

# LGBT Jewish Clergy Confronting Trumpism: A Strategic Summit

July 25-26, 2018  
Berkeley, California



**Jewish Roundtable**

of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion

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## Welcome

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Welcome to LGBTQ Jewish Clergy Confronting Trumpism. The purpose of the summit is to identify what contributions LGBTQ rabbis, cantors, kohenot and other clergy can offer in responding to the social justice, pastoral, and existential concerns raised by Trumpism—and to empower one another in our responses.

Sessions will include analysis of specific threats and challenges, training in allyship of vulnerable populations in the United States—including queer and Jewish people—and working meetings for sharing best practices in order to create a strategic blueprint. Our shared insights will be distributed by the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion (CLGS) in the coming months to use during the High Holy Days and leading up to the November election.

Rabbah Deb Kolodny  
Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman  
Rabbah Rona Matlow  
Rabbi Jay Michaelson

# July 2018 Queer Rabbi Summit Schedule

## Wednesday, July 25

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*Note: affinity groups and additional workshops can be added to any workshop after lunch on Wednesday. We will add no more than one slot or two for Workshop 5.*

8:30 am      **Breakfast** (Badè)

9:45 am      **Welcome Settling in Exercises** (Badè)  
*Rabbis Jane Rachel Litman and Rona Matlow*

10:00 am     **Opening Plenary: Public Queer Theology in the Context of White Supremacy** (Badè)  
*Rabbis Jay Michaelson, Deb Kolodny*

Progressive clergy have a number of advantages, and some limitations, to act as prophetic voices in a time of state violence. In contrast to academic or theoretical theology, this “praying with our feet” (and voices) is sometimes called “public theology.” The recent viral video of Rabbi Arthur Waskow being arrested for protesting at an ICE detention center is one example. This plenary question will explore some questions that arise from this role, including:

- What, exactly, can queer Jewish clergy do that others cannot? How are our voices uniquely valuable (if they are)? What are some effective (and ineffective) public theological responses to Trumpism?
- What are some effective Jewish responses to the wars on truth, journalism, immigrants, internationalism, human rights, and democracy? Where do these responses fall short?
- How do we balance our own potentially radical commitments with the value of more accommodationist public positions? (For example, if “Abolish ICE” is a political ‘loser’ but a moral commitment many of us hold, what do we do?)

- Is it possible for rabbis to get ‘inside the heads’ of our fellow citizens and address the pre-political, spiritual roots of political commitments, such as fear, trauma, ignorance, and love?

11:00 am **Break** with snacks (Badè and outside)

11:15 am **Workshop One**

**Big Data and Big Hearts: What can data tell rabbis about how we can help?** (Room 133)

*Rabbi Jay Michaelson*

The mainstream LGBT movement succeeded in its goals (debatable as those goals may have been) in large part because of the exhaustive use of polling and communications testing. What can big data tell us about how we as queer rabbis can help make meaningful differences today? Using recent studies on voter segmentation, voter psychology and value formation, populist ideologies, and persuasive strategies, we will explore some strategies for persuading the persuadable, ignoring the unpersuadable, and moving the needle of public opinion. We'll look at specific issues including the Supreme Court, immigration, Islamophobia, and civil rights.

**Mussar for Social Media** (Room 134)

*Rabbi Ruth Adar*

Social media used wisely are a powerful set of tools for communication and connection. Used unwisely, they can waste our time, fray our nerves, and be a vehicle for terrible harm. In this workshop we will explore some texts that can inform our use of some of the most popular social media platforms and pool our insights on best practices.

12:45 pm **Lunch** (Badè)

Wednesday schedule continued

2:15 pm

## **Workshop Two**

**HaAderet v'HaEmunah** (Room 133)

*Rabbah Rona Matlow*

The piyyut הנומאהו תרדאה can be very challenging, particularly in view of the text for Motzei Shabbat, where we read proof texts of God's humility.

In this workshop, I propose a creative writing session, where participants take select verses from this piyyut and write English verses that relate to the Hebrew, but show us as proud queer Jews who are working to maintain our Jewish identity in the face of Trumpism.

These verses would need some hook to the Hebrew of course, but can be as bold as the authors choose to make them. Any relevant topics of the day can and should be folded into these works.

People will work in hevruta to create their verses. At the end of the workshop we will collate the verses, read the entire work out loud and create space for discussion.

