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***"What guidance does Judaism offer to transgender people
or those who are gender-nonconforming?"***

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

I distinctly remember being surprised and impressed when I first encountered the Talmudic term *tumtum*, which refers to an individual whose sexual characteristics are indeterminate or obscured, and whose gender is in a state of doubt. Surprised, because I'm not even sure I was aware of this biological possibility, and impressed that the rabbis were not only aware but talked about it so easily, as another category they had to take into account.

The rabbis were equally aware that someone could display both male and female characteristics. They called that person *androgynos*. Today we might use the term intersex.

The rabbis also understood that a transition could take place as one aged. They used the term *aylonit* for a person who identified as female at birth but developed male characteristics at puberty. On the other hand, a *saris* was a person who identified as male at birth and develops female characteristics at puberty and/or is lacking a penis either naturally or by human intervention.

The rabbis were remarkably well ahead of their times. They recognized and accepted a world of possibilities. It is up to us, in our generation, to further the acknowledgement and unconditional acceptance of all transgender and non-conforming people and to re-affirm yet another age-old teaching: the infinite and equal worth in every human being.