

# הנני Hineini

COMING OUT IN A JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL



## Purim to Passover Campaign Discussion Guide

### ABOUT KESHET

*Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School* was produced by Keshet, a grassroots organization working for the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) Jews in Jewish life. Nationally, Keshet provides resources, training, and technical assistance for creating change in Jewish communities across the country. In the Greater Boston area, Keshet also offers community events for GLBT Jews.

### ***HINEINI: COMING OUT IN A JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL***

Keshet produced the film *Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School* to bring Shulamit Izen's courageous story to light and to inspire Jewish educators and leaders to create a safe and inclusive environment for GLBT Jewish youth.

In addition to the film, Keshet has produced a comprehensive **Curriculum Resource Guide** for Jewish educators working with youth in grades 7-12. The Curriculum provides Jewish educators with resources to integrate GLBT issues into a wide range of programs and curricula, including Jewish text study, history, social studies, health education, or a youth group program on social justice or diversity in the Jewish community.

Keshet also offers individualized **staff development trainings, consultations, and workshops** that teach concrete strategies for combating anti-GLBT bias, supporting GLBT youth, and creating fully inclusive experiences for all Jewish youth and families. Keshet runs two intensive Training Institutes annually for Jewish educators and community leaders. Participants are given the tools and guidance to replicate the trainings in their own communities.

If you are interested in learning more about the Curriculum or trainings on GLBT issues, please contact Andrea Jacobs, Director of Education at Keshet: [andrea@keshetonline.org](mailto:andrea@keshetonline.org) or 617.524.9227.

### LEARN MORE

[www.hineinthefilm.org](http://www.hineinthefilm.org)

For behind the scenes info, photos, reviews, to purchase a copy of the film or curriculum, or schedule a screening in your community.

[www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org)

Learn more about Keshet, the organization that produced the film, and how to bring the film and trainings to your school, community center, synagogue, or organization. The site also includes a list of GLBT Jewish websites, books, and films.

## **WHAT'S ON THE DVD?**

The DVD contains the main film plus several special features. Depending how long you have for your screening, you may want to view the film, plus one additional feature. The clips are described below, along with their length.

### **Feature Film (60 minutes)**

*Hineini* (Hebrew for 'Here I am') chronicles the story of one student's courageous fight to establish a gay-straight alliance at a Jewish high school in the Boston area and the transformative impact of her campaign on her entire community.

Longing to connect more deeply with her Jewish identity, Shulamit Izen enters 9th grade at The New Jewish High School (now Gann Academy). She also starts school as an out lesbian.

Using interviews with Shulamit, her family, teachers, and other students – both those who support her campaign and those who oppose it – the film allows the members of this community to tell their own stories. What emerges is a potent and inspiring story of Jewish pluralism and a community navigating the cross-currents of Jewish tradition and social change.

Beyond the struggle to create a supportive environment for gay and lesbian students and teachers at the school, this is the story of a community wrestling with the very definition of pluralism and diversity in a Jewish context.

### **Special Features**

#### **Catching Up With Shulamit (4:50)**

Hear from Shulamit today, a rabbinical student, as she reflects on her experience in high school.

#### **Coming Out After Graduation (3:49)**

A male student featured in the film comes out.

#### **The Open House Today (5:46)**

See what the Open House, the gay-straight alliance at The New Jewish High School, looks like today.

#### **Behind the Scenes with the Producer and Director (6:57)**

Hear the story and struggle behind the making of the film.

#### **Conversation with Singer-Songwriter Catie Curtis (3:08)**

Award-winning singer-songwriter Catie Curtis talks about what the film means to her.

#### **Reactions to the Beit Midrash (5:03)**

Hear from students about their experience at the Beit Midrash about Judaism and homosexuality.

#### **The Teachers of New Jew**

A slideshow about the faculty featured in the film.

