

(#22) Trouble to See

"Trouble to see" played an essential role in the Exodus story, according to Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg. Based on ancient, Talmudic tales of Moses at the burning bush, she writes:

God chooses to reveal Himself to Moses, because he has "gone to trouble to see." ... it is his capacity to "twist his neck," to turn his face in wonder and questioning, that brings him the voice of God.

The neck in torsion—an image for desire, a counter image to the stiff-necked intransigence of those who set themselves against the new. Within Moses himself, within his people, within the Egyptians, even within the representations of God in the narratives of redemption, the tensions of Exodus will seek resolution, the momentary equilibrium that again and again is to be lost and reclaimed.

— Avivah Zornberg,
Particulars of Rapture, p.79-80

The Exodus story is filled with what Zornberg calls "the stiff-necked intransigence of those who set themselves against the new" as well as Moses' "trouble to see." Moses had to really twist, according to the commentary above, to see something he might have otherwise missed... new or not. Twisting can be harsh on a body, especially one not accustomed to such an action. But we still have to emulate Moses here in this tension between the urgent need to escape and the pauses built into the seder nudging us to look around.

- Have we "gone to trouble to see" things we did not perceive, or perceive as clearly, before this Rereading Exodus journey began?
- How are we helping one another to notice and appreciate variety already in our Jewish and wider communities?
- How are we working in- and outside Jewish communities for more and deeper inclusion -- across ability, gender expression, sexual orientation, class, color, differences of background and belief?

This stage of the Rereading Exodus journey is meant to stimulate and invite thoughts on this and related topics for Part 2 of this book.

Please consider sharing yours.

"Bernie Sanders Looks Like Everyone's Jewish Grandpa"

"[He] doesn't try to be your cute Jewish grandpa, he just is."

Thus read a July 2016 article in the *Jewish Daily Forward*. It was meant as light-hearted fluff, of course. But it highlights a serious situation: Despite the fact that some 11% of U.S. Jews are non-White (see American Jewish Population Project, e.g.), many people in- and outside of Jewish communities retain a kind of casting-call mindset about who "looks Jewish": Central- or Eastern European descent, maybe with a hint of an accent and a smattering of Yiddish-sounding phrases.

The author, many readers, and the editorial staff at the *Forward* were apparently happy to agree, at least for the purposes of a short fluff piece, that Bernie Sanders "looks like *everyone's* Jewish Grandpa." But odds are that some of the Jews pictured on the next page, who bear little physical resemblance to Bernie Sanders, are somebody's Jewish grandpa, or grandma, too. (I know that at least one of the Jews of Color pictured is a grandparent.) Not all Jews look one way. And not all their grandparents do either.

We fail to name what we don't recognize and vice versa.



Images above from Facebook pages of Jewish Multiracial Network and Jews of All Hues (public content).

Image at left: "Ethiopian Jews," Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, March 30, 2012 (correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro; videographer not listed). Fair use for educational purposes.



"Many of us fight tirelessly for social justice against institutionalized discrimination in this country, yet operate as vehicles perpetuating those same systems of marginalization upon the Jews that don't look like us in our own pews. Or aren't married the way we are. Or don't believe precisely as we believe...."

"We tout the Jewish value of every human being created in the same reflection of the Divine Image, but we label other Jews as not being "really" Jewish because they aren't what we see when we look in the mirror."

-- speech of title character,

MaNishtana, *Ariel Samson: Freelance Rabbi*

...Bigging up all people who are a little miffed 'cuz someone tells you you don't look like or act like your people. Impossible. Because you are your people. You just tell them they don't *look*. period.
-- from Vanessa Hidary, "The Hebrew Mamita"

Sefira: Counting Days & Weeks/Marking the Journey

Do we "label other Jews as not being 'really' Jewish because they aren't what we seen when we look in the mirror"?

Do we tell others (or ourselves) that we don't "look like your people"?

**After nightfall, see Appendix and note --
Yesterday we counted twenty-one.**