

Sacred Becoming

“So... when did you know.. you were a lesbian?”

This inquiry came from my grandma at her ripe age of 96. Even in her mid-nineties, my grandma was still quite sharp. Her short term memory, however, was non-existent. During every conversation we had, at about 60 second intervals, I would be asked, “So, Jessica, when did you know you were a lesbian?”

“Grandma,” I would reply, “I don't really identify as a lesbian, I just identify as Jessica.

I was 30. After years of dating men, I finally realized that being with women was more honest, and true, and deep, and sexy than anything I'd ever experienced. My family was understandably still adjusting.

I was harmonizing with this new part of myself too. Wrestling with labels that didn't feel totally me and navigating a girlfriend whose internalized homophobia made our relationship more complicated. I didn't know what to call myself either. After a decade of considering myself pretty darn straight, here was this surprising, delightful curveball. Did being gay mean I was now “other?” I felt so contentedly “me” and also like I was 14 again--awkward, unsure about my own skills with women, and hesitant where I fit in.

My grandma was a beautifully progressive Jew. She volunteered at the Gay Men's Health Alliance in the 80's at the height of the AIDS crisis. She had no problem with me being gay, she was just trying to understand. And I was trying to understand too, as I came out to her again and again,

at roughly 60 second intervals, each conversation.

“So when did you know you were a lesbian?” These phone calls raised profound questions: what to be called, how I saw myself, where was my sense of belonging?

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Our tradition recognizes the power of naming. For me, the most stirring example of this is what Moses asks the Divine after encountering the Eternal at the burning bush. Moses has just had this life-changing moment and is worried. “When the Israelites ask me your name, what shall I call you, God?” he asks. And the Divine responds, “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,*” *I Will Be What I will Be*. What a wonderfully enigmatic response. **The Divine is a process of becoming.**

That’s what I needed to tell my grandma, *I am a process of becoming*. I am who I am with and beyond labels.

Moses has words to capture the Divine, AND at the same time the Divine epithet doesn’t begin to scratch the surface of knowing the Ineffable.

Similarly, what I love about PRIDE is how we celebrate every shade of the rainbow of human expression and SIMULTANEOUSLY *become*.

Hues on the spectrum of rainbow light we *cannot even imagine*.

PRIDE declares, “Look how far we have come! Being LGBTQ+ is no longer considered a mental illness. LGBTQ+ marriage is available in so many more states, visibility is increasing for non-binary folx. Let us exalt where we are today!

AND...and...we will go so far beyond who we are in this moment. How

can we offer LGBTQ people of color and those who sit at the intersection of marginalized identities more opportunities to thrive?¹ Where can we elevate collaboration and a sense of shared humanity? How can *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, lift up voices long silenced?” In the words of activist Glennon Doyle, “Imagination is not where we go to escape reality. Imagination is where we go to discover the truest reality.” // What might we imagine? What wants to become?

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The past 16 months have called us forward--to recreate reality. Let us explode the narrow paradigms that keep us small! Let us expand our potential for goodness, for inner integrity, for the luminosity beyond the narrowness of the past. Where is your Spirit yearning to expand?

Societal change cannot happen without our individual evolution first. My Grandma’s question was an invitation to search myself for a deeper truth. In 2009, I was not ready to declare myself a lesbian, I was still figuring that out for myself. And now, I like to refer to myself as “super gay.” ☺ The labels we use are such a tiny part of who we are. Moses wants God to have a fixed name and identity, but the Divine refuses to be pinned down. As co-creators with the Eternal, we must each take our own unfolding seriously... What potential tugs at your heart’s evolution?

What is being called forth within you on this PRIDE Shabbat?

Profound, lasting change comes from small, intentional steps.

Maybe it is choosing to show up differently as a parent.

Or practicing a spirit of generosity with those who challenge you.

¹ <https://www.hrc.org/about/values>

Maybe it is an act of sacred forgiveness - remembering that grudges are like drinking poison and hoping someone else will get sick.

And self forgiveness - remembering that we get to be human and lovingly affirming that we are each doing the best we can.

Perhaps it is demonstrating power with instead of power over.

Or releasing an old story of limitation.

Offering an interest free loan to someone in need.

Or my favorite, what about imagining not living from “should’s” and instead living from “heck yes!”

This PRIDE season, my heart calls me forward in new ways. In business, I am integrating social justice into the soul of my work instead of as piecemeal *tzedakah*.

In romance, I am expanding narrow assumptions about how my girlfriend is “supposed” to behave seeing how my rigidity keeps my life small and my relationship with her limited. I feel the potential of love so radical it explodes what I ever could have previously imagined! And within my family, I am realizing ways to offer my parent the dignity of their own experience without needing them to be different. It is all in progress...the burgeoning of becoming.

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“So...when did you know you were a lesbian?”

Grandma, your curious spirit is SO present here today. This simple question offers a vision beyond labels. *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, we are each invited into a lifelong journey: Who are you? Who are you called to become?

Shabbat Shalom.