

Modern Jewry and Where I Might Belong

(Alternative Title: I'm Here Too)

by Azriel Apap

What does it mean to be a modern Jew?

Is there one way, some right way to exist as a Jew, as a person?

Am I somehow wrong for being both Jewish and transgender?

Less than one hundred years ago, I would be G-d-knows-where, because I am Jewish and transgender. Less than one hundred years ago, I would likely be dead, because I am Jewish and transgender. Less than one hundred years ago, I would be an outcast, rejected by and because of my own community.

There are thoughts nagging at the back of my brain, asking me what's changed in that short amount of time.

(Because, are we still not fleeing Europe?)

(Are we still not safe in what's meant to be our homeland?)

(And me, did my previous rabbi not tell me that I wasn't welcome in what was, at the time, my synagogue?)

Yeah, sometimes it hits me like a ton of bricks that the only community I've ever called home kind of, well, doesn't always seem to want me.

The fact that I belong shouldn't be something I have to *learn*. It should be a given. Should be; isn't.

We, the Jewish people, have beaten all odds by simply surviving. After all the hardship we've collectively faced, we are still rejecting our own.

I wish to pave the way for others that will come after me, which is easier said than done. I must be the perfect poster child, make no mistakes. Mistakes are for people who have the time, the position, *the privilege* to make mistakes.

(Be brave, be strong, speak out, stand up. Hold your head high, don't listen to them, rise above. I want to scream sometimes, at the sky, at the universe, at people. At myself.)

I say, *I'm a Modern Orthodox Jew.*

(Am I? Is this something I am allowed to be? Is it something of a status, one that can be revoked?)

I do not say, *I don't quite know where I fit.*

I do not ask, *do I belong?*

(Perhaps these questions are worthwhile, but my fear outweighs my curiosity.)

It is interesting place, where I live, at the crossroad of two beautifully, dangerously, fascinatingly intersected streets.

I'm not alone. I have my friends and family on my side. I have determination and fire and hope on my side. Everything will turn out fine.

(Accepting myself was the hard part. From here on out, everything's just heavy lifting.)

I am okay and I am not wrong and I *belong*.

Somewhere, somewhere, I belong.