**Interrupting Hate in Public Spaces** (Room 134)

*Rabbah Deb Kolodny*

The vast majority agree that we must ensure the safety of our communities. Yet we are living in a moment when public vitriol is skyrocketing, tensions flare and hate incidents have increased anywhere from 20% to 200% in our cities. FBI statistics show that 20% of all hate incidents are based on LGBTQ status and 11% are based on Anti-Semitism.

This abbreviated workshop provides an opportunity to address this crisis. Using tools and methodologies proven over decades from the foundational text: Training Active Bystanders by Dr. Ervin Staub, participants will leave confident of their ability to support and empower targets by:

- Tapping into skills, experiences and values they already have
- Understanding and overcoming what inhibits them from actively supporting targets
- Learning and practicing specific tactics for interrupting verbal hate in public by centering and empowering the target to create safety
- Learning specific tactics for protecting themselves from verbal abuse
- Understanding the risks inherent in any hostile situation
- Learning what NOT to do to escalate the situation

3:45 pm

**Break** with snacks (Badè and outside)

4:00pm

**Rodef Tzedek: Strategic Activism in the age of Trump** (Badè)

*Rabbah Deb Kolodny*

There are so many opportunities to become active that discerning where our time is best spent can be daunting. What actions actually have an impact in this chaotic world? What roles are most effective for us to perform? Together we will explore both the content of these questions and a process for discernment that you can take home to support you in the years to come.

6:00 pm

**Dinner** (Badè)

7:30 pm

**Mya Byrne Performance** (Badè)

Join singer, songwriter, and social justice advocate Mya Byrne for entertainment, stories, and a Q&A. Mya, a rabbi's daughter, out and proud trans woman, and multifaceted award-winning performing artist, is humbled to be part of the 2018 Summit. In this program, she'll be talking about her background, the current issues facing trans people in the world and broader Jewish community, and of course, playing some songs that will have you singing in your seat. [www.myabyrne.bandcamp.com](http://www.myabyrne.bandcamp.com)

## Thursday, July 26

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8:15 am      **Breakfast** (Badè)

9:00 am      **Shacharit with Torah Service** (Badè)  
*Rabbis Shoshanna Dembitz and Robin Podolsky*

10:15 am     **Break** with snacks (Badè and outside)

10:30 am     **Workshop Three**

### **Why 'Born That Way' Strategies are Tempting but Problematic** (Room 133)

*Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman*

Polls show that casting gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans\* identity as biological from birth is a successful strategy in promoting equal rights for these groups among Americans, particularly White Americans. Many queer people experience themselves as having that identity from birth. Others do not. This workshop will explore the theoretical and activist advantages and pitfalls with the "born that way" strategy, including trans\* exclusion, racist underpinnings, normativity and social pressure, and whether it is "good for the Jews."

### **Listening to and Speaking with Orthodox Jews** (Room 134)

*Rabbi Mike Moskowitz*

This workshop explores the theological, cultural, and social formation of a Pro-Trump Orthodox Judaism. We'll discuss the deeper issues and why these communities are turning to the Republican party and Trump, and how they manage to deal with the rise of anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism that is part of Trump's America. We will suggest best practices in engaging Orthodox Jews in progressive initiatives, such as equal rights in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation.

11:45 am **Lunch** (Badè)

1:00 pm **Workshop Four**

**Resilience and Activism** (Room 133)

*Kohenet Talia Johnson*

Being an activist is difficult. Being a rabbi, cantor or spiritual leader is difficult. Being someone who cares for others is difficult. When we are in these roles it is extremely easy for us to forget to take care of ourselves. In this workshop the focus will be on recognizing burnout and building a toolkit to ensure that one's health is maintained while doing the work. This session will be interactive and discussion encouraged.

**Israel/Palestine** (Room 134)

*Rabba'ot Deb Kolodny and Rona Matlow*

The situation in Israel/Palestine is divisive. Trumpism has made things worse, with Trump's blind support for Netanyahu, despite all the evidence of his corruption and human rights violations.

Two state solutions and other ideas have been floated with no success. Together we will explore options to move the situation forward to bring peace, safety, prosperity and health to all who inhabit the land. D'vorah and Rona have written pieces with thoughts, feelings and ideas about the situation to launch and juice the discussion.

We will begin and end the session with guided visualization/meditation, establish ground rules and have two facilitators to keep the speaking queue and support us in having the holiest, most peaceful conversation possible. We will also ask for a volunteer to provide pastoral support for anyone who requests it.

