

Hello, my name is Yael Silverberg-Urian and I am the Vice President of Tikkun Olam at Bnai Keshet. I would like to talk about "Strangers within our Jewish Community."

Today I will speak about Jews on the Periphery looking at some of the experiences of Jews of Color.

So, take a moment and look around our sanctuary. Who do you see? One striking feature that I see is that our sanctuary is predominantly filled with White Jews, their partners, children, friends, and extended family. I, myself, am a White, Ashkenazi Jew. My wife and daughter are both Filipinas. Having a daughter who is a Jew of Color has opened my eyes to issues of "belonging" in the Jewish Community that had not been on my radar as significantly before.

We must begin changing American Jewry from "Ashkenazi or White, European Jew" as the assumed definition of our normative, authentic Jewish identity.

If someone had asked me years ago how racism and Judaism intersected, I would have drawn a blank and responded confidently that "we are the group that stands with People of Color demanding justice" or "We Jews have been oppressed with Anti-Semitism and are as much the "Other" as any group of Color."

Having White skin privilege was a concept that I had never thought about with respect to being a Jew; my people have such a long history of discrimination! But when I began listening and bearing witness to the experiences of Jews of Color, I saw many bridges to the racism that other People of Color often speak. Soon, I began to understand what it meant that I am located within simultaneous positions of skin privilege and oppression.

If some of you are sitting being frustrated by my request to take a look at how we are aiding in maintaining a White-centric Judaism: I ask you to listen to this sampling from the Privileges checklist created by the members of the Jewish Multicultural Network.

Most White Jews take these privileges for granted; most Jews of Color cannot:

\_\_\_ I can walk into my temple and feel that others do not see me or my children as outsiders.

\_\_\_ I can easily find Jewish books and toys for my children with images of Jews that look like them.

\_\_\_ My child's authenticity as a Jew is never questioned by adults or children based on his/her skin color.

\_\_\_ People never say to me, "But you don't look Jewish," either seriously or as though it was funny.

\_\_\_ I can arrange to be in the company of Jews of my heritage most of the time.

Research from 2001 revealed that 20% of America's 6 million Jews are racially diverse including African American, Asian, Latino, Sephardic, Mizrahi, and mixed race.

With over 1/5th of Jews in 2001 being Ethnically Diverse, why is it that Jewish texts, music, websites, camps, schools, media, feature illustrations, information and curricula focused almost solely on Whites or Ashkenazis ? If in 2009 only 61% of Jews 18-29 considered themselves White, what will our narrowness mean for the future of American Jewry?

What does it say about us as a People who are taught to Welcome the Stranger?

The Jewish experience is built upon foundations of diversity as old as the Jewish People. The historical home of the Jews lies at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Jews are a mixture of peoples and Jewish origins include a multitude of

languages, nations, tribes, and skin colors. Don't forget, Israel's greatest prophet, Moses, married Zipporah, an Ethiopian. Solomon and David's wives were from Africa.

So where do we begin? With a willingness to look deeply at our "givens" and work to change our opinions about the things that separate us from one another. We each must ask how we contribute to maintaining the insider/outsider dichotomy. It is time to challenge ourselves here at Bnai Keshet and in the larger American Jewish Community. We must seek to overcome the significant organizational, cultural and ideological barriers to growth in the Jewish community. We must commit ourselves to grow and strengthen the Jewish people through ethnic, cultural, and racial inclusiveness by advocating for the diversity that has characterized the Jewish people throughout history. In this way, we will foster an expanding Jewish community that embraces its differences.

We at Bnai Keshet can be in the forefront of becoming a truly inclusive place for all Jews. In the coming months I will be putting a notice on the website and into the Bnai Keshet Blast. Anyone interested in forging this new path with me, I look forward to what we can discuss, UN-learn and create together.

May we work together for a world that is more inclusive,

L'Shana Tova