## Technical Tips for Your Screening:

- >Preview the entire film so you know the content and context before you show it.
- >Review the suggested questions below and choose which ones you would like your group to discuss. The questions are merely suggestions and should be adapted to meet the needs of your particular audience. Don't try to tackle all of them in one night!
- >Test your equipment including your DVD player, TV, and sound system.
- >Turn off the television when the film is finished. This will switch people's focus from the screen to each other.
- >If you would like additional information before the screening on the issues covered in the film, visit the resources page on the Keshet website: <http://www.keshetonline.org/resources/>. You can also refer your group to this page if questions arise during the conversation.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

*Hineini* can be a powerful springboard for discussion about:

- creating safe schools and programs for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth
- the experiences of GLBT Jews
- the role of allies in creating change
- youth-led activism
- the importance of supportive adults for GLBT youth
- pluralism and inclusion in the Jewish community

### I. General Questions

- This film focuses on a day school. What thoughts does it spark for you about how GLBT issues are addressed in our community?
- What are we doing well to welcome and support GLBT Jewish youth? What could we do better?
- In the movie Shula describes the desire to be “Jewish, Gay, and Holy.” How do you see these identities intersecting in your own life? Are there identities you have felt are in conflict with your Jewish identity?
- Nearly all of the GLBT adults and all of the GLBT students in this movie are girls and women. Why do you think boys and men feature less prominently in this story? (If you choose this question, consider screening the feature “Coming Out After Graduation” or “The Open House Today” which both address this issue.)
- How do you think the Jewish community could better support GLBT youth and educators?
- In what ways do you feel part of our Jewish community? In what ways do you feel apart?

### II. Questions for Purim and Passover

#### Risk taking

In the story of Purim, Queen Esther takes a risk when she tells the king she is Jewish in order to save her people. By coming out as a Jew, Esther comes into her power as a leader.

- Who are the risk takers in *Hineini*?
- What are they each risking? What do they gain?
- What risks could you take in your own community to make it more inclusive of GLBT Jews?
- What might you, and your community, gain in the process?

#### Liberation

Passover encourages us to think about liberation, both personal and communal. In the Passover story, the ancient Israelites take an enormous leap of faith in trusting Moses – and God – to lead them out of slavery. Mitzrayim, the Hebrew word for Egypt, means “the narrow place,” and much

of the themes of Passover are about moving from narrow places to wider and more expansive visions of the world.

- How is *Hineini* a story of liberation? In the end, is it achieved?
- What are the costs of keeping one's identity secret and how does this play out for GLBT people? Have you ever experienced a sense of leaving Mitzrayim by “coming out” about a part of your identity?
- Is it possible to have individual liberation without communal liberation, or vice versa? How do the two intersect in this film?

### **III. If you have teachers or students at your screenings, consider incorporating the following.**

#### **For High School Students**

- The movie touched on the role of mentors in supporting GLBT students.
  - a. Do you feel like you have mentors in the Jewish community?
  - b. What role have they played in your life?
  - c. If you haven't had mentors, where have you found support in the Jewish community?
  - d. Do you know any GLBT role models in the Jewish community? Who are they?
  - e. Do you think having out GLBT teachers, rabbis, youth group advisors or camp counselors makes a difference to Jewish youth? How so?

#### **For College Students**

- Looking back on your experiences, how were identity issues addressed or not addressed in your home, youth group, religious school, or day school?
- What do you think the Jewish community does well to welcome and support GLBT Jewish youth? What does the Jewish community do well to support GLBT Jewish young adults?
- What kind of safe space exists on your campus for GLBT students?
- Is the Jewish community on your campus inclusive of GLBT Jews? If so in what ways? If not, what needs to change?

#### **For Teachers**

- In the film, we saw a different kind of coming out struggle for the educators and the youth. How do you think it is different for teachers who want to come out compared to students?
- What are the differences and similarities in how Jewish and secular educational institutions respond to GLBT students and educators?
- What, if any, responsibility do GLBT teachers have to serve as mentors or supports to students who are struggling with coming out?
- What do you think is the role of straight ally teachers to support GLBT colleagues? Students?