2:15 pm **Break** with snacks (Badè and outside)

Thursday schedule continued

2:30 pm

### **Workshop Five**

#### **Health Care Justice: Engaging Jewish Communities in Solidarity with Disability Activism (Badè)**

*Rabbi Julia Watts Belser*

Disability activists have been on the front-lines of recent political struggles for health care justice, opposing devastating cuts to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, while also challenging the roll-back of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In this session, we will examine critical current policy issues in these debates and consider health care activism as a potent site for coalitional organizing and solidarity, with powerful potential for queer Jewish engagement. Together, we will strategize ways to catalyze Jewish political work for disability rights and justice -- and discuss responsive and accountable ways for queer Jews with and without disabilities to be in solidarity with disability communities.

3:30 pm

#### **Coalescing Plenary (Badè)**

*Rabbis Jay Michaelson and Julia Watts Belser*

Identify next steps, break into work groups to clarify and deepen on whatever categories emerge, then report back and solidify collective next steps (includes a break).

5:00 pm      **Healing Service** (Badè)  
*Rabbi Pearl BarLev*

We come together to share the healing torah of our day, our lives, our rabbinates, our tradition. We will pray and bless together with visions of community, strength and possibility, so that we can leave inspired to enter the next chapter: “Chazak chazak v’nitchazek!”

5:30 pm      **Closing Ritual and Blessings** (Badè)  
*Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman*

6:00 pm      **Dinner** (Badè)



## Presenters

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**Ruth Adar** is a Reform rabbi with over 30 years of experience in online communities and environments. She founded the first online support group for survivors of sexual abuse in 1985. Currently she teaches classes in Basic Judaism for Lehrhaus Judaica, writes on topics of economic justice and blogs at [CoffeeShopRabbi.com](http://CoffeeShopRabbi.com). She may be reached at [@CoffeeShopRabbi](https://twitter.com/CoffeeShopRabbi) on Twitter and at [ruthadar@gmail.com](mailto:ruthadar@gmail.com).



**Rabbi Pearl BarLev MAHL, BCC** is a lover of life, a musician, a writer and a spiritual teacher for wholeness and happiness. She is the former Jewish Chaplain and Interfaith Psychiatric Chaplain for UCLA Health, and former congregational Rabbi for Santa Ynez Valley Jewish Community. She was ordained by HUC-JIR and is a board certified chaplain.

She currently serves on the CCAR Rapid Response Team offering spiritual and emotional support to rabbinic colleagues in crisis. She is a consultant and on-call Rabbi/Chaplain at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center and Santa Monica UCLA Hospital. She served on the editorial team for CCAR's *Mishkan Refuah*, and her essay entitled "The Reform Movement's Jewish Tent of Healing" appears in the CCAR book "A Life of Meaning: Embracing Reform Judaism's Sacred Path". Rabbi BarLev brings to her rabbinate a knowledge of and respect for Jewish and social diversities, and a passion for the hope of *am echad lev echad*, "one people one heart." She draws on the ideals of Reform Judaism and the wisdom of Jewish teachings as a path to the possibilities of peace, meaning, and well-being for the individual, the Jewish community, and the interfaith community at large.



**Mya Byrne** is an award-winning songwriter, poet, proud trans dyke, and rabbi's daughter. She's been featured on national TV and radio, NPR, Spotify, major folk and rock festivals, many queer/Pride events (including the 2017 SF Trans March), and has opened for many of her heroes, including Rae Spoon and Levon Helm. In addition to her solo performance career, she plays bass, guitar, and mandolin for others onstage and studio, including SF's Homobiles and the legendary Lavender Country. Her creative writing has been published by EOAGH, The James Franco Review, and The Advocate, among others. Her most recent single, "American Dream," a song about anti-trans violence and school shootings, is available on [www.myabyrne.bandcamp.com](http://www.myabyrne.bandcamp.com), with all proceeds going to Trans Lifeline. Find out more at [www.myabyrne.com](http://www.myabyrne.com) and follow her on Twitter or Instagram @myadriene.



**Shoshana Dembitz** has been a community and service leader for many decades. In the 70s and 80s she was a community leader and farmer in Humboldt County where she also helped found congregation B'nai HaAretz. She honed her skills at the Davvening Leadership Training Institute and currently helps lead the community and services at the Aquarian Minyan.



**Talia Johnson** is an out trans, queer, lesbian, autistic woman based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Her work as a Kohenet bridges the realms of spirituality, LGBTQIA+, and mental health and is expressed through leading services, facilitating workshops, teaching, and one-on-one work. Talia has been an activist for most of her life, with her first political activity at 8 months old, and her first words were likely, "That's not fair!"



**Rabbi Debra Kolodny** has been pursuing justice as a spiritual activist since 1981. She led ALEPH, Nehirim and Resolutions Northwest as Executive Director and is now the spiritual leader of Portland's UnShul. She founded Portland's Spirit Led Justice Alliance and spends 20-30 hours a week as a resister, persister and bad-ass sister who gets shit done.



**Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman** is the Rabbi of the Chico Havurah, a diverse and welcoming community. Prior to Chico, Jane served as the Rabbi of LGBTQ outreach congregations Sha'ar Zahav and Kol Simcha. Jane has been a consultant on religious education for alternative families for the Metropolitan Community Church and National Council of Churches. Jane was a lecturer at California State University Northridge, where she co-founded the Queer Studies Institute. An LGBTQI and AIDS activist for over twenty-five years, including serving on the Board of the March on Washington and Freedom to Marry, Jane is widely published in the fields of feminism, trans and queer theory, and is the co-editor of the award winning Lifecycles series. Jane's latest piece is the chapter on Judaism in *Struggling From Within*, a multifaith look at religion in American from an LGBTQI perspective.



**Rabbah Rona Matlow** is a transwoman, ordained rabbi, disabled veteran and community advocate, activist, educator and counselor. She provides counseling services to fellow veterans through The Soldier's Project. She actively monitors social media, identifying people in the transgender, Jewish and military/veteran communities, who are in crisis, and reaches out to them to offer support. She has been married to her wife Susan for over 34 years. Rona hopes to start work on a Doctorate of Hebrew Letters program at Spertus Institute for Jewish Studies this fall.



**Rabbi Dr. Jay Michaelson** is a political pundit (columnist, *The Daily Beast*; commentator, MSNBC etc.) and a meditation teacher (secular, Buddhist, & Jewish). Previously, he was a professional LGBT activist for ten years, founding two Jewish LGBT organizations and working as an LGBT funder for two years. From 2011-13, he spoke at roughly 100 colleges, churches, and synagogues during the pivotal years of the marriage equality battle. In 2013, he authored the first exposé on the right-wing “religious liberty” movement now made famous by Masterpiece Cakeshop and Hobby Lobby. His recent work at the *Daily Beast* has focused on the Supreme Court, anti-trans ideologies & violence, and the religious right. JD/Yale, PhD/Hebrew University, nondenominational rabbinic ordination.



**Rabbi Mike Moskowitz** is the Scholar-in-Residence for Trans and Queer Jewish Studies at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. He is a deeply traditional and radically progressive advocate for trans rights and a vocal ally for LGBT inclusivity. Rabbi Moskowitz received three Ultra Orthodox ordinations while learning in the Mir, in Jerusalem, and in Beth Medrash Govoha, in Lakewood, NJ. His work on behalf of trans rights began while he served as the Rabbi of the Old Broadway Synagogue in Harlem and the Aish NY Rabbi at Columbia University. His writings can be found at [www.rabbimikemoskowitz.com](http://www.rabbimikemoskowitz.com)



**Rabbi Robin Podolsky** teaches at California State University Long Beach and blogs at <http://www.jewishjournal.com/erevavr>. Her most recent article was published in *European Judaism*, Volume 49, Issue 2, Autumn 2016. She lives in Los Angeles, CA.



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1798 Scenic Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94709  
Main office: 510/849-8206  
Toll-free: 800/999-0528  
Fax: 510/849-8212  
Email: [clgs@clgs.org](mailto:clgs@clgs.org)

The **Jewish Roundtable** of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion brings together scholars, leaders and activists to develop strategic thinking toward building culturally-appropriate programs and coalitions that affirm the dignity and human worth of LGBTQ Jews and allies. Rooted in Jewish tradition, the Jewish Roundtable promotes the exchange of best practices, encourages LGBTQ Jewish leadership, and develops educational resources for Jewish and allied faith communities.

The Jewish Roundtable guides and provides assistance for work on creative ritual, liturgical innovation, theological exploration, and social justice programming. Its goal is tikkun olam in the classic sense of that term – the repair of a broken and benighted world – by giving support and affirmation to Jewish LGBTQI people and their allies as they engage in full and open participation in their local communities, the larger Jewish community, and society as a whole.