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TIKKUN

HAMAS & PLO
A PALESTINIAN VIEW
ASMI B'SHARA, M.K.

CHANUKAH SUPPLEMENT

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1997 $6.00



THE JEWISH LITERARY REVIVAL

Melvin Jules Bukiet • Morris Dickstein
Rebecca Goldstein • Sanford Pinsker
Nessa Rapoport • Mark Shechner • Steve Stern

DENNIS RIVERA INTERVIEW
Jack Newfield

ISRAEL UPDATE
Galia Golan - Peace Now
Israeli Orthodox Mishugas - Editorial

A SEPHARDIC "JEW-ESS"
Ruth Knafo Setton

ON CYNICS AND CYNICISM
Lawrence Chickering

SPECIAL SECTION:

Crime & Punishment
Steven Donziger • Debra Jo Immergut • Michael Tonry • Sol Wachtler

PLUS: An interview with DAVID MAMET
CHARACTER EDUCATION: Debate with RICK ULFIK vs. THOMAS LICKONA
GARY PELLER on CRIME, RACE, & RADICAL LAWYERING

More Chagall Than Chagall

It's true; many cities preserve
nostalgic alleys in ancient Jewish districts
but nothing like Mea Shearim to get lost in,
drunk with its rancid odors,
with the history of such dumps,
anonymous and lost in central Europe.

A suburb that time willingly forgets
so that one can recognize he might descend
from those dirty radiant Levites,
from those faces that flee the sun,
from those pickles, sour fish and orange peels,
from that narrow door, open just enough
for a gray beard and the sound of a violin to filter
through,

from the arduous haggling,
from the shot glass of liquor with which the matchmaker
formally promises to find you the husband or wife
before it's too late
from that psalmody which rocks his body with a certain
rhythmic wrath before a scroll of paper lovingly
wrapped up in violent velvet,
from those strange galleries hiding sweaty heads where
elaborate reddish or ashen coiffes appear,
from those men who turn away on passing a woman,

from those pale, ancient girls,
from the living daguerrotype of those young ladies
who whisper a confused, suspended, mixed-up language
from all the places where their parents and their
parents' parents
were punished
for that blindness with which they keep their clothes,
suck their candies, polish their diamonds,
repeat their prayers
and I'm sure, day by day
secretly try to make
a golem to relieve their sorrows.

— Luisa Futoransky
translated by Jason Weiss

TIKKUN

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY VOLUME 12 NUMBER 6



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Letters to the Editor

What's a Mitzvah?

To the Editor:

Your interview with Shlomo Carlebach almost sent me scurrying back to a simpler time when a mitzvah was just a mitzvah.

You spoke of your Kaddish experience at an Orthodox synagogue, the "no-nonsense davening, everybody getting through the prayers as quickly as possible so that they could get down to Wall Street in the morning to be there in time for the opening bell…but not much seemed to be happening spiritually." Surely, continuity of tradition, the day-in, day-out devotion and loyalty essential to Jewish ritual amply compensate for any perceived lack of religious quality time. When any of us need a minyan to recite Kaddish we can rely on its being there predictably from generation to generation, despite spiritual mood-swings ebbing and flowing either individually or collectively.

My teen-age son got it right, I think, when, having assumed the obligation of daily prayer, he was asked to assess its spiritual benefits and he replied: "I would say, on average, I need to daven about one hundred times for every truly peak experience; I can never predict when it will happen, but when it does it is not only worth the other ninety-nine times, but depends on them in order to happen at all."

MIRIAM ELKINS
Los Angeles, CA

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To the Editor:

I appreciated your comments, in the review of "Contact," on the limitations of the narrow empiricist worldview. I suspect that even apart from the rise of modern scientism, there is a much larger and older cultural phenomenon involving a general unwillingness to accord importance to subjective experience. Even within the traditional Jewish sources, there seems at times to be disproportionate attention paid to externally-observable behavior, with inner experience given short shrift. Within some segments of the modern Jewish community, it seems to be almost taboo to talk about one's subjective experience of rituals or mitzvot.

To give one small example from my own life, I've found that the traditional custom of giving *tzedakah* during daily prayer services is a tremendous aid to kavanah. I resisted the practice at first, thinking of it as "bribing God."

Now it functions for me as a statement of willingness to participate in giving and receiving. When I'm feeling small, preoccupied with fears of scarcity on multiple levels, thinking "There isn't enough time, enough money, enough energy, enough anything," then the simple act of dropping a few small coins in the *pushke* feels like a concrete statement of faith, an affirmation, "There is enough." It brings me back out of Mitzrayim (by which I mean consciousness made narrow by fear) and into a wider space of possibilities, so that the energy flows more easily in the davvening.

I once shared this observation at a Shabbat table, at which the other guests had been quoting famous rabbinic sources on the topic of *tzedakah*. The others simply stared at me, then went back to quoting from the traditional literature—leaving me with the impression that reflection on one's inner experience was an unfamiliar conversational mode in that setting. I've received similar impressions in a number of Jewish contexts, and have heard a few Jewish friends remark on this phenomenon as well. I applaud your suggestion (in the book *Jewish Renewal*) that we ask ourselves, "How real does it feel?", but there may be some unwritten rules against getting "too real,"

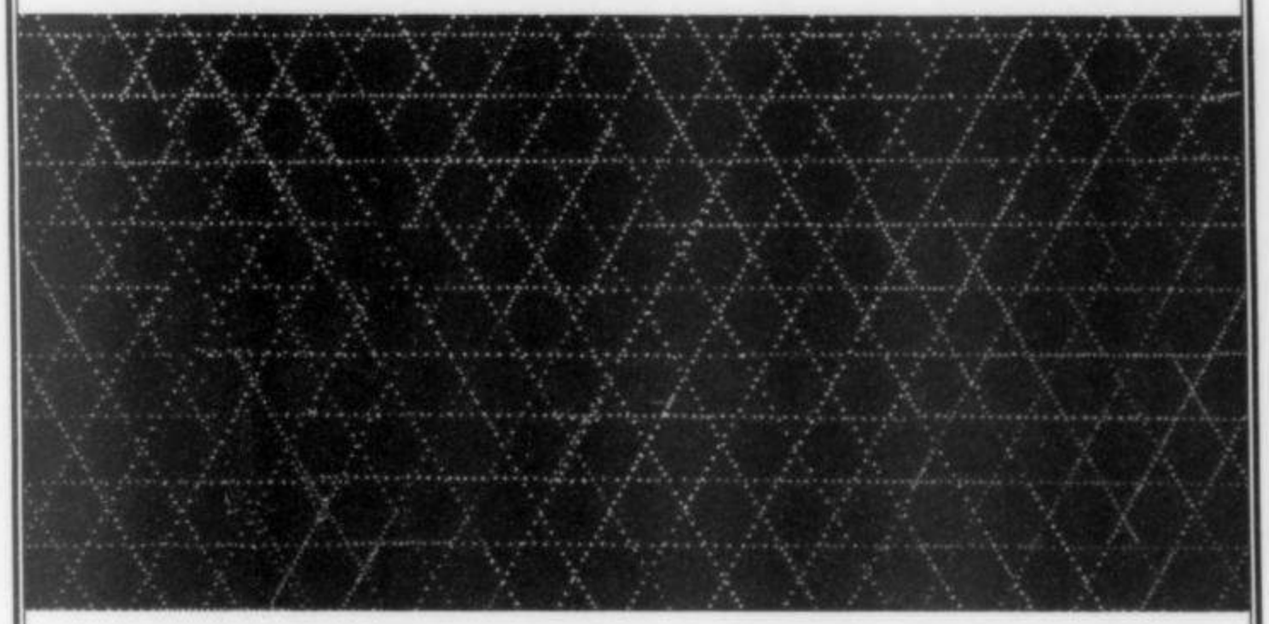
It was the custom of my tribe to speak and sing . . .

--Denise Levertov

TELLING AND REMEMBERING

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EDITED BY STEPHEN J. RUBIN



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such as by talking about the ways that Judaism can genuinely touch and transform a person's life.

The mystical dimension of Judaism is another aspect of subjective experience that deserves more open discussion. Some people experience Jewish rituals as ways of connecting with energies or consciousness outside of themselves.

Some describe perceptions such as feeling an intense "jolt" from putting on *tefillin* or handling a Torah scroll, or having an awareness of a loving Presence when they immerse in the mikveh or stand in front of the open ark in synagogue. Yet these perceptions are rarely discussed openly in the Jewish community, and some Renewal groups debate the pros and cons of adhering to traditional ritual formulations without even considering whether the traditional practices make possible certain spiritual connections. It's almost as if we didn't believe these rituals might actually be connecting us with anything real outside of ourselves. As we're trying to make Judaism feel more real, it would be good for us as a community to lift these taboos on discussion of our subjective experience.

KAREN VAN HOEK
Ann Arbor, Michigan

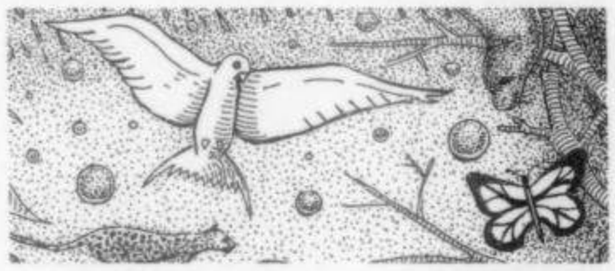
Biodiversity

To the Editor:

Rabbi Artson should be applauded for his efforts to provide a defense of biodiversity. The Jewish community continues to need a Jewish ethic that can provide guidance as we respond to the variety of environmental crises we face today and those we will face in the future. The problem I have with Artson's essay is that the central support for his argument seems to rely on assertions directly opposed to contemporary scientific theories of nature.

To defend biodiversity, Artson appeals to the teachings of the Bible, the rabbinic tradition, and medieval philosophers. All of these Jewish sources teach essentially the same thing: it is God's will that each species live indefinitely or, as Nachmanides wrote, "as long as the Blessed God will desire the existence of the world." And as stewards of God's creation, human beings are obligated to preserve species and so maintain biodiversity. To argue that species' extinction diminishes "the greatness of God's sovereignty" or that the "modification of a species constitutes an impermissible violation of creation" was almost self-evident in a time when everyone believed that the natural order was static, at least as far as species were concerned.

Today, however, the science of evolutionary biology teaches that nature is far from static, especially when it comes to the existence and extinction of species.



Approximately 95 percent of all species known to have lived on the earth are now extinct. In addition, mass extinction events have caused the total number of living species to vary considerably over time. From this point of view, nature is incredibly dynamic: species have evolved and have gone extinct throughout life's history and the process is still continuing today. While the impact of the human species on this natural process is surely dramatic, the natural 'order' that human beings are disturbing is one in which extinction is already quite prevalent.

These scientific findings make it problematic to argue, as Artson does, that humanity should be "God's partner in the preservation of biodiversity." Does this make sense if God has neither preserved every species, nor ensured that biodiversity has continuously expanded? These scientific findings also challenge God's providence and sovereignty, at least if we accept, as Artson apparently does, the belief that God's providence and sovereignty are linked to species survival. Contemporary science challenges us to rethink at least some of our traditional theological commitments.

To make the case today for the preservation of biodiversity, we need a different kind of argument. Rabbi Artson's essay includes several promising beginnings. The notion of human beings as stewards, the belief in the world as "an expression of God's exuberance," and the obligation to protect life, whether human or non-human, could all be developed in ways that avoid assumptions about nature that contradict contemporary science.

However, whatever approach is adopted, it will eventually be necessary to directly address the findings of modern science, while relying on Jewish principles and values to guide our response. Recognizing the prevalence of species' extinction in life's history, the question becomes should we or should we not actively participate in this process? Should we be permitted to increase the pre-human extinction rate by a small percentage, to allow us to fulfill our obligation to 'settle the earth'? Or, should we work to prevent the extinction of species because, in imitating God, human beings should emphasize the divine attributes of compassion and mercy? Asking and answering these types of questions illustrates an approach that engages the views of nature provided by science. This approach will lead us to a Jewish environmental ethic that is compatible with contemporary science.

MARC SWETLITZ
St. Charles, IL

Response:

Marc Swetlitz has produced many fine and thoughtful works on environmental ethics and Jewish sources, so I am delighted that he finds "several promising beginnings" in my essay. The point that he elaborates, that Judaism's sources posit stability for each species and that science recognizes an endless dynamic, is important. There are significant differences between what the Bible and ancient rabbis knew about the world around them and what recent scientific exploration has uncovered.

Recognizing that species have always developed and disappeared doesn't, I think, negate the primary point I was trying to make: we are not God, and we ought to minimize our impact on the ecosystem. As humanity is not the key decisor in "who shall live and who shall die" we usurp a role that is properly left to God (both in the medieval and the scientific schema). On that major point, I believe that Swetlitz and I are in agreement.

One minor point also deserves elaboration: I stand by the claim that we should be

"God's partner in the preservation of biodiversity." Judaism's faith that God wants the world to be filled (and teeming with diversity) is a premise that scientific evidence does not contradict. That particular species come and go doesn't alter the fact that life is stunningly diverse. We ought to strive to celebrate and to ensure that diversity by minimizing our negative impact on the age-old processes of life on Earth.

RABBI BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON
Congregation Eilat, Mission Viejo, CA

Contact

To the Editor:

TIKKUN steps onto some awfully gooey ground when it editorially hails *Contact* as a "spiritual high." The movie's single most preposterous premise is one that plagues all classic God-as-a-Being theologies. Benevolent aliens send messages across space and time to instruct us in the construction of a fantastic transport machine *that can only accommodate one traveler at a time.* Corroboration becomes impossible; the faith of the individual "witness" is all with which we are left. Indeed, that "faith" (and the love it wins for Jodie Foster) is seen as somehow superior to the wish for reliable corroboration, which is portrayed in the film as the "religion" of arrogant, Inquisitorial minds.

But why does "God" (or the aliens) always choose disguise and subtlety? If we are all One, why must God win our hearts one by one? Why a painstaking Covenant instead of a single redemptive moment? Why must we suffer through the process? (Granted, at least in Judaism there are 600,000 witness to the Revelation at Sinai, and a worldliness that often verges on humanism.) These sorts of questions—answered in Torah only by the mysterious, muscle-flexing God of the Book of Job—have always made the notion of an Almighty Being and a messianic outcome absurd and outrageous to me.

