

## Terms for Gender Diversity in Classical Jewish Texts

by Rabbi Elliot Kukla, 2006

**Zachar:** This term is derived from the word for a pointy sword and refers to a phallus. It is usually translated as “male” in English.

**Nekevah:** This term is derived from the word for a crevice and probably refers to a vaginal opening. It is usually translated as “female” in English.

**Androgynos:** A person who has both “male” and “female” sexual characteristics. 149 references in Mishna and Talmud (1st-8th Centuries CE); 350 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes (2nd -16th Centuries CE).

**Tumtum:** A person whose sexual characteristics are indeterminate or obscured. 181 references in Mishna and Talmud; 335 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.

**Ay'lonit:** A person who is identified as “female” at birth but develops “male” characteristics at puberty and is infertile. 80 references in Mishna and Talmud; 40 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.

**Saris:** A person who is identified as “male” at birth but develops “female” characteristics at puberty and/or is lacking a penis. A saris can be “naturally” a saris (saris hamah), or become one through human intervention (saris adam). 156 references in mishna and Talmud; 379 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.