

## Davey Shlasko D'var Rosh Hashonah 2025

A little while ago, you heard A Besere Velt sing *Pleytem Tzuzamen*. We sang about being in this together and having each other's backs. And that is exactly what we need right now, in all this injustice and chaos. While we organize to stop it, while we work to build better alternatives, we also need to be the kind of community that can really support and protect each other.

Part of what it takes to build that supportive community is trust. I've been thinking about trust a lot lately.

- Without trust, we can end up working at cross-purposes in spite of shared values and goals. We might find ourselves second-guessing each other's work, stepping on toes, or holding back, guarding our energy more carefully than we need to, perhaps reluctant to fully commit to a shared project.
- When we have trust, we can go beyond just working together, to really collaborate and co-create something. We can take risks together, which means we can make more ambitious choices and try for more radical change. Trust also allows us to rest sometimes, trusting that someone else has the wheel.

In addition to trusting each other as individuals, there's the question of how we trust organizations or institutions. As a kid, I was taught pretty explicitly *not* to trust the federal government, because my grandfather and many of his peers had been blacklisted, so we knew the government wasn't always on the side of righteousness. I was also taught not to trust the police, not out of a nuanced political analysis, but because people we cared about were growing weed in their back yards, and that was much more illegal than it is now, and we didn't want them to get in trouble.

On the other hand, I thought I *could* trust other institutions, like my school, in spite of quite a lot of evidence that the school really had no idea what to do with an academically gifted and socially awkward queer kid. Later, for some reason, I thought I could trust my college, in spite of the fact that it was explicitly designed to help students with vastly more class privilege than I had to maintain their privilege. Even now, I still experience an irrational sense of betrayal when an institution - like an employer, medical clinic, or synagogue - says it wants to support me and people like me, but then predictably does what it has always done and prioritizes protecting its own power.

I think a lot of people right now are feeling a similar sense of betrayal as institutions we have relied on are so clearly acting out of malice, or ignorance, or fear - and are so clearly failing to protect the people they're supposedly for. This makes it all the more important that we be able to trust each other, and that we be trustworthy - as individuals, as a BWC community, and as BWC the organization.

One of my favorite models about what it takes to build trust has four parts: intentions, competence, reliability, and awareness of power differences.

- Intentions - Do we have each other's best interests at heart? Do we have our *shared* interests at heart? For me this is also a question of, are we doing this for the right reasons? Are our motivations aligned with shared values? Or are we maybe doing it for the kudos, or to alleviate guilt, or to feel better about ourselves in some other way? And if the latter, can we make sure to cultivate healthier motivations too?
- Competence - Can we do it? Do we have the skills, the capacity, the resources, to do what we say we'll do, and support people in the ways we say we will?
- Reliability - Will we do it? Will we show up for each other consistently, and continue to prioritize what we have decided to prioritize together? Will we live up to our commitments over time?
- The fourth ingredient, awareness of power differences, is sometimes trickier: How accurate is our awareness of where we have power - where we have the ability to make things happen - and of who we have power over, and who has power over us? And how well do we understand what that means for *our particular roles* in the work we're trying to do?

So what does this look like in our BWC community? Let's think about a couple of examples.

One of the groups that's being particularly targeted by this administration is trans people. So, what does it take for me, as a trans person, to trust BWC to have my back in the face of this nonsensical and violent transphobia? What does it take for us, as a community, to be trustworthy about that?

- Everyone I've met in BWC has shown positive intentions around trans inclusion. Compared to other communities I've been part of, it has been truly astounding how consistent that is.
- Most BWC folks are more or less reliable about using the right pronouns, but of course that's a pretty low bar. What skills and capacity do we have as a community to support trans folks who aren't able to travel because our passports are no longer safe to use, or because in many places outside Massachusetts, there are no public restrooms we can legally enter? What skills and capacity do we have to support trans folks who are losing access to essential medical care? How consistently are we bringing our enormous capacity for loving and supporting each other to welcome trans people who don't get that kind of support from their families of origin?
  - Speaking of families... It is refreshing that BWC doesn't have an aggressively straight vibe like many majority-straight spaces do. But in one way, BWC does come across as very culturally straight to me, and that is that lots of folks in BWC seem to assume that people's relationships with their families of origin are basically positive. At shabbos gatherings and social events, people ask me about my family like it's a small talk. In queer spaces, at least for folks my age and older, that's not a *casual* question. And a few times, I've had experiences in BWC community where I answer that sort of question in a way that acknowledges some of the messiness that happens with my family, and folks get pretty uncomfortable. Like they don't know what to say. That's another skill and capacity we can build to better support trans and queer community members.
- I've paid attention to trans politics long enough to see a lot of organizations be really supportive when it was cool and then withdraw support - like the women's center that invited me to give them a trans inclusion training five years in a row, but didn't want a trans person actually

working there; like the committee I was recruited to (not here) that really wanted my opinion about engaging trans Jews until I mentioned that LGBT Jews are statistically less likely to be Zionist and more likely to be poor, and then they not only didn't want my input anymore but actually dissolved the committee; and like the many hospitals and clinics that have stopped providing transition care under threat from this administration. So, I'm slow to trust organizations about trans stuff. I mention this because part of what is required for us to be trustworthy is that we have to be reliable over time *even though* people won't trust us right away.

- Finally, power: Do we understand how much power we have to make a trans person's day better or worse, or to influence institutions we're part of to treat trans people better? Do we, as trans people in this community, understand how some of us have significantly more power than others? It's easy to me to see how I've been disempowered by transphobia and ableism, and I've had to learn to notice how I receive power because of racism - none of these consistently overrides the others, and they don't cancel each other out - they just make each other more complicated. Can we strategize openly about how to use our differently complicated access to power to support and protect each other?

Of course, we could ask all the same questions about how we can be trustworthy to other groups that are being targeted right now, like immigrants, people who rely on Medicaid, people who've been publicly vocal about Palestine. The one other example I'll speak to, briefly, is about how building trust fits into our mutual aid efforts.

BWC folks are organizing mutual aid in the form of skill-shares, social/emotional support, and practical support like rides to appointments, and meals when people have a short-term need. In order to build on this work and envision even more ambitious ways of supporting each other, we're going to have to trust each other enough to acknowledge differences in our power and resources - and acknowledging those differences is also *how we build* that trust.

We want to support each other to meet our needs, socially and materially, in a way that doesn't reentrench power differences, but is genuinely mutual and builds connection and relationships. And our needs differ, as do our capacities - some of us can contribute time and energy, some can contribute money, some can support our shared efforts with connections and expertise.

We need to get comfortable *contributing* in a way that's equitable rather than equal, and makes good use of all our resources. To do that, we need to have a certain level of trust that we all know how to assess our capacities honestly - that we're more or less on the same page about how to figure out how much, and in what ways, to give. We also need to get comfortable *receiving support* - and this requires a certain level of trust that people won't judge us for our needs. We need to cultivate awareness of the power we have to contribute to each other's wellbeing, by *giving and by receiving*.

Building trust in these ways is not automatic! It will be uncomfortable sometimes. We will mess up, and feel guilty about it. We might feel betrayed. We will not always get all our needs met and we will not

always live up to our best expectations of ourselves. But we can do it. We can build a trust so strong and so flexible that the betrayal of institutions has less and less impact on us, emotionally and materially. We keep us safe. We keep us cared for. We show up for each other and, and together we build a world of compassion and justice.