

PARSHAT BESHALACH
EXODUS 13:17-17:16
HAFTARAH JUDGES 4:4-5:31
15 SHEVAT 5784/25 JANUARY 2024



Self-Portrait
Oil on canvass by Rembrandt van Rijn (1669)

TO IMAGINE WHAT IS NOT THE SELF

1. Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song: I will sing out (אֲשִׁירָה) to Adonai. (Exodus 15:1)
Miriam called out to all the women: Sing (שִׁירָה) out to Adonai. (Exodus 15:21)
2. All the worlds and all creatures may be categorized as masculine and feminine....Anything bounded has both upper and lower extremities. In the future, however, the lines and the circle will be equal, and there will no longer be the categories of masculine and feminine. All will come to realize God's light equally. This is just like a circle dance, where every part of the circumference is equidistant from the center.

Now Moses said, "I will sing until Adonai." This was because Moses spoke while still under the categories of masculine/feminine, for the light of supernal clarity had not yet appeared...But Miriam, through her circle dance (*hakafah*), drew down the supernal light from the place where the categories of masculine/feminine do not exist. (Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Epstein, *Ma'or va-Shemesh*)

3. Let us, you and I, talk
About the world we're in,
So that, when we have talked,
That world seems closer,
Dearer in closeness,
Dearer in light,
Dearer for us.
Let us talk
About him and her
And them and that
So that they all
Be means to us
Of being closer
Our very selves.

(Eli Siegel, "Our Very Selves")

4. All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves. (Eli Siegel)

There are two purposes that fight in us all. One purpose is to have contempt, "the lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it (Siegel). The other is the purpose we were born for: *to be ourselves through seeing meaning in what is not us* – that is, the purpose to like the world. (Ellen Reiss, Chair of Education, Aesthetic Realism Foundation; emphasis added)

5. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. (Toni Morrison)