bigger and bigger and led me to create this way of approaching the amidah.

During the amidah, I start by thinking about how I've been accepted in the past week or month. I reflect on times from the past when I felt "they made me feel welcome there," "they invited me," "it's okay to be different,". I like to start there and put myself in a happy place. I think about those people that maybe didn't accept me and how stupid it was that they didn't accept me and how they should have accepted me and how they let me down. Lastly, I think about how, even though I try to be as accepting as I can be, sometimes I mess up, sometimes I'm a little mean or not as inviting as I might be or should be. I'm an apologizer, so in those moments, I want to say I'm sorry. Even though sorry doesn't always fix stuff and I know I can wreck relationships through my actions, I still recognize that even if I had a rocky start, I can still do better and change for the future. This reflection helps give me a different point of view of the other person's idea and why I didn't accept that person for it.

I've been doing this practice for almost five years. It doesn't always look the same. Sometimes I question my queerness, sometimes I think "yeah I'm queer, yeah I'm here" -- my feelings about my identity change, so I don't go so into the specifics.

When I started this practice, I'd get revenge on people who judged me by judging them back. I've come to the place where I offer acceptance, even in times when I feel judged. Acceptance is about honoring our differences and our similarities.

We're going to turn to page 46 to start the Amidah. I want to invite you to do my acceptance practice:

- First, think of moments from the past when you have felt accepted
- Second, think about moments when you didn't feel accepted. When you think of those moments, try to remember that people have bad days and see if it's possible to forgive. This is still proof of how far to go til we're all accepted
- Finally, think of times when you weren't as accepting as you could be and think about why that was

We'll start the Amidah together and come back together on page 62.