To my mind, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* remains the only sci-fi film of quality that manages to combine artistry, plausibility, respect for science, and an overwhelming spiritual message of hope and renewal.

LAWRENCE BUSH
Accord, NY

Social Responsibility

To the Editor:

I am a former public relations professional. It is obvious to me that your proposals regarding the Social Responsibility Amendment won't receive any serious attention until the public is aware of the need for them. We need to coordinate with other groups which monitor corporate behavior and begin a widespread public information campaign about the multitude of tragedies which occur when corporations seek only to maximize profit. Without this, we will be labeled leftist fanatics and dismissed, and not without justification.

We also need to be in dialogue with the business world, and not demonize it on a blanket basis. There is such a thing as a socially responsible corporation, and there are many socially responsible people working at corporations. Their input is vital to refining the ideas in your proposal, and their support is important for any degree of success.

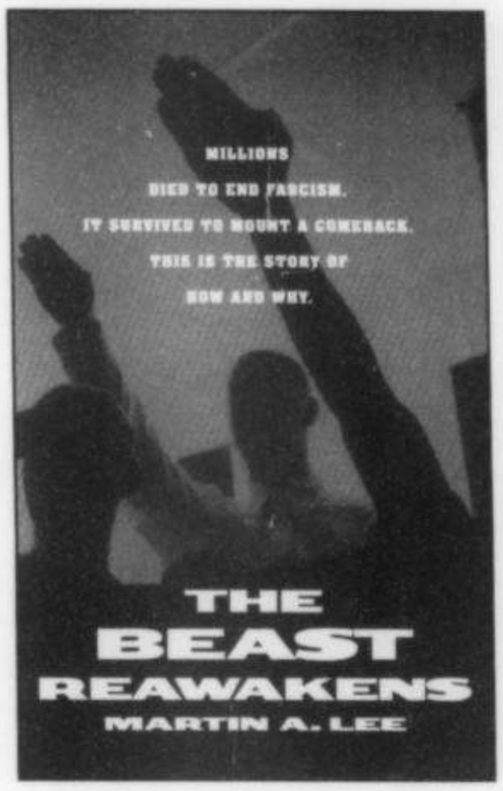
I also would suggest that if a corporation were to lose its charter under the SRA, surely a meaning-oriented competitor should have the opportunity to purchase its assets. Your proposal that a community group take over errant companies is ridiculous. Community groups don't know how to run a business. Most can't even manage their own affairs. I know this from bitter experience—I have volunteered and/or served on the boards of several non-profits. (By the way, many non-profits are more political and less caring that for-profit enterprises.) Your proposal is a recipe for economic disaster.

The SRA will be an economic disaster unless it applies to companies selling products and services in the United States. Failing this, companies simply will relocate their operations to countries which do not require responsible behavior of business. Massive unemployment will result.

My comments are not "quibbles." I'm not even sure it's appropriate to call them "refinements." They are logical, substantive and strategic. One need not be an expert approved by TIKKUN to have an idea worthy of consideration.

JUDITH ALEXANDER
Oak Park, IL

THE CHILLING HISTORY OF THE NEO-NAZI MOVEMENT.



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—Andrei Codrescu, author of The Hole in the Flag

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ISRAEL'S ASSAULT ON THE NON-ORTHODOX

The only thing offensive about the Orthodox's claim to be the only legitimate version of Judaism is their use of Israeli state power to enforce their position. After all, we too think we have a correct vision of Judaism, one that leads us to believe that most (though not all) of the Israeli Orthodox camp are practicing some variant of what we've labeled "Settler Judaism." Settler Judaism is a religion that totally ignores the Torah's insistence that every human being is created in the image of God, that we are enjoined to "love the stranger," and that ritual observance is totally meaningless unless it is accompanied by a sustained struggle against all forms of oppression (stated most clearly in the Haftorah for Yom Kippur, Isaiah 57:14–58:14). We, of course, recognize that Settler Judaism relies upon an alternative and legitimate strand within a tradition that has contradictory and competing tendencies within it, but that only makes us more tolerant than many Israeli Orthodox. Tolerance is one of our values, not one of theirs.

The problem is that the Orthodox are now using the government to impose their views on others. The *sine qua non* of the modern democratic state was its refusal to be a handmaiden to any particular religious tradition, and it is this that is being undermined by Netanyahu's current willingness to use Israeli state power to legitimate one specific reading of Judaism.

This is a boundary issue for democracies. On the face of it, there's nothing undemocratic about the Orthodox using their democratically elected representatives to lobby for a monopoly on Jewish practice in the Knesset. Israel, after all, does not have a Bill of Rights that prohibits imposing a particular religious or ethnic position on everyone else, so the Orthodox can argue that they are playing within the rules of the game.

Yet that is exactly the problem. Israel's rules have no protection for "the Other," whoever that might be at any given moment. The Conservative movement, both in Israel and in the U.S., has had very little to say about the violation of the rights of Palestinians. The Reform movement in the U.S. (much less so in Israel) has been far more courageous, though it too has not been willing to publicly support the activities of Peace Now or of any other major political organization struggling for peace.

What these movements should be learning is that the tendency to delegitimate the humanity of others (as opposed to disagreeing with their positions) is a process that is unlikely to stop at the first scapegoat. That's why the Right (and, until 1993, the Rabin wing of the Labor Party), happy to use state power to delegitimate the humanity of Palestinians, has had little trouble making outrageous deals to impose Orthodox Judaism on a reluctant population.

No wonder so many Israelis, quite unfairly in our view, end up blaming Judaism as a whole—and feel no connection to it. Unfairly, because Settler Judaism represents only one possible reading of the tradition, and there's a whole other reading that we've been propounding. Yet until Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism really make a systematic critique of Settler Judaism, and unite to fight it, the Orthodox variants are going to be the major voice heard by many Jews. ❑

BEYOND CAMPAIGN FUNDRAISING EXCESSES:

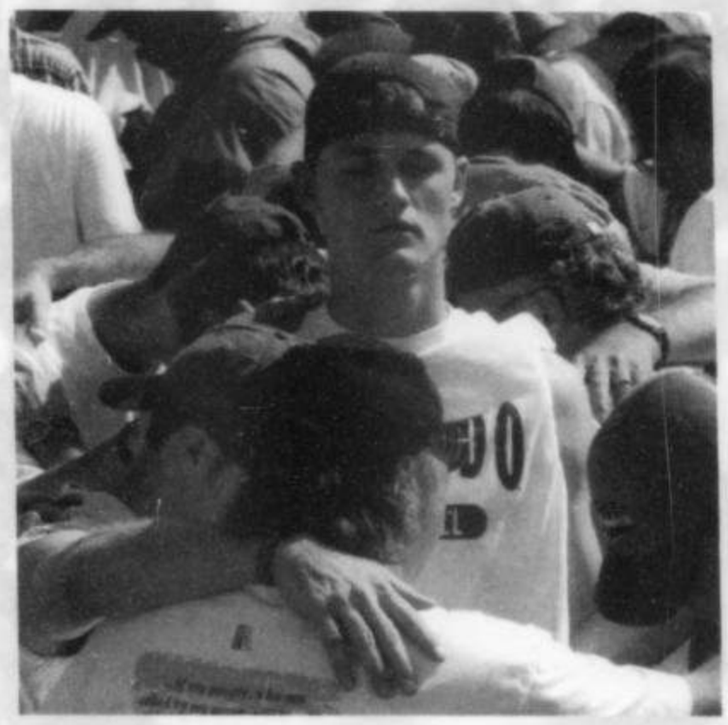
Don't expect us to be involved in assessing campaign fundraising excesses or Paula Jones-type abuses. (When will the incessant yapping about Clinton's 1996 campaign corruption stop?) The never-ending media focus on Clinton's campaign finances (despite repeated evidence that the American people are totally bored by this issue) shifts attention from the real ethical issues that the President faces. We talked last issue of TIKKUN about the budget package and its increase in taxes on the poorest while decreasing taxes for the richest. Now consider this:

Landmines A few hours after the Nobel Peace prize was awarded to those who are organizing in support of the international treaty to ban landmines, President Clinton reiterated his opposition to signing the treaty. The U.S. is the major producer and supplier of landmines that continue to wreak havoc in the third world, where we've indiscriminately dumped them. Clinton's excuse, that landmines are the most effective way to block a North Korean assault on South Korea, is ludicrous—if we spend hundreds of billions on a military that faces no threat from Russia or any other major power, it could mobilize sufficient force to protect South Korea without requiring that the U.S. continue to use and support these time bombs of horror and destruction.

Global Warming The Clinton White House has been putting out warnings that it cannot support any serious restrictions on emissions unless the restrictions are put so far into the future as to be meaningless (because the ecological damage would already be irreversible). Even the most conservative environmental groups were forced to put stern warnings to Clinton that his environmental record would be judged negatively if he persisted in this path. Clinton's argument, that Americans would never accept any restrictions or taxes on automobile gasoline, is the kind of let's-look-at-the-latest-poll approach to politics that ignores the potential leadership role a president could have in shaping public opinion if he were to fully describe the nature of the environmental emergency.

Fast Track Trade Agreements Clinton has proved to be one of the most loyal advocates of the corporate community's desires to

The Promise Keepers



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN K. DIGGS / AP PHOTO

INSET PHOTO BY TRACEY ATLEE / AP PHOTO

Liberals bemoaned the connection to right wing political leaders, women's movement spokespeople talked about the sexist implications of suggesting that men "take responsibility" for their families (by becoming "the leader of the household")—and they were right, but missed the point.

Most men who have been attracted to the Promise Keepers and other right-wing-connected Evangelical movements have not come into that context because of the politics, but because of their own hunger for meaning and community. While the Left continues to talk about fairness, rights, and economic benefits (listen to Clinton's endless prattle about making Americans more competitive, as though our economic situation is the "bottom line"), these right wing groups talk about love, repentance, and building a spiritual life.

The last weekend in October, hundreds of thousands of African American women demonstrated that a spiritually-oriented politics need not be ceded eternally to the Right. Just as the Civil Rights movement was built on the spirituality of the Black Churches, the Million Woman March in Philadelphia attracted women by openly acknowledging the spiritual crisis that permeates our society.

Yet most liberal and progressive organizations remain willfully ignorant of America's spiritual crisis, and react to talk about the hunger for love and meaning with hostility, or patronizing dismissal. When will they ever learn?

Clinton's Ethical Impact

break down all restrictions on trade. The idea is to make an international capitalist marketplace that places no constraints on trade, thus allowing American corporations to relocate in third world countries where they can pay lower (and sometimes sweat-shop-level) wages and thus lower the costs of the goods. The American consumer supposedly benefits by getting lower cost items. The catch: not only do we perpetuate extremely low wages, we decimate our unions (whose fight for decent working conditions for workers is significantly weakened if the plant can always threaten to move abroad), and we cause unemployment for a significant section of our own workers who thereby will be unable to be the consumers that will supposedly benefit from lower costs.

Standard Educational Testing Every test conveys a message: what society judges important and what it does not. American society is not suffering from a lack of technical proficiency; the reason jobs are going abroad is because corporate leaders want to maximize profits through cheaper labor costs. America's primary problem lies in the ethical and spiritual illiteracy that schools foster. Schools should be teaching empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility—and using math, reading and other "skills" as adjuncts to these central values. Instead, what the Clinton educational reform package teaches is that each individual needs to learn how to compete most effectively in the market—precisely the formulation that leads people to see each other not as sharing a common heritage of being created in the image of God, but rather as a potential foe whose success might come at our own personal expense. No wonder we have drug problems, violence, family breakdown and despair in a population that is taught to "look out for no.1" and keep their eyes on the "bottom line" of "making it." That this consciousness will now be extended to even younger ages by the Clinton educational package is a moral and spiritual outrage.

These are the ethical issues that ought to concern us—not whether Clinton (like his Republican rivals) found questionable ways in 1996 to evade or avoid campaign finance restrictions. ❑



EDITORIAL

Learning About Health Care the Hard Way

My Weeks in the Hospital

Michael Lerner

I spent three weeks in September in a hospital, battling for my life. What began as a sudden pain in my abdomen, and which seemed at first to be not more than an easily operable hernia, became something far worse when the emergency room kept me sitting for over nine hours before operating. In that time, my intestines were caught in the hole in the lining of my abdomen, and were strangulated, so that when the operation did finally begin the doctors were forced to cut out a foot or more of the intestine. Next came an ileus—the failure of the intestines to return to normal operations—requiring me to remain in the hospital and to have my stomach pumped continuously while I was being fed intravenously. Finally, internal bleeding caused the loss of three pints of blood, and fear that another operation would be required, until my doctors discovered that while in the hospital I had developed a bleeding ulcer. That was the good news, since ulcers can be treated without surgery, though the persisting fever that accompanied me after I finally left the hospital remains a source of medical concern.

My experience in the hospital confirmed everything we already know about the crisis in health care. I was lucky to have good insurance coverage, though the deductibles add up to thousands of dollars that I don't have. I can only imagine what a trauma this would have been had I not had the coverage (far too many Americans don't).

Hospitals operate under the technocratic and materialistic assumptions of the larger society. The patient is treated like a piece of raw material that needs to undergo certain processes. Though sensitive doctors or nurses occasionally show up and add an element of humanity, these moments are basically peripheral to the functioning of the institution as a whole. Your overwhelming experience is of being subjected to staff doctors, nurses, technicians, and other hospital personnel who are switched every day and who have no idea of who the patient is or what his/her needs might be.

Wondering why some technicians who drew my blood seemed so inept and needed to stick me so many times before finding a vein, I soon learned that these were nurses' assistants who had been given this job because they would do it for less pay than those who had previously done this work (far more efficiently and less painfully) for decades. And so it went…area after area in which the hospital was cutting back on services in order to save money. After all, the bottom line for the hospital is to make money.

Because the hospital operates under technocratic assumptions, it is totally inept when it comes to the spiritual and psychological dimensions of healing. For example, I had to overcome many of the hospital's bureaucratic regulations in order to avail myself of the alternative healers recommended to me by my friends. But once I succeeded, I began to recognize the problem with such alternative health approaches: while they might be useful in preventing disease or injury, they were far less relevant once one was in a critical or near critical situation in the hospital. Moreover, there is no way to tell the flakes from the competent practitioners, except to experience their practice. Although some of the alternative health practitioners were competent and helpful in ways that the medical personnel could never be, I spent too many hours with well-meaning and good-hearted crackpots who came highly recommended by someone or other who cared for me.

I was almost tempted to contrast these alternative health practitioners with the medical profession, which at least had some "objective criteria" for deciding competence. But I quickly reminded myself that it was these very people who had kept me in the emergency room for wasted hours while my condition significantly deteriorated. Moreover, some of the doctors I encountered seemed easily as flaky or deranged as the worst of the alternative health practitioners I encountered. It would take the same trial-and-error process to test out different doctors, but when you are sick and powerless you have little space or ability to do this kind of testing.

Fundamentally, I was experiencing the logic of the capitalist market rather than the support of a caring community. The patient had to beware, to become a cautious consumer. There was desperate need for someone, or many someones, to defend the interest of the patient and protect the patient from insensitivity, unconscious cruelty, and straightforward neglect. In my case, my son and daughter-in-law and a host of caring friends let the doctors and nursing staff know that they were being carefully watched. I pitied others who did not have this kind of vigilant support system.

A hospital could be something very different: a spiritual rather than a materialistic venture. In such a hospital, the goal of providing care and of connecting with the highest



spiritual energies in the universe could have led to a very different kind of atmosphere, one in which the holiness of life was central in the consciousness of all who worked there. In such a context, knowing the particularities of each patient and how their physical, emotional, and spiritual lives fit together would assume a high priority. A case coordinator—separate from the doctors, and well versed in psychological, spiritual, medical and alternative health issues—could be responsible for assembling the right team specific to each individual's needs (because there is no "one size fits all" formula), and for assuring that each patient's needs were being taken seriously.

Would it cost more? Not necessarily, because a hospital that was built for the sake of caring and love would not necessarily have to maximize profits. Moreover, talented and relevantly trained unemployed and retired people would be inclined to volunteer time in a hospital that was understood to be a center of love and caring and a manifestation of the community's highest spiritual commitments.

Much of one's time in the hospital is tedium, waiting for the few moments one gets with one's doctors, with the television being the only provision for distraction from pain and boredom. A spiritually sensitive hospital would provide opportunities for patients who were ambulatory to meet together, perhaps to pray together (there were enough Jews in that hospital to have a significant prayer meeting daily, and probably enough Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and Unitarians as well to have their own—but the only praying I encountered was that of the Muslim hospital orderlies who met at noon together). A hospital could provide (either live or televised) poetry and fiction readings, music of all varieties, lectures, good quality films, and other opportunities for people to grow. There were parts of each day when I would not have wanted anything like this, but there were also many days when I had a few hours in which I did not have the energy to concentrate on serious reading, but would have been receptive to something more stimulating than the dreck of daytime TV.

I came to understand the urgency of reforming health care when a group of doctors came to visit me to discuss their own distress at how far the medical system was moving from its original caring directions. These doctors had heard that the editor of an influential national magazine was in the hospital, and they asked to meet with me to discuss the distress that they were experiencing with the erosion of health care caused by the managed care system. It was heartening to meet these doctors, because they reminded me that many members of the medical profession remain committed to the original caring values that led them into the profession in the first place, despite the constraints and distortions produced by the competitive market.

For me personally, the major lessons of my hospitalization were not about the health care system, but about how I had allowed myself to be captured by the same market-driven dynamics that I often write about. Reflecting on my own life, it became clear to me how much I had been running at an insane speed, working three jobs (editor of TIKKUN, rabbi of Beyt Tikkun, and a national leader of the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning) and constantly generating new projects that pushed me beyond all reasonable limits.

In the hospital, I realized that I have to ask myself about the quality of life that I will have if I keep taking on more projects. And the answer is obvious to me: that in running so quickly, I've neglected too many of the joys of life, have not allowed myself enough time to actually experience what I've been going through, and have often, as a result, treated others without the caring that I publicly advocate.

Nor is this just a personal problem. A central complaint of American middle income people today is that they are working longer and longer hours and having less and less time to enjoy their lives. My own life is only one of the many caught up in the frenetic energy that surrounds and engulfs tens of millions of Americans. Understanding these dynamics was not sufficient for me to avoid falling into them.

I also realized the immense complexity and miracle of every human body, and every person on the earth. Our bodies are engaged in constant miraculous transformations. If, as our liturgy says, a single opening or closing should fail to function, we would be unable to stand before God. Yet all too often I have taken that body and its miraculous nature for granted, out of touch with the miracle that each of us is.

So I've resolved to dramatically slow down. I hope you'll help me in this, in part by not being angry if I don't respond to your letters (which I *love* to read—I read everything sent to me—but which I simply have no capacity to answer), in part by not being too disappointed if we don't have as many TIKKUN conferences.

At another level, I hope you'll join me. I hope that you can slow down with me, and let us spend more time smelling the flowers and experiencing the wonder of creation and the miracle of each person we encounter. In the long run, that kind of spiritual community will be in a stronger position to heal and repair the planet. ❑

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INTERVIEW

David Mamet on *The Old Religion*

TIKKUN: Your new book, *The Old Religion,* raises troubling questions about the location of Jews in American society. By picking out the one instance that we know of in American history in which a Jew was lynched, you seem to suggest that Jews are making a big mistake today to feel secure in American society. The book itself starts with a chapter in which Leo Frank, the guy who is eventually going to be lynched, is sort of laughing off the insecurity that other Jews around him feel. So it's hard not to read the book in some way as a critique of Jews who feel too comfortable in American society.

MAMET: Well, perhaps. I think that another way of reading the book is that the issue of how safe is it to be a Jew is one which occupies Leo Frank as a *prima facie* issue, as it occupies many Jews, but that Frank goes deeper and that's just a question which gets him interested in the subject. I mean it's the *reductio ad absurdum* of an assimilated Jew having to ask that question. He has to ask it because every non-Jewish person's hand is turned against him for something he didn't do, so he has to go through a process of trying to figure out how he can understand this. One answer, perhaps, is that he should have been better protected, but I think it goes deeper than that.

TIKKUN: One could read the Jewish community in America today as being divided between those whose primary focus is on the history of the persecution of Jews and those who feel that this is a different historical period, one in which the agenda for the Jewish world shifts away from the issue of defense towards the issue of the spiritual meaning of Judaism.

MAMET: Well, I think that the book occupies itself with the second question.

TIKKUN: Could you say something about how?

MAMET: Sure. The whole book is basically an interior monologue of a fellow trying to figure out what it means to him to be a Jew, and the larger question of what it means to be a Jew full-stop. I don't think the book is in any sense a cautionary tale.

TIKKUN: If you had to characterize what Leo Frank learns in the course of the time he is incarcerated, not just about non-Jews but about the larger human reality, how would you characterize it?

MAMET: Well, I think the primary thing that he learns is he has a spiritual life which is very, very different from the spiritual life which he thought he had, or the spiritual life which he thought he lacked—that there is something greater than the physical and the intellectual in his make-up, and that he is forced to go take advantage of it, and he does.

TIKKUN: Could you say something about your own spiritual orientation?

MAMET: I don't know if I have the ability or if you have the time—

TIKKUN: I have the time!

MAMET: Let me see if I can cunningly deflect your question and talk about the cultural aspect of the phenomena. I wrote an essay a few years ago called "Jew for Export" about how everyone needs heroes and heroines to model themselves after, that most of the Jews I saw depicted in art of any kind were both stereotypical and false; they weren't like anyone that I knew. I wanted in a couple of works—one is the movie *Homicide,* the other one is this book, *The Old Religion*—to talk about my culture in a way that meant something to me, rather than to talk about it in a way that might mean something to someone else.

TIKKUN: One thing that has made it difficult for many Jews today to be proud of their Judaism is the feeling that the social justice sensitivity that used to be connected to Jewishness has gone down the tubes.

MAMET: Well, when I went to Israel, my rabbi said to me, you are going to be shocked to find out that, although Jews have a country, they and you are people too, there are going to be rapists and murderers and liars and thieves just like in any other country that has ever existed. As we read the Torah, the people you are describing could be Korach and they could be Simeon Levi, and you say, what the hell are they doing, how dare they be in my Book!

TIKKUN: But the truth is that everyone has to be part of the Book because the Book is a story of a reality and reality is complex. And so what you would say to people who are distanced from their Jewishness because of their upset around these issues is…

MAMET: I would tell them to read the Torah, because if you read the Torah all that Moses is doing throughout the Torah is *geshraying* about those god-damn Jews. You can't get a better example than Moses of this, "I'd love being a Jew if it weren't for these god-damn Jews."

TIKKUN: That attitude is also a typical Jewish attitude.

MAMET: Of course it is. Thank God. ❑

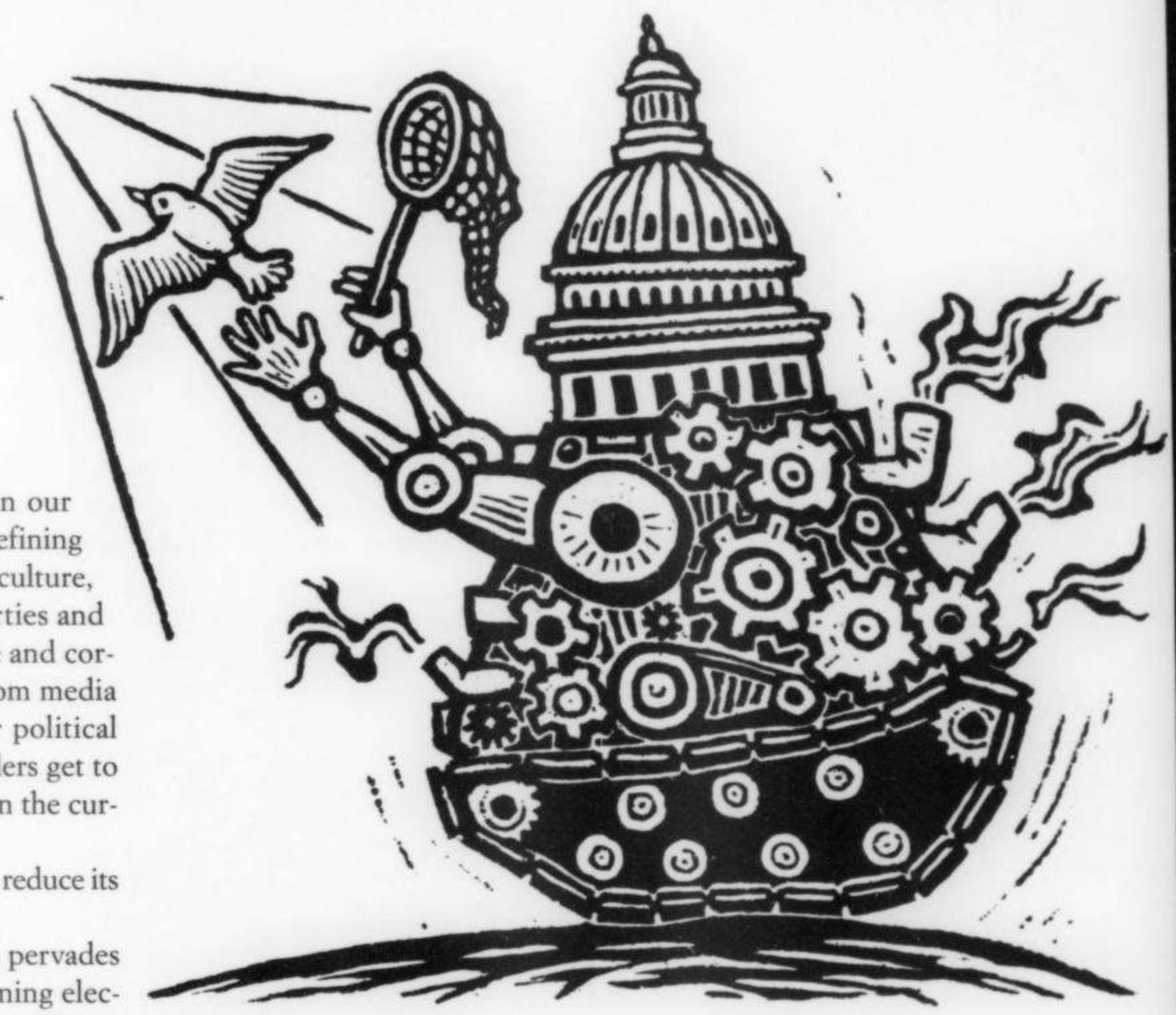
David Mamet is the Pulitzer prize-winning author of numerous plays, incuding Oleanna, *and films, including* The Postman Always Rings Twice, Hoffa, *and* The Untouchables. *His new novel,* The Old Religion, *has just been published.*

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POLITICS

On Cynics and Cynicism

A. Lawrence Chickering



How can we reduce cynicism in our public life? Cynicism is the defining characteristic of our political culture, infecting politicians of all parties and all ideologies. Perhaps the most pervasive and corrosive influence on our politics comes from media cynics, who through their control of our political theater control which of our political leaders get to walk on stage, who gets to speak, and when the curtain goes up and down.

Why is cynicism so strong? How can we reduce its stranglehold on our political discourse?

If you are tempted to say that cynicism pervades our politics because politics is about winning elections, you are already afflicted by the disease. That is the subtext of most media reporting. But is it true there is no higher purpose than winning elections? Anyone who believes that would do well to retire to his bath and open his veins.

Wherever there is hope, cynicism is contained. Among all hopes, none is more important to a society than the hope that people in all walks of life will reach out to each other, come together, and work to build a common enterprise. Yet all the mainstream political parties, both on the organized left and right, believe that such cooperation and connection are impossible—inherently impossible. Their worldviews are rooted in the belief that state and society *inherently* conflict. In this sense, cynicism is built into the very terms of our discourse.

Conservatives vest all hope in society and its market economy to reform a corrupt state, while liberals vest all hope in the state to reform a corrupt society. Thus, conservatives focus all their energies on shrinking the state and warning private institutions to avoid contact with governments, while liberals focus all their energy on protecting the state in its current form, while attacking conservative initiatives to shrink the government. (Liberals would like to expand the government, but that is difficult to do in the current political climate.)

A. Lawrence Chickering is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Contemporary Studies. His most recent book is Beyond Left and Right, *1993.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS PAPA

This dualistic world of mechanism and mind focuses everyone's energy on perfecting the great governmental machine. Although conservatives and liberals (again) disagree on how to fix government, they agree in their focus on government. Society—or people—are anecdotal, mechanically linked to state institutions and policies. In their preoccupation with getting the government right, neither left nor right sees any responsibility to reach out to people or to provide leadership to them—because they assume that all social effects will follow automatically from government policies.

The belief that state and society are locked in a never-ending conflict leads inexorably to a sense of hopelessness and cynicism. If they are always in conflict, then it follows naturally that left and right cannot avoid seeing each *other* (liberals representing the state and conservatives representing society) as hopelessly and inherently corrupt—lacking all sincerity. The fact that cooperation and connection are impossible at the macro level (i.e., between state and society) also makes them impossible at the micro level (i.e., between their representatives). This vision of eternal night is built into the terms of our political idiom—into the terms of discourse in which all mainstream political debate is conducted. Under the circumstances, is it surprising that cynicism dominates our political life?

With their negative, mechanistic agendas, focused always on the Beltway, neither liberals nor conservatives have any interest or time in addressing the real problems

of real people. It is not surprising, for example, that the recipients of many social services are depressed and demoralized populations. What is very surprising is that public bureaucracy employees in almost all social service areas—welfare, public housing, education, immigration—are also demoralized and depressed. Go into any welfare office or post office or housing authority, and you will see depressed, pathological communities—a social problem of enormous proportions. Why is there no mention of this in the U.S. political debate? The disconnectedness experienced by real people gets no attention because it doesn't fit the terms of the current debate. Liberals don't see the problem because to them government cannot be the problem; government must be the solution. Conservatives don't see it because to them government is the problem. Government workers either are the enemies of society, and thus should be demoralized, or they are working for the enemy and thus come by their depression as a matter of course. Neither liberal nor conservative sees people, only symbols of darkness and light.

To pick another example, many social service programs could be reformed to enormous public benefit by allowing recipients a role in the design and delivery of services. That way, recipients would gain a stake in the process and would value it far more than they do now. It is true in public housing—giving tenants a meaningful role in managing and eventually owning housing projects; in public education—increasing parental and teacher participation and choice, as in the famous experiment at Harlem District Four; and in law enforcement—experimenting with community policing. In these and other areas, passive, depressed recipients could become active, independent citizens. Many successful social programs are based on this model. Why don't we learn from them?

Liberals and conservatives don't learn from them because it would require them to step outside their negative, mechanistic roles and reach out to citizens and to each other to accomplish objectives they fundamentally share. Conservatives are not interested in pursuing an active empowerment agenda because it would contaminate and retard their mechanistic dream of shrinking the government. Liberals are not interested because it would conflict with their mechanistic dreams of a government that will 'care for' the dependent poor, who have been brutalized by corrupt society. The dependent poor—liberals believe—cannot be independent or self-governing; their continuing dependence is an indispensable symbol of society's corruption.

A final reason neither side is interested in a serious empowerment agenda is their mechanistic and *impersonal* preoccupation with the state. An empowerment agenda could only work—would only make sense—if state and society work together. It would require a commitment to *personal contact,* reaching out to engage people to share responsibility for the public business. Personal contact, however, ends the possibility of a world understood and mediated only and entirely by mind. The mechanical world of contemporary left-right policymaking is a world of, by, and for mind; spirit has no role in this world. Personal contact, on the other hand, requires embrace of spirit, which is frightening for people in the mind professions of government, media, and the academy. Few things stir greater fear in people of mind than mention of spirit, and fear fuels cynicism. For such people mind and mechanism are easier.

How might we reduce cynicism in our public life?

It is common, in asking this question, to mean: How might we reduce cynicism *in the power centers?* How can we reduce it in Washington and New York? This emphasis on the power centers is itself part of what is wrong. If we want to reduce the grip of cynicism on our public life, the first thing we must do is forget about the power centers. Washington and New York are the *last* places that will see the barren deadness of the world of mechanism and mind that they dominate. They are far too invested in that world to give it up easily. As long as they can sustain the myth that all life is lived inside the Beltway or on Manhattan Island, they can enjoy the enormous benefits of money and power that come with managing the levers of power.



Their world of mechanism and mind is an entirely closed operation. People who live in it believe that everything in the universe revolves around them. At the same time, they also believe that everyone else—people outside the power centers who live in the rest of the country—have the same view and share their preoccupation with the power centers. Their steadfast defense of mind, combined with their unwillingness to let the faintest trace of spirit trespass on their domain, shows how they fear spirit.

Breaking down cynicism must begin between people, at the local level—reaching out to each other in common purpose. Spirit has enormous potential to break down barriers between people, to reconnect them: people of all ethnicities, races, religions. It even has potential to reconnect state and society—people who live in the power centers and the rest of us. When models of connection are developed in education, in public housing, and in rehabilitation programs, then an invasion might be planned of the power centers. With major renewal in the poorest sections of Washington and New York, the darkness will start to lift, and hope will appear for the first time that even the power centers might be humanized. ❑



Israelis begin expanding a West Bank settlement, fall 1997.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK BOWMER / AP PHOTO

ISRAEL

Interview with Asmi B'shara

TIKKUN: Could you talk about the problems faced by those pro-peace Palestinians in the territories who feel caught between Hamas on the one hand and Netanyahu on the other hand?

B'SHARA: The majority of the Palestinians want a peaceful solution with the Israelis, a two-state solution, or feel that they have no other choice. These people tended mostly to support the Oslo accords. Of course, some of them were against Oslo because they thought Oslo was an imposed agreement and would not be the way to guarantee self-determination. But until Netanyahu's victory in the elections, they still believed in giving this process a chance; at least the process had begun and they had hope that something was right and was moving. And the Palestinian political elites and the Israeli political elites had started to build some kind of trust.

And then came Netanyahu with a declared program opposing Oslo. And the day after his victory he began emptying those agreements of any possible content.

The Palestinian people who want a two-state solution are trapped not only between Hamas and the Israeli government, but are also trapped within a Palestinian regime which is not—at least in the absence of territorial sovereignty—representing what I call institutional sovereignty. Institutional sovereignty refers to those representative elected institutions that are functioning in spite of the Israeli occupation, that are functioning according to the rule of law and democratic principles that can be represented worldwide, and that can be represented to ourselves

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Asmi B'shara is a member of the Israeli Knesset from the National Democratic Alliance, a Palestinian peace-oriented party in Israel.

as something that is functioning despite the Israeli intent not to recognize us.

There is something irreversible about Oslo. As you know, Michael, I was myself very critical of Oslo. But constructs were built. Now to oppose Oslo is to oppose history—it's nonsense. It's there, it's built its realities. Now you can't oppose realities.

For example—the Palestinian Authority is there! You have police, you have courts, you have a legislative council. Now a lot depends on this reality, on how it is built. They can function as democratic institutions and become a real tool against Netanyahu worldwide and here. If they don't function the right way, and if Hamas is there and Netanyahu is there, it's a real trap.

TIKKUN: Explain.

B'SHARA: I do not think that liberal democracy under the conditions we are living is absolutely possible the way it is now implemented in the West in the twentieth century after three hundred years of development. But there are some things you can speak about. You can speak about the rule of the law, about the institutionalization of political decisions, that they don't depend on somebody—there should be some kind of transparency and accountability, some kind of separation of powers. There should be some independence of jurisprudence, there should be a considerable, reasonable, freedom of expression.

The PLO leaders' approach to Oslo was to find a solution for themselves, and not for the Palestinian people.

And such institutions would express a kind of self-determination which would impose a national will on Netanyahu. Under existing conditions, it's easier for Netanyahu to pressure the Palestinian leaders because they do not practice a politics of representation of their people. So they are more dependent on Israeli good will, they are more dependent on Israeli money, they are more dependent on the freedom of movement that Israel might grant their VIPs.

TIKKUN: Why did it happen this way? Why wouldn't people like Nabeel Shath recognize the importance of a democratic regime and try to create it?

B'SHARA: The Palestinian leadership did not make the agreement at Oslo because it thought that this was the only way to solve the Palestinian question. They had to represent it that way, because that is the historical burden they had on their shoulders. But actually they thought Oslo was the only way to save themselves as leaders of the Palestinian people after the Gulf War. And this of course was recognized by Rabin, that's why he agreed to speak to the PLO, because he knew that they would give anything to be recognized internationally after they were isolated in Tunis and after several defeats.

So from the beginning, their approach to Oslo was to find a solution for themselves, and not for the Palestinian people. From the beginning their attitude of work was to serve the Apparatus that they have, to give it its privileges, and this could only be through coordination with the power that could give these privileges, which is Israel—there is no other power that can give or take freedom of movement, can give or take money, etc. So they chose this way and now we here in the occupied territories and the democratic forces that we have among the Arab population in Israel, we emphasize, ok, you made this agreement because of that motivation, but now it's a historical chance to connect to the Palestinian society and to start to build something, in spite of Rabin, in spite of Netanyahu, in spite of anybody.

TIKKUN: But here you have a group who have been fighting for the Palestinian people and their liberation for thirty years. So what happened to them, that suddenly they become more interested in their own power and the power of their Apparatus than they become in the fight that they were originally engaged in?

B'SHARA: A lot of things happened, including the democratization of the PLO in a massive way and a process of bureaucratization. These people were ideological and were idealistic, of course they were, but what happened at the end of the intifada and during the Gulf War was a real internalization of defeat. They had the feeling that they were defeated, and there were two ways to go. The first was to accept defeat and to try to remain the political leadership of the Palestinian people—Oslo, introduced to them by Rabin, was the only way for them to remain leaders of the Palestinian people. The other choice was to leave it, and the whole issue of the historical leadership of the Palestinian people would have become an issue of the past, and there would have emerged a new leadership, a leadership which was starting to give some signals in Madrid.

TIKKUN: It sounds to me that you have on the one hand the Palestinian Authority, and on the other hand the only organized, systematic opposition to that Authority is the Hamas, so where does somebody who wants a democratic, secular state in Palestine go? what do they do?

B'SHARA: First of all, let's begin with the very simple fact that Netanyahu's government is one of the biggest problems, and that the maneuvering space of these democratic forces which want to have a Palestinian state alongside of Israel is getting less and less.

TIKKUN: Is there any organized expression of these democratic forces, or is this just a few intellectuals?

B'SHARA: I have a real reason to believe that what I am speaking about comprises most of the Palestinian political individuals, but their possibilities to express themselves in the public sphere have been more and more limited.

What I think most of them are doing in the current

situation is attempting to emphasize the importance of the existing institutions and to try to act inside them and to make them work in a more rational way: for example, trying to organize the legislative council.

The political candidates for doing this transformation should have been from the Palestinian left; the left is the Palestinian political force which has progressive ideas. But the left did not do that.

TIKKUN: Why?

B'SHARA: They boycotted elections to the legislative council, a fact that made me mad, because this was an opportunity to make the council very active by having a political opposition inside, and they had that choice. With all that I said against Oslo, the Palestinian elections to the legislative council were, because of Oslo, monitored elections. It was the first time, maybe the last time, that we had international observers. That's why it was a great chance, but they made the choice to boycott the elections and I think they made a very, very fatal mistake. Now they lost one very important place to express these political thoughts.

I don't know if it's now too late to ask for a development in a different direction, but I know that more and more people reach my convictions concerning the national option for Palestine. If we don't want a bantustan like in South Africa—what we have now is a bantustan, Mr. Netanyahu—if we want to get out from the system of apartheid that is being built now by Netanyahu, we have two possible options. We have either a national option which has to be democratic—we have no choice, it has to be democratic, because we have to go straight to the world and claim institutional sovereignty in spite of the hindrances—or we have to go to binational options and wait for the next generation to ask for annexation to Israel. There are no other options. All the other options are bantustans and militias and policemen, etc.

More and more people are gaining this conviction, that the national option has to be an enlightened one, a very democratic one, because we have to work with very limited tools. We need authority, in the places that we have authority, and we need to introduce to the Israeli people and to the West a united front of people and leaders who want sovereignty and who are against settlements. In that case, a Palestinian opposition would be a very great benefit to the Palestinian leadership because the leadership could say, like Netanyahu says, I have my extreme right, I can't move; we should be able to say we also have our system, we also have democratic opposition, we also have public opinion, so you have to give us something.

Of course, we have real public opinion now, but who believes that we have it? If it is not expressed and is not affecting the decision-making politically? If we show this public opinion, then of course they have to take it into consideration.

TIKKUN: Well, the public opinion that appears in the West is only the public opinion of people who would prefer

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Hamas to the Palestinian Authority because they want to destroy Israel entirely.

B'SHARA: First of all, it's not true, totally not true. There are no real polls in this part of the world, how could you make polls here? Who has a telephone here? It's nonsense.

I don't agree that there are only two alternatives for the Palestinian people, either the Palestinian Authority like it is, or Hamas like it is. Even if there were only two, their relationships would be very different if they were part of a political democratic game—it would be a totally different game. Netanyahu for example, has a coalition with his extreme right, with religious forces that are not more rational than Hamas, so what is different about them? What is different about them is that they are part of a democratic system that somehow they have to respect the rules of. And the world also respects their place and would take into consideration Netanyahu's complaint that "it's a coalition, I can't move, I'll lose my government." If Hamas becomes a part of that kind of democratic game, not only the world but Israeli public opinion would have to take them into consideration when Arafat would say "I can't be the only one who decides." You see?

Even Hamas could not do the things that it does if there were a real belief in the Palestinian street in the possibilities of peace. Hamas can be irrational ideologically, but it is a pragmatic movement, and this is what the Israelis can never understand. It doesn't only have a struggle with Israel. It has another conflict too: it wants to be the leadership of the Palestinian people. So it has another struggle *within* Palestinian society. Pragmatically, they don't want to leave the Palestinian street unless the Palestinian street has some hope of a peaceful solution. Any Hamas act that would be directed against this hope would be totally isolated.

TIKKUN: Why do you think Israel acted recently to release these Hamas leaders? Is it just because they want to maintain their good relations with Jordan and Jordan is angry at them becuase of the attempted assassination? Or is Israel trying to strengthen Hamas?

B'SHARA: Well, there are many reasons. If Israel wanted, for example, to release Sheik Ahmed Yassin because of his bad health and so forth, the Israelis could have released him to the Palestinian Authority, which was demanding his release, and with this act, they would have strengthened Arafat. But they did not want to do that, they wanted to weaken Arafat.

Now, what is the common thing between Netanyahu and King Hussein? And why did King Hussein, on the eve of the last Israeli election, support Netanyahu?

TIKKUN: How did Hussein support Netanyahu?

B'SHARA: Well, he did not accept the visit of Peres to Amman on the eve of the election, but he did accept a visit from Netanyahu. He was the only Arab leader who gambled on Netanyahu; he thought that Netanyahu would win. What's in common between them? Not the Jordanian option—it's ironic that Likud would adopt the Jordanian option. What they have in common is that they are both against the Oslo accords. Hussein did not like Oslo from the beginning because it excludes him from negotiation on the Palestinian issue. And Netanyahu, of course, has his reasons, his unbelievably dogmatic ideology. So both are against Oslo. Now, who is a third against Oslo? Hamas!

What's happening here is very weird, and people cannot get it. The Islamic Brotherhood, which is the godfather of Hamas, has traditionally cultivated excellent relationships with the Jordanian regime. Both were against Arab nationalism and against [former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser. Most of the Hamas political leadership have great relationships with Jordan. Of course, Israel claims that there are terrorists in Amman. But that's not true. Hussein would not give auspices to leaders of armed struggle, not because of his love of Israel, but because he fears that they would turn against him sometime. So by definition these people had to be politicians and not terrorists. Khaled Mashaal [the target of the Israeli attack] and Moussa Abu Marzouk are politicians of Hamas, which means they are very close to the Islamic Brotherhood, which means they are very close to the regime. Now, because of this dumb, idiotic and immoral act of Israel, it became possible for King Hussein to come out to the public with his intimate relationships with the Islamic Brotherhood and Hamas. Why?

First of all, that relationship becomes legitimate because he protected them and Israel did what it did, and international opinion could be on his side—but not only that. He can demonstrate now that if the question is the security of Israel, and if the security of Israel depends on who controls Hamas, he can say, I can control Hamas more easily than Arafat, I have relationships with their leaders, so, if you want a solution, talk to me. He wants to use all this to come back to the negotiations of the final status.

Of course, this weakens Arafat, and Netanyahu, for his fundamentalist ideology, has reasons to weaken Arafat. He believes that a strong Arafat means a strong Palestinian Authority, and a strong Palestinian Authority would definitely lead to a Palestinian State. So he wants a weak Authority that is always dependent on Israeli goodwill. Of course, the whole thing strengthened Hamas, which now can choose between Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. I think Hamas is split on this issue. Some want to go with Jordan, but many want to still find a basis for debate with the Palestinian Authority, because a lot of the Hamas leaders consider themselves not only Islamists, but also nationalists with Islamic ideology. ❑

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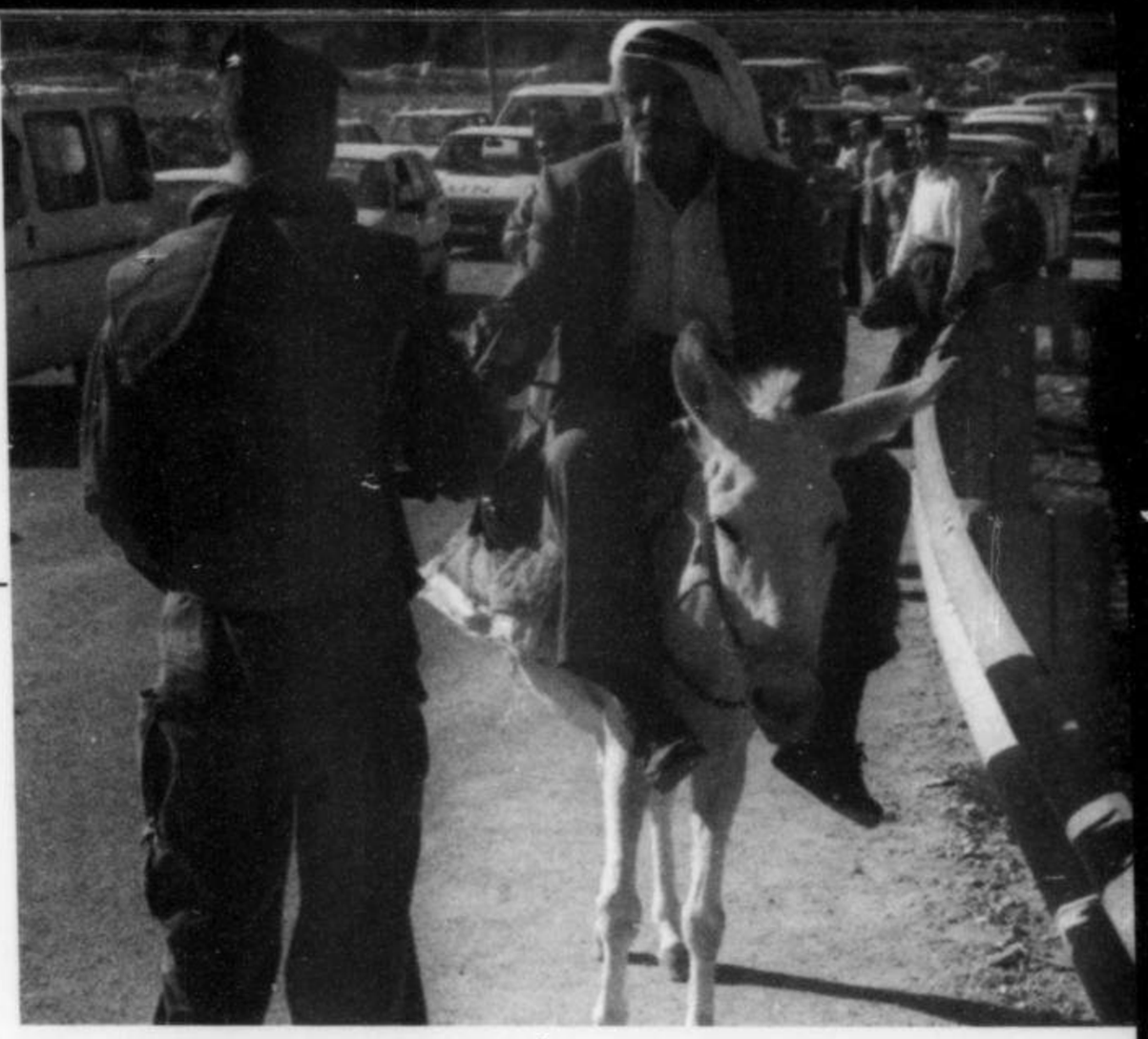
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ISRAEL UPDATE

A Peace Now Perspective

Galia Golan



PHOTOGRAPH BY NASSER SHIYOUKHI / AP PHOTO

It would be laughable if it were not so tragic; it would simply be embarrassing if it were not so disastrous. That is how many—the polls indicate most—Israelis are feeling these days. The mood in Israel is the lowest I can remember, despite the fact that there have been many other periods of depression here before. I remember the *mitun* (recession) the year before the Six Day War, when the joke going around was, "the last person in Lod (airport) will turn off the lights." And there was the gnawing despair of the daily losses during the War of Attrition, the shock and disillusionment of the *michdal* (blunder) surrounding the Yom Kippur War, the *botz* (mud) of Lebanon, the anguish and fear of the unwinnable intifada, and, of course, the horror and sadness that accompanied each terror attack of the 1970s and 1980s.

Yet this time, it's different. Perhaps because there had been hope; there had been a period when, for the first time, it looked as if this long, bloody conflict was actually coming to an end. For the first time, Israel was making peace with its neighbors, people were visiting Arab countries, getting to know Palestinians, reducing the size of the army, making money. There were difficulties, even tragedies; many people were skeptical, a minority was unhappy, but the overwhelming conviction was that we were headed for peace—finally.

Perhaps this time is different because we had an assassination—the devastating murder, at a peace rally, of a Prime Minister who had been Chief of Staff, commander of the Six Day War victory, Palmach fighter of the unit that had saved Jerusalem from siege. And he was murdered not by a terrorist or a crazed Kach supporter, but by the brilliant product of the National Religious Party's educational establishment.

Perhaps this time is different because the depression is not over just one event, however unfortunate. It has been going on practically the entire year and a half that the Netanyahu government has been in office, for event after event, blunder after disastrous blunder. It began immediately after the May 1996 elections with Bibi Netanyahu 's ridiculous refusal to meet or negotiate with Arafat and with the repeated delays in withdrawing from Hebron (only to be forced to move by American intervention); then with the foolhardy opening of the tunnel in the Old City, which led to widespread bloodshed and the loss of over sixty Israeli and Palestinian lives. Then came the Bar-on affair, a dirty maneuver designed, the police believed, to install a party loyalist as Attorney General to do the Prime Minister's political bidding in the courts. Talk about losing confidence in your leaders.

But this wasn't enough. Interspersed with terror attacks (we discovered that we not only had no "peace" but we also had no "security" out of the "Secure Peace" so blithely and hypocritically promised by Bibi in his election campaign), this march to folly continued with the decision to build in Har Homa. This area south of Jerusalem was annexed to the city after the Six Day War and is claimed by the two Arab villages between which it lies. For almost three years, Peace Now's legal and political actions had delayed the planned construction of thousands of Jewish housing units in Har Homa by convicing the Rabin-Peres government of the dangers and inadvisability of this project. Bibi was another story.

As Har Homa and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank were more than bringing home the message to the Palestinians that Israel was not planning to leave the occupied territories, the government decided that the next scheduled partial IDF withdrawal would encompass only 2 percent of the area under full Israeli control. Then the date for the second scheduled withdrawal was totally ignored by the government. Soon after, settlers came to Ras al-Amud, a Palestinian neighborhood deep inside East Jerusalem—a move Bibi could hardly deny knowledge of, inasmuch as he had asked the mayor of Jerusalem (by the latter's account) to postpone the move until after Secretary Albright's visit! And then, within hours of talking to Albright about a "time out" on expanding the settlements, Bibi announced plans to build hundreds more houses in the settlement of Efrat. Meanwhile, throughout all of this, soldiers were being killed in Lebanon on the average of one or more a week.

Galia Golan is a Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a spokesperson for Peace Now.

Parents, of course, don't see "averages." One wonders if Bibi does. One wonders if he sees anything.

He certainly didn't see Israel's relations with Jordan when he ordered the assassination of a Hamas leader in Amman. He didn't see Israel's relations with Washington when he ordered more building in the settlements. He most certainly didn't see relations with the Palestinians or any of the Arab world when he undertook virtually all of these ill-advised (if advised at all) and disastrous moves.



But what he should be seeing, if not all of this, is, at least, what he is doing to Israel, to the Israeli people, to our hopes, to our pride in our fifty-year accomplishments, to our belief in Zionism, to our obligation to the Jewish people and to Jewish values, to our children.

Actually, what amazes me more than Bibi's idiocy (or is it deviousness?) is the resilience of the public, of that part of the public known as the peace camp, and in particular the young people. Perhaps it is not so amazing; these are the people who will have to risk their lives to protect the settlers, to fight the next war, to face the increasing hostility and isolation that is the bitter fruit of Bibi's folly. Maybe that explains why they have been demonstrating almost every day for the past two months. What is perceived as the revival of the peace camp, of Peace Now, is not actually a revival, since it was never dead, but rather an anguished effort to find some way to stop the folly. Our protest is so habitual that even large demonstrations get little attention—Peace Now is demonstrating, so what else is new. Or, as Bibi would have it, Labor and Meretz just want new elections to get back into power, and the media are all leftists anyway.

So we seek new ways to express the Israeli public's chagrin and despair, new ways to get the message across to Bibi. We plaster the streets and roads with posters proclaiming our concern over the war that is coming, although the authorities remove them within hours. We, and the ex-generals, the women, the religious doves, and even anonymous citizens run costly ads in the press that may deplete our finances (and are somehow never as large as the still costlier ads placed by the extreme right). We march, we dialogue, we petition, we lobby, we sit in vigils, we camp out in tents or stand outside Bibi's house blowing on the shofar and beating on drums, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to do these things, and to search for other methods because…because? Because we must, and because we know that the majority of Israelis want a return to a policy of peace, and that the majority of Palestinians are desperate to the point of hopelessness but also, still, interested in peace.

We had high hopes for Secretary Albright's visit; we didn't expect American intervention to come, instead, in the form of Irving Moskowitz. We still, however, look to America for help. Hussein, Mubarak, Arafat, King Hasan of Morocco, Assad, none of these leaders can seem to get through to Bibi. But it has been proven that President Clinton can. It has also been proven that American Jewish leaders and American Jews at large support us, support peace, and support American steps, directly, to press not just Arafat but also our esteemed leader, Bibi. Press him to desist from these ill-considered provocations, to stop the building in Har Homa and the settlements, to end the repressive and discriminatory measures against the Palestinians (particularly in East Jerusalem) and to resume implementation of the Oslo Accords and negotiations for a final peace agreement with the Palestinians as well as to resume talks with Syria on the same basis as Rabin proposed (that is, that the depth of the peace would equal the depth of the withdrawal).

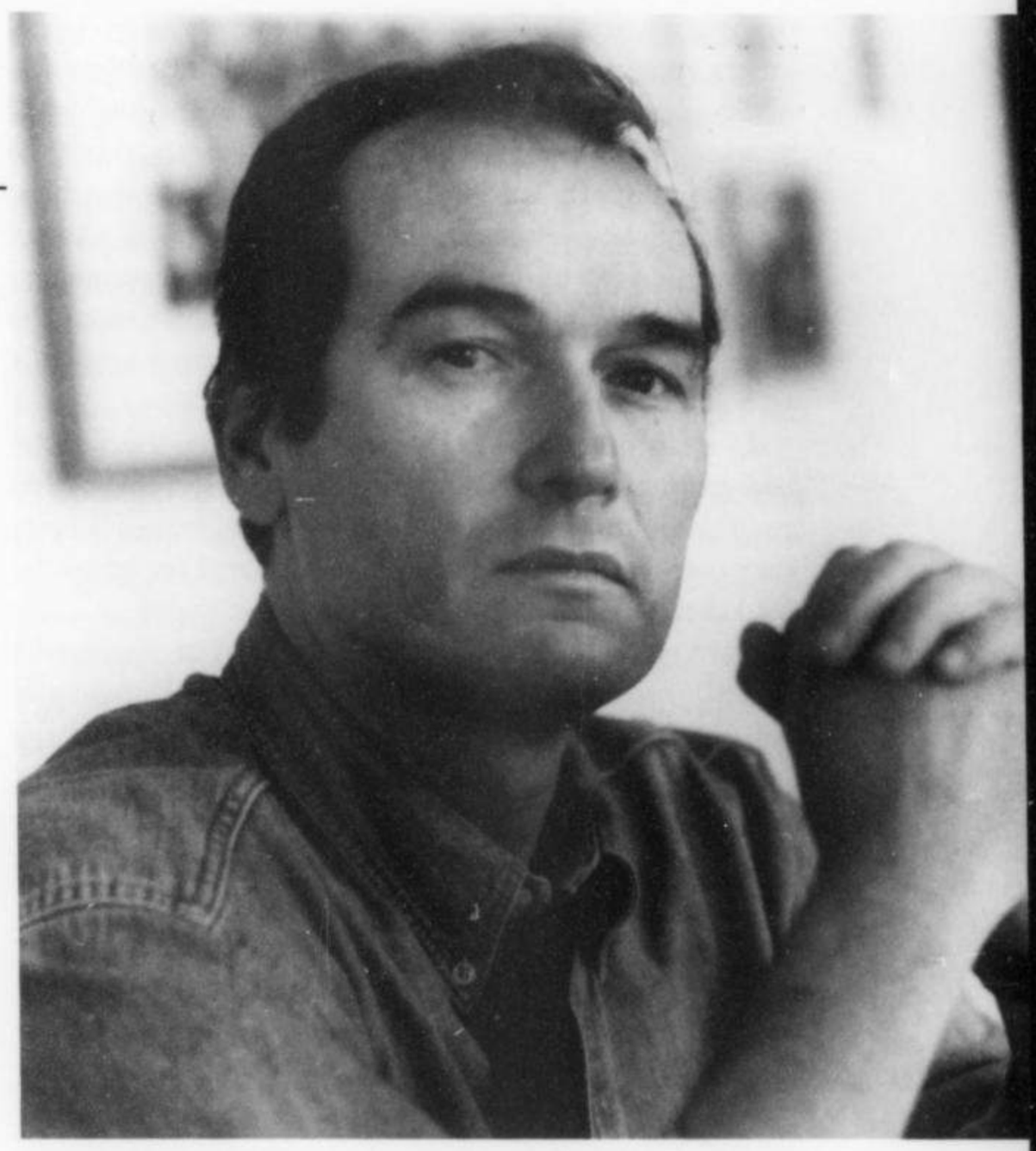
President Clinton has invited Netanyahu and Arafat to Washington once again. If anything concrete is to come of this most welcome effort, we would hope to see a firm American initiative specifically calling for simultaneous resumption of the redeployments and the final status talks, to be based, from the outset, on a commitment to reach an agreement that provides guarantees for Israeli security and the rights of the Palestinians to their own state within agreed upon borders. If these had been spelled out in the Oslo Accords, we might not have seen the collapse of those accords. Today it is most likely that Arafat cannot rally his people to support renewed cooperation and peace with Israel for less than such a promise; Israelis too must see some light at the end of the tunnel.

We have been at this longer than we would like to remember. The children we thought would not have to see war have grown up and are being killed in Lebanon, and maybe again in the occupied territories. Yet we were almost there: we had peace with Egypt and with Jordan, were on our way to full peace with the Palestinians and were at least talking with the Syrians. All of this can be regained; the road to these achievements was more difficult than the road to their resumption. But only an all-out effort, with all the help we can get from abroad, stands a chance of removing the blinders from Bibi's eyes and putting Israel on the road to peace once again. ❑

PHOTOGRAPH BY KHALED ZIGHARI / AP PHOTO

Rivera Rules

Jack Newfield



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JIM TYNAN

Dennis Rivera is one of the most original, effective, and aggressive union leaders in the country. He is president of the 120,000 member hospital workers union of New York. He is also a major player in national Democratic Party politics, a national leader among Latino politicians and intellectuals, and a board member of the Children's Defense Fund. Rivera was interviewed in his New York office by author and columnist Jack Newfield.

NEWFIELD: Dennis, let's start with the apparent revival of the American labor movement, after 15 years of decline, since Ronald Reagan crushed PATCO (the air traffic-controllers' union). What is it that's allowing labor to make this comeback? Is it Sweeney? Is it winning the UPS strike? Is it the reform of the Teamsters?

RIVERA: I think it's a combination of many factors. The first one I would say is the current condition of the economy. The fact that…well, let's go back. I think that the labor movement in the United States had reached a kind of tacit agreement back in the 1950s and 1960s which said, "we will let the labor movement survive in the United States in exchange for pursuing a very anti-Communist policy abroad." And the remnant of that agreement was the leadership of Lane Kirkland, who was more interested in foreign affairs and doing what was good for workers in Poland and Eastern Europe and other areas. There was not a lot of energy devoted to organizing workers in the United States.

NEWFIELD: How important, historically, was the election of John Sweeney (to the presidency of the AFL-CIO in 1995)? Was it a real watershed in the history of labor? What about his willingness to spend money for liberal candidates and organizing the unorganized?

RIVERA: I think it was incredibly important. Because of the attitude of union leaders in the past, those who were organizing unions knew that the National Labor Relations Board was not a resource. We had workers who went on strike, and they were replaced. It became clear that the focus of the past leadership was based on a cold war mentality. That realization led an institution, the labor movement, to have this revolution inside, to change the leadership from Lane Kirkland to John Sweeney.

I don't know if you have ever been—I don't know how many people from these publications have been—to a labor convention, but it is one of the most boring places. It's a place where there basically is no dissension. It's very hierarchical and you go along to get along. So the fact that at a labor convention they decided to replace Lane Kirkland with John Sweeney represented a very dramatic change in the culture. And John Sweeney has been doing a terrific job. Yesterday, in church, his Eminence, John Cardinal O'Connor, made a moving remark. He basically talked to Sweeney, and he said to him "You know, you have a big burden on your shoulders right now, which is to carry the aspirations of the working people in this country." And his Eminence told Sweeney that we'd all pray for him. I think Sweeney has taken on this burden.

I think there is a sense of enthusiasm now. Before this change, the labor movement was owed about $4 billion a year in income, in dues, from the aggregate of all the unions. And we were spending less than five percent on union organizing, if that much. So this institution, the trade union movement, had not recognized that it needed to organize in order to survive. Now John Sweeney has come in and said that we need to do the following: we need to change our priorities. For every dollar, we've got to put 33 cents into new organizing. That's a very dramatic change. It means that there's going to be billions of dollars for

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Jack Newfield is an Emmy award winning documentary filmmaker and a New York Post *columnist. He is the author of six books, most recently* Only in America: Life and Crimes of Don King.

organizing new workers—public employees, new immigrants. In addition to that, Sweeney took another very dramatic step, and I have to say he took it with the support of another trade union leader, Gerald Macentee, who's the head of ASCME—another of the unsung heroes of the American labor movement. They decided to put together a very aggressive political campaign. So the labor movement is now very aggressive on the political front and on the organizing front. And ultimately, I think there's a sense that we need to mobilize the membership.

In addition, there's been a change in the guard of the leadership in the labor movement. New leaders are coming up, like Andrew Stern, who's now the president of Service Employees International, and Brian McLaughlin, who's the head of the Central Labor Council in New York.

NEWFIELD: In 1996, under John Sweeney's leadership, the AFL-CIO spent $35 million trying to elect a Democratic majority to the House and unseat Newt Gingrich as the Speaker. Though they fell short, there were 27 districts in which the margin was one and a half percent or less. Do you think there will be and should be a similar financial effort in 1998 to get a Democratic majority in the Congress?

RIVERA: It's already in place. As a matter of fact, the last person who was in my office before you walked in was Dick Gephart, and we were talking about the race in Staten Island. At this moment, it looks like the whole labor movement in New York City has coalesced around the candidacy of Eric Vitaliano. And it looks like we have a good shot—in a Republican stronghold, Staten Island—to elect another Democrat to Congress and reduce the number that we have to change from 11 to 10.

NEWFIELD: Let me change the subject and talk to you a little bit about the spiritual dimension of public leadership, because I think a lot of the leaders that you and I have the most admiration for—Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Robert Kennedy—all had a spiritual/religious element to their leadership. Do you think this is what's missing in some of the Democratic Party leaders and some of the political leadership in the country, that the Left has lost its connection to the spiritual dimension?

RIVERA: I think in some measure that's the case. First of all, it's interesting to see the vacuum of leadership that exists—it's one thing that characterizes this moment in our society. That vacuum is a result of the fact that we're living in a time that's driven by technology, driven by cold, calculated methodologies to advance positions—as opposed to sheer passion and emotions and beliefs motivating leadership. For example, political candidates and campaigns are driven by pollsters.

NEWFIELD: Aren't these exactly the things that are creating the need and a desire for a more spiritual leadership?

RIVERA: I believe so. This lack of leadership means there aren't figures who the people can identify with. We saw what happened with the common people identifying with Diana. It's interesting how this woman, who basically was engulfed in all this wealth and this royalty, it's interesting how the images that she conveyed to the world—in addition to the wealth—were images of Diana with common people, with people who were disadvantaged, people who were sick, who were injured, who were maimed. People who were basically facing death. People could identify with those images. And what I learned from that experience was although we as a society want to do well economically, we want everybody, in the end, to be protected. And at this moment, in terms of getting back to your questions of moral leadership, the problem is too…

NEWFIELD: Well, it's more than moral…it's spiritual, it has some kind of religious quality—I think certainly Caesar Chavez and Martin Luther King had religious roots to their politics, and an element of faith in God that motivated them. And I think maybe you should speak autobiographically. I think you share some of those qualities.

RIVERA: I believe that, at best, we are going to come to this life only once and that what we should do is assist each other to have the best life possible. In this context that means providing everybody with the opportunity for a good education, good health care, a good job, and the real opportunity to have a meaningful life.

NEWFIELD: Is there a religious root to your politics? To your values, your ideas?

RIVERA: Well, basically my values have a lot to do with my upbringing as a Catholic—I went to a Catholic school. In school, the values of the Catholic Church that were important were those that emphasized helping each other. For example, yesterday in church his Eminence, John Cardinal O'Connor, was extolling the virtues of Mother Theresa. He said what's most important to remember about her was her commitment to the poor, to the downtrodden, to the people who did not have any advantages, didn't have any opportunities. She not only thought about them, but went out and worked to help them.

And it's in the context of aid, of assisting fellow humans, that I see the Catholic Church. Many people have a cynical view of the Church because of its wealth and because of all the contradictions in terms of gender. But I try to focus on all the good that the Church does. I, for one, think that those who become priests make a very dramatic statement. I know that there have been some scandals dealing with child abuse, but I would say that there's a large number of people who believe that the majority of the practicing leaders of the Catholic Church have made a commitment to try to assist those in need.

NEWFIELD: Do you think there is a perception in the country, because of issues like school prayer, that liberals are too antagonistic to religion?

RIVERA: Well, I think the philosophical tradition of liberals works to separate Church and State and it is right if we are going to try not to impose our views on others.

I think one of the basic strengths of liberalism is it allows for diversity and toleration.

NEWFIELD: What are some of the defects you see in liberalism today?

RIVERA: As liberals, we sometimes have been perceived as the defenders of the status quo, defenders of bureaucracy, defenders of programs that no longer work. We can now ask, to what degree did liberals become paternalistic in our attempts to organize our society? For example, we've became so paternalistic that asking people to take responsibility for their acts has become a conservative thing to do. I think we liberals have to have a lot of conversations among ourselves, because there is strength in the philosophy of justice for all and in diversity. They are ideas that are crucial to our survival as a society. But, at the same time, we should look each other in the eye and say, "look, some of the stuff that we've been talking about has some serious problems." For example, if somebody came and told me that being a liberal in New York means defending the school board of the City of New York, I'd take a gun and shoot myself because it represents everything that's wrong.

NEWFIELD: Are you following the revival of the Farmworkers' Union out in California?

RIVERA: We talked earlier about the revival of the labor movement. We talked about the energy, about the enthusiasm. But, we have incredible obstacles to getting our message out and being successful. Although there's enthusiasm on the part of the farmworkers, are there the laws that we need for the union to develop? For example, Governor Wilson basically has undone many of the laws that Governor Jerry Brown put in place, laws that allowed the farmworkers' union to grow. Now it's more difficult for the unions. Unfortunately, the real problem that we face now are changed values. Our society is moving in a direction that says it's A-okay to exploit people to make big bucks. I was reading Clark Clifford's book and he said—and this made such a strong impression on me—he said that the most important Reagan legacy was not that Reagan changed laws. Reagan changed the values of the country. And values are much more important than laws, because values are what we hold each other accountable to. And so, now we have to ask again what is the meaning of labor? The rights of labor? And what do we hold each other accountable for as human beings? What is the relationship between us? What is acceptable? What's not acceptable?

NEWFIELD: In line with what you've been saying, I want to read you a quote from someone who I think is probably one of our most perceptive social critics, William Julius Wilson (professor of social policy at the Kennedy School, Harvard University). He recently wrote, and I quote: "With changes in technology and the globalization of the economy, knowledge-based industries will soon dwarf all other industries in the economies of the Western nations. While many better educated workers will benefit from these changes, the demand for low-skilled workers will plummet to the lowest depths in human history. In the United States, this pattern will be reflected in extreme and growing wage differentials between economic haves and have-nots."

RIVERA: He's right on the money. Now, not only are individuals fighting for jobs, but communities, cities, and even regions of our country are competing to keep multi-national companies from taking away their jobs. In terms of technology, it's no mystery that Bill Gates went from making $16 billion to making $32 billion in one year. He doubled his income in one year. That, I believe, is almost half of the budget of the State of New York. One individual.

NEWFIELD: Where do you think the National Democratic Party should be headed? How do you assess the prospective candidates for the year 2000? Gephart, Gore, Jackson, Wellstone, Bradley…

RIVERA: Well, you might think that I'm copping out of this question, but I'm not. If through this publication we want to focus people's energies, they should be focused on taking back the House of Representative before the year 2000.

NEWFIELD: But in terms of program, agenda, what could a Democratic House majority accomplish? What would be your priorities, in terms of laws?

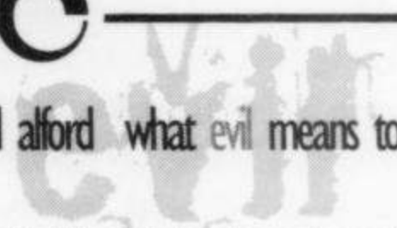
RIVERA: Well, we have an unfinished agenda. I'm going to give you two examples that are very narrow, very close to our interests, that still can have a profound impact on our society. One is the rights of working people. Work is the most important element in our lives. Work defines us. Through work, we are able to sustain ourselves and our families. Through work, we get a sense of satisfaction about what our contribution to society is. Through work, we are valued by society for that contribution. Upgrading the opportunities for every member of our society to have a job, to have a meaningful job, to have the opportunities in this global economy, to have the opportunities to have a job where you get fair wages, with health care benefits, with pensions would be a dramatic and powerful thing.

What do I mean by "upgrading the opportunities"? I mean enhancing the rights of the labor movement in order to help working people. The labor movement is the greatest self-help organization that exists in our country. We are doing for ourselves. Republicans who believe in quote-unquote self-help thinking should support the labor movement, because the labor movement basically tries to advance its members. Let's take an illustration from Union #1199. What do we do here? We try to get job security for our members. We try to have a health care plan for them and their families in which there are no co-payments and which includes dental, prescriptions—every aspect of the health care needs of members and their families. A pension fund so whenever they retire, members can enjoy their retirement. A child-care program so we can assist members with the needs of our 52,000 kids, helping them with child-care and educational needs—from pursuing an

elementary or high school education, or, if children go to college, helping them with tuition. It's a training program. We want to better ourselves and our lifestyles.

So we are a self-help organization. We should have laws that will help replicate our experiences and allow the labor movement to grow, for example with card count recognition. That is, if more than 50 percent of the workers on a site sign up, and you got those cards without coercion, then you can walk up to the employer with the cards and signatures and the employer must automatically recognize the union. If that were possible, there would be an explosion of union members in America. Poll after poll shows that right now, as a result of the corporate greed that exists, working people want to join trade unions. But they don't want to lose their jobs.

NEWFIELD: What about a law banning scabs and replacement workers?



c. fred alford what evil means to us

C. Fred Alford interviewed working people, prisoners, and college students to discover how we experience evil—in ourselves, in others, and in the world. What his informants meant by evil, he found, was a profound, inchoate feeling of dread so overwhelming that they tried to inflict it on others to be rid of it themselves. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Alford argues that the primary experience of evil is not moral but existential.

"The book gives a healthy jolt to our psychological insight into evil. Alford's thesis—that a sense of dread can be the impetus for doing evil—demands serious attention."

—FRED E. KATZ, author of
Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil

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RIVERA: Yes, banning scabs and replacement workers—so many of those laws are part of the agenda that we have out there now. I think that's why we are trying to win back the House. It's not because we love Dick Gephart so much more than Newt Gingrich, but because of these issues.

NEWFIELD: Your union elected some people to the City Council in New York in 1991, like Adam Powell, who turned out to be bums. You're going to try to elect a Democratic Congress, but how do you know they're going to do the right thing?

RIVERA: We need a commitment from our candidates on what they are going to do once elected. Candidates are most interested in us when they're running for office. Once they get into office, they get very distant. In terms of a legislative program, to get back to your earlier question, the other item is health care reform. We did not get universal health care coverage from the failed health care reform of 1994, we got HMO's—insurance companies that basically have taken over the health care industry and are siphoning our dollars from the health care industry for their Wall Street bankers and investment folks. And literally, we need major surgery to make sure that health care is more than the Columbia Corporation of America, a for-profit hospital chain that went from owning one hospital to owning close to 450 hospitals, whose greed has shown through in the end. We need to put health care reform back on the forefront of the national agenda.

NEWFIELD: Why did the health care reform effort in 1994 fail? Was it too complicated?

RIVERA: I think the effort of 1994 failed because one-seventh of the American economy is health care. That's fifteen percent of our gross domestic product. And the effort was done in a very sloppy way. There were 500 secretive meetings led by the First Lady, who had great intentions and a great desire to achieve the goal, but, who, unfortunately, alienated the people who had to pass it—the lawmakers. Lo and behold, the administration arrived in Congress with a document which was 1300 pages long and said: this is the blueprint. That in itself turned off the members of Congress. But we still demand reforming health care and providing for those who don't have coverage. We want Congress to come back with a program like the one that they have for themselves.

NEWFIELD: So labor rights and national health care reform would be your two priorities to create a majority coalition in this country?

RIVERA: Right. And in addition, another important element is jobs. The UPS strike was so important because of the last 49,000 people that UPS hired, 40,000 were part-timers. This is what's happening all over the place. Yes, there are a lot of jobs that are being created in America, but they are jobs with no health care benefits, with no pensions.

Every year that goes by, we have more people who do not have health care coverage. At this moment, it's about 44 million people. When Clinton announced his vision, there were about 39 million people. There's another 60 million people who do not have adequate health care coverage. Now, as we speak, the bulk of the jobs that are created in the United States, about 62 percent of them, are jobs without pension programs. Something in the neighborhood of three-quarters of the many jobs that are created are part-time jobs. In industry after industry, there are workers hired without benefits, whose hours can be adjusted literally at any time to give quote-unquote flexibility to the employer. But, as we approach the new millennium, we need a new social contract. We need to ask: What is the new social contract in our society going to be? What are the values that we're going to hold each other accountable to? How are we going to view each other as human beings? What is our commitment towards each other as human beings? ❑



PHOTOGRAPH BY CORI WELLS BRAUN / COURTESY OF BANTAM BOOKS

OUT HERE

An Open Book

The Late, Great Memoir Debate

Meredith Maran

It's become quite fashionable, in the pages of literary reviews, on the FM airwaves, and in the hallowed halls of author appearances, to deliberate, debate, and deconstruct the question: "What Explains The Current Popularity of the Memoir?"

Was Kathryn Harrison extraordinarily courageous—or flagrantly narcissistic—for wresting from her affair with her father not only two novels, but a best-selling memoir? Does James McBride's poignant portrait of his passing-for-black Jewish mother warrant the social and literary attention it's received? Are readers snapping up first-hand tell-alls about alcoholism, abusive families, breast cancer, and gangster life because the memoir is a vibrant, valid literary genre—or because we've become a nation of voracious voyeurs? Is *The Kiss*, is *The Color of Water* simply the highbrow version of any day's Jenny Jones show?

This question may be intellectual fodder for those who toil in the rarefied rabbit warrens of the *New York Review of Books* or NPR. But for me it's far more personal. Just yesterday a friend called me to say she'd read a profile of me and my latest book. "I thought you were a writer," she said, sounding mildly horrified. "They're saying you're a…memoirist!" It was as if she'd picked up her morning paper and discovered I'd been arrested for embezzlement.

I plead guilty. Although I don't find writing about my personal life to be a problem, and although I think as long as I do it in the privacy of my own home it's no one's business but mine, and although I know I can stop doing it any time I want to—I'm not in denial any more.

Hello. My name is Meredith, and I'm a memoirist.

How can I tell? Because every single time I'm interviewed I'm asked the Dread Question every other memoirist is asked during every interview. TV, radio, newspapers, book readings, Thanksgiving dinner: same question, every time.

"How can you stand to write so openly about the intimate details of your life?"

Sometimes I explain my philosophy about secrecy, and the destructive role it plays in our lives and our society. I say that if today it became impossible for families, corporations, religious institutions, and governments to keep secrets, the world would change—for the better—by tomorrow.

Sometimes I answer by divulging that whenever I visit a friend's house, I go straight to the fridge to check out the contents and find out what's really going on in her life. Brimming with home-cooked abundance? A few expired rolls of film? Juicy-looking date leftovers? A freezer full of vodka, or Chocolate Fudge Brownie? If "God is in the details," the details, I say, are in the fridge. And what is a memoir but the literary equivalent of a well-lit, wide-open refrigerator?

Maybe I've had one of those bad memoirist weeks—perhaps I've received threatening correspondence from a friend, or the attorney of a friend (or "literary victim," as some refer to themselves) whom I've honored by including him or her in one of my books. In that case I might answer with a deep groan and a few repetitions of the MA (Memoirists Anonymous) vow: "I will never write about my own life again. I will never…"

If I'm feeling Hemingwayish, I say, "I just open a vein—my own, or that of someone near and dear to me—and bleed."

If I'm feeling cynical, I say, "It's easier than doing real research."

If I'm feeling Buddhist, I say, "What does privacy matter? I'm just a speck in the universe anyway."

If I'm feeling really cynical I say, "Because they pay me really well to do it."

I guess the real answer is, all of the above—plus this one.

There's a perfectly good reason that Americans watch perfectly awful trash talk shows and read perfectly wonderful memoirs.

We are starving for truth, context, and community.

We are dying to know how other people really fight with their husbands, deal with their teenagers' piercings and shoplifting, get even with mean bosses, and decorate their living rooms. All those people who drive around from one Open House to the next every Sunday aren't looking for new places to live. Just like the folks who watch Jenny Jones and the folks who read Kathryn Harrison, they're hoping to catch a glimpse of their neighbors' real lives.

Read my memoirs, and you'll catch a glimpse of mine. Tell me how you respond to what I've written, and I'll catch a glimpse of yours. ❑

Meredith Maran is the author of Notes From An Incomplete Revolution: Real Life Since Feminism *(Bantam, 1997) and* What It's Like To Live Now *(Bantam, 1995).*

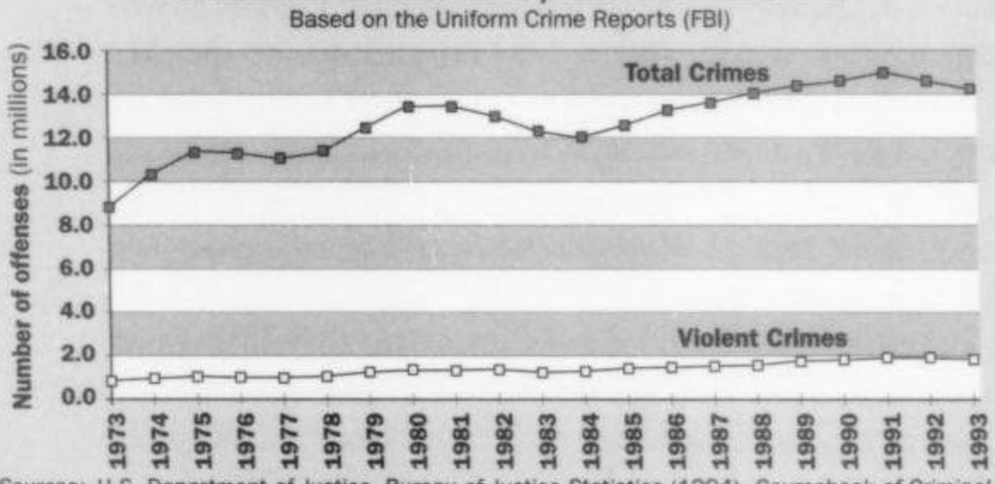
FEAR, CRIME, AND PUNISHMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Steven R. Donziger

In 1961, at the end of his term in office, President Eisenhower warned of an ominous development: defense policy was falling under the influence of a new "military-industrial complex" that was composed of private defense contractors, Pentagon officials, and elected leaders. It was said that the rise of the military-industrial complex represented a convergence of political forces so powerful and far-reaching that it outstripped the capacity of any institution or individual to control them. Those involved were financially and politically invested in the rapid growth of the defense sector of the economy, regardless of whether that growth was the most effective way to combat the Soviet threat and defend America from foreign enemies. The creation of a balanced defense policy, one that actually might have cost less and been more effective, was at best a concern secondary to the need to keep funneling tax dollars into defense spending.

CRIME TRENDS, 1973–1993

Based on the Uniform Crime Reports (FBI)



Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (1994), *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics—1993*, p. 352; U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1994), *Crime in the United States—1993*, pp. 5, 10.

Today, commentators have begun to speak of the rise of a new "prison-industrial complex" and its hold over crime policy There appear to be many similarities between the "prison-industrial complex" and the "military-industrial complex" as they have exercised influence in their respective areas. The most striking is the need to create a policy that firstly addresses the economic imperatives of the industry rather than the social needs of the public it purportedly serves. A second similarity is that the resulting policy creates significant employment opportunities in communities where prisons (or military bases) locate—a process that today ties the economic well-being of millions of people to the growth of the crime industry and the existence of crime itself. A third similarity is that elected leaders adore crime in much the same way they loved Communism; both symbolize an evil without impurities that can be easily bashed for electoral advantage. Yet another similarity is that both the military and prison industries have an implacable internal logic that allows them to benefit regardless of whether their stated policies succeed or fail. If we lose a war, we need more weapons to win the next one; if we win a war, we need more weapons so we can keep winning. If crime is up, we need more prisons to lower crime; if crime is down, we need more prisons so it stays down.

While the military-industrial complex helped to create the most powerful military machine ever, the prison-industrial complex has produced the largest and most expensive prison system in the world (with the possible exception of China, which does not publish statistics on its prison system). While the military has been enormously extravagant, spending hundreds of dollars for a toilet seat and more than a billion dollars each for the Stealth bomber, the prison system is rife with irrationalities that waste huge sums of tax dollars by confining petty offenders to some of the harshest sentences in the world for nonviolent crimes. To take just one recent example, about 100 persons have been sentenced to prison for life for possession of marijuana under California's "three strikes" law. The projected cost to taxpayers is $1.5 million per head. This is an example of why prisons are the largest public works program in America, providing housing, food, (and only sometimes) education, mental health services, and drug treatment. Not coincidentally, public spending on the institutions that used to provide these services to those in need has been slashed dramatically to pay for prison construction.

Rates of serious crime in the United States remained remarkably stable from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s. While the last five years have seen a sustained decrease in reported crime, due to variables that include the aging of the population and the stabilization of the drug trade, an average of three 500-bed facilities still open each week. Since the early 1980s, our prison population exploded

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Steven R. Donziger, a former public defender in Washington, D.C., edited The Real War on Crime *(HarperPerennial: 1996). He practices law in New York City.*

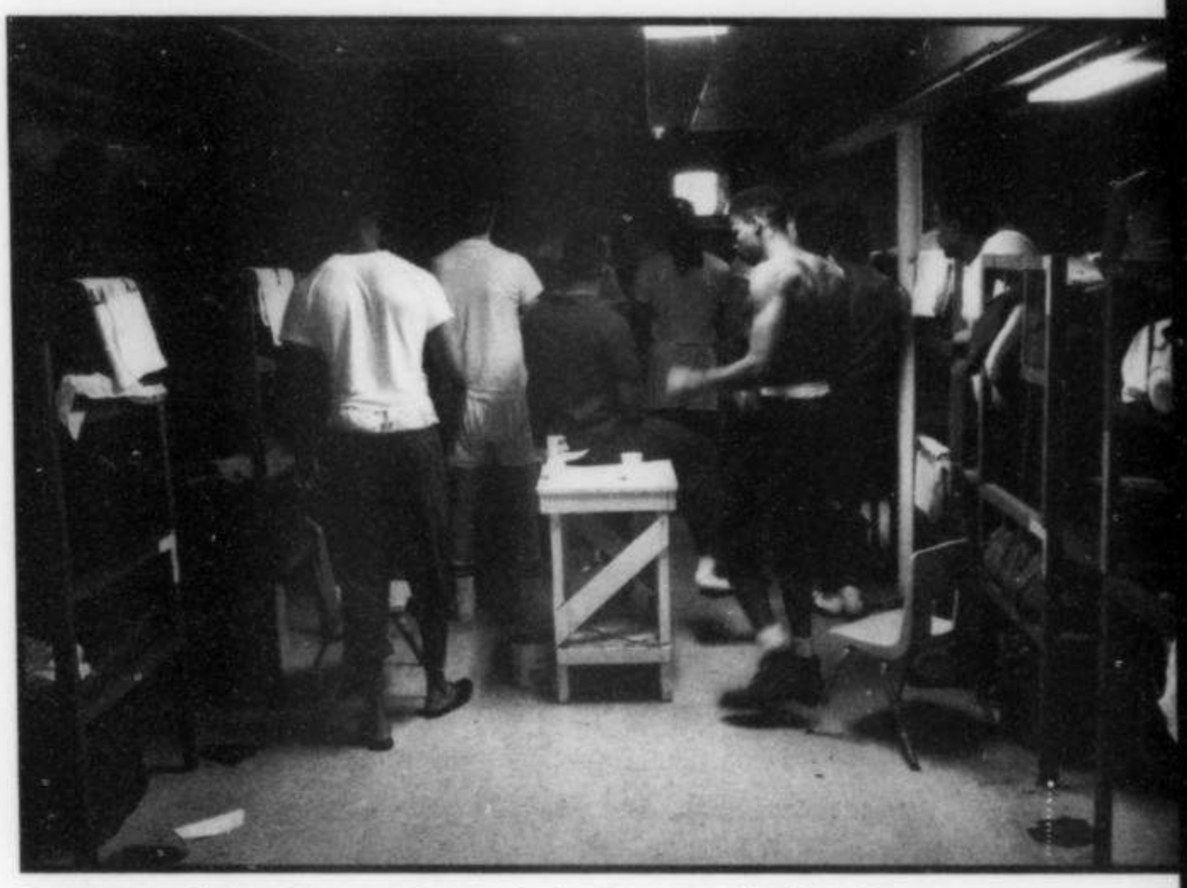
from 400,000 persons to 1.7 million. During this time, spending on crime control increased at twice the rate of defense spending. We have experienced the largest peacetime prison expansion in world history. Because this expansion has taken place at a significant but relatively modest pace (about 8 percent annually), it has been almost imperceptible to those who are not involved in the criminal justice system. But the growth has begun to compound on itself, resulting in a radical paradigmatic shift. *The Real War on Crime*, a 1996 study by the non-profit National Criminal Justice Commission which I headed, found that if growth rates continue apace for the next ten years, by the year 2020 more than six out of ten African American men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four will be behind bars, and our total prison population will top 10 million persons.

The sheer magnitude of the figures is astounding. The number of people arrested and booked into a jail or prison for at least one night each year (12 million) is greater than the entire combined population of the fourteen least populous states in the country (Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming). In addition to the 1.7 million persons behind bars, another 4 million or so are either on probation or parole. Approximately 4 million citizens have lost the right to vote due to a felony conviction. We have the same rate of crime as Canada, but, because our sentencing policies are so tough, we have five times the rate of incarceration as Canada. One in fourteen men in this country is admitted to a jail or prison in the course of a year. Of those imprisoned, 70 percent are charged with a misdemeanor; only 5 percent are convicted of a felony.

Public Fear and the Media

The unprecedented expansion of the prison population is grounded largely in public fear of crime. For the past decade, polls have shown that public fear of crime has been at an all time high. While the risk of crime varies radically depending on who one is and where one lives (the risk of criminal victimization for an elderly white woman is one-sixtieth the risk borne by that of an African American male teenager), the fear of crime has become generalized. It has penetrated all of our communities. Psychologically, there are no longer any safe havens from violence.

Fear is often manufactured for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the actual threat of crime. Take as an example what happened in a small town in rural Virginia. During the 1994 election, one of the leading candidates for governor attracted intense local media attention with his proposal that parole be abolished for all violent offenders. There had not been a homicide for over two decades in the town. There was virtually no violent street crime. Yet the majority of town citizens listed fear of violent crime as their most pressing concern.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK LUDAK / IMPACT VISUALS

Prison crowding at Somerset County Jail in Sommerville, New Jersey.

What happened in this Virginia town is emblematic of what is happening across America. We believe we are under the constant threat of crime because we are bombarded with televised images like the murders of Meghan Kanka, Ennis Cosby, and Gianni Versace. These crimes are real and warrant our outrage, yet their sensational coverage creates a political climate in which the very word "crime" conjures up heinous images of murderers, rapists, robbers, and serial killers. Indeed, it is the murderers and rapists who are portrayed most frequently on shows like *Hard Copy*, *Inside Edition*, *America's Most Wanted*, and the nightly network news. The Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a watchdog group, recently surveyed 100 local news programs on the last night of the February sweeps; fifty-nine led with a sensational story of violent crime. A producer for a crime show called *American Detective* recently disclosed that to focus the staff, producers posted the following words on the office bulletin board: DEATH, STAB, SHOOT, STRANGULATION, CLUB, SUICIDE.

Of course from the standpoint of the media, most crime is rather dull—about nine out of ten arrests in America are for the nonviolent crimes of theft, burglary, trespassing, DUI, drug possession, public order offenses, white-collar crime, and a myriad of other mostly misdemeanor offenses that state legislators have brought under the rubric of the criminal justice system. But because of the way television portrays crime, we associate the word "crime" with violence and we respond to it emotionally. The distinction between violent crime (crime against persons) and nonviolent crime (mostly crime against property or drug offenses) is rarely made.

Most interesting about the proliferation of violence on television is not that it causes crime (an assertion that is virtually impossible to prove), but that it so completely shapes our views of what and where crime is. George Gerbner, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, coined the term "mean

world syndrome" to describe how heavy viewers of television increasingly feel that their own lives are under siege because there is so much violence on both news and entertainment shows. As a result, Gerbner found that heavy viewers of television tend to support more punitive anti-crime measures. He also found that such viewers are far more likely to overestimate their chances of being victimized by violent crime.

Politicians and Crime Policy

In response to public fear, politicians propose "get-tough" policies that have a devastating impact on low-income, urban communities in which voter turnout is historically low and where most violent street crime (as distinct from domestic violence) takes place. The policy implications of this are profound. Get-tough policies like "three strikes, you're out" have the broadest appeal to the so-called "soccer moms," powerful swing voters who generally bear the least risk of being victimized. Polls indicate that it is these voters who have the most anger about the perceived failure of the criminal justice system to stem street violence and who are the most vehement about supporting new prisons to lock up violent criminals. (Bill Clinton offers a perfect example of a politician who parlayed support of get-tough crime policies into electoral success. By ordering the execution of a mentally retarded man during the 1992 campaign, Clinton innoculated himself against any possibility that the Bush campaign could charge him with being soft on crime.) These extremely popular measures are supported by a public that is almost completely unaware that they cost billions annually in tax dollars, have little impact on violent crime, and drain precious resources that could go into their own pockets or into grossly under-financed public schools, job training programs or drug rehabilitation programs that would have a real impact on crime reduction.

The Bait and Switch

When an elected leader proposes tough sentencing and new prison construction, voters believe it will be the mostly violent criminals they see on television who will fill the cells. This is why prison construction has intuitive appeal. But because those terrible crimes are atypical in the extreme, our crime policy takes on aspects of a "bait and switch" phenomenon. The "switch" takes place because the vast majority of persons entering the prison system are nonviolent offenders. Only one in every ten arrests in this country is for a violent crime, and only three in 100 arrests are for violent crimes resulting in physical injury. Only 1.5 of every 100 arrests are for murder and rape. About 77 percent of the persons in our jails (jails are run by county and city governments, generally for persons awaiting trial or serving sentences of less than one year), 89 percent of inmates in our federal prisons, and 53 percent of inmates in our state prisons are incarcerated because they were either convicted of or charged with a nonviolent offense. Though women commit far fewer violent crimes than men, they comprise the fastest growing category of prisoners nationwide. In the 1980s, thirty-four women's prisons were built, compared to seven in the 1960s.

These facts create a conundrum: there are simply not enough violent criminals being apprehended and convicted to fill all the new prison beds. Once built at a cost of $100,000 per cell, prisons beds must be occupied to be justified. With approximately 12 million arrests per year (about 70 percent on misdemeanor charges), filling a prison is simply a matter of shifting some of the country's punishment "quota" (defined as the amount of prison space available for punishment on any given day) to the vastly more numerous low level offenders. This helps to explain why the so-called war on drugs, a policy almost completely discredited in academic circles, is so useful to the political and industry leaders who promote prison expansion. One drug sweep on a summer night can lead to the arrest of hun-



dreds (most of whom cannot afford to hire their own lawyer or to make bail), while it often takes months or even years to make a single arrest on a complicated homicide.

Finally, many of the low level offenders rounded up in a drug sweep will be prosecuted under exceptionally stringent sentencing guidelines. For example, under New York state's Rockefeller drug laws, it is not uncommon for a mother with young children to serve a fifteen-year to life sentence for selling a small amount of cocaine on a first offense. Human Rights Watch recently condemned the Rockefeller laws as being in violation of international human rights law.

Private Prisons: A Market Opens

The expansion of the prison system has created market opportunities for private industries ranging from architectural firms to health care providers. But the biggest beneficiaries have been private companies that build prisons. Because it costs so much to build a prison, states are increasingly turning to the private sector for cost savings. Private prison companies promise savings of about 10 percent to 20 percent over state-run prisons, mostly by hiring non-union guards and paying them as little as eight dollars per hour. Currently these companies control about 5 percent of prison beds nationwide, but they are growing at four times the rate of state run prisons. In 1995, the leading private prison company, the Correctional Corporation of America (CCA), earned about $290 million in revenue and posted the fourth largest gain on the New York Stock Exchange.

The low level offenders flooding the criminal justice system happen to be the prototypical for-profit prisoners. They tend to produce the highest returns because they are well-behaved and therefore require less supervision (staffing represents 60 percent of the cost of a prison). Adding to the profit margins, they do not require expensive programming. They can help run the facility by cooking and cleaning. And they can be "leased" as in-prison laborers to private companies for less than the minimum wage (many airlines lease prisoners to take reservations), creating further profit for the managers of the facility, be it state-run or private.

Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, in his book *Crime Control As Industry*, calls low level offenders the "raw material" for prison expansion. Christie posits that the prison industry needs inmates in much the same way the paper industry needs trees, and market imperatives encourage it to do whatever is necessary to ensure a steady and uninterrupted supply. Because public hysteria over criminal violence is so whipped up, the leaders of the prison industry do not themselves have to lobby legislators to allocate money for prison expansion (though I have no doubt that some do). The twin trends of prisonization and privatization have taken on a momentum of their own, and they play right into the hands of the prison industry. "We are so busy, a change in crime rates really does not impact us," Susan Hart, the CCA's vice president for public relations, told me. Indeed, for the CCA, business is so good that the company has contracts to manage prisons in Australia and the United Kingdom, and is bidding on one in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the record of private prison companies is decidedly mixed. In Appleton, a town of about 1,300 in rural Minnesota, a private prison run by the CCA is doubling its capacity to 1,076 beds. Appleton's mayor has praised CCA for providing jobs, increasing property values, and reversing a population decline. But South Carolina recently canceled its contract with CCA because the level of staffing in a juvenile facility was inadequate and the lack of training led to a flurry of complaints about physical abuse.

Prisons and Rural Communities: From Bust to Boom

In a time of fiscal austerity corrections spending is almost the only line item in state budgets that has expanded significantly over the last two decades. Between 1976 and 1989, state corrections spending rose an average of 95 percent, compared to a 41 percent drop in welfare spending and a 6 percent cut in spending on higher education. Since the prison binge began in the early 1980s, California has built 21 prisons and one university. This steady influx of cash and jobs offers salvation to rural communities. Between 1980 and 1990, 5 percent of the entire increase in the rural population nationwide was accounted for by prisoners, most of them Black and Latino men from urban areas.

As in the past with military bases, when money is allocated for a new prison facility—whether public or private—the competition becomes fierce. In Texas, fifty towns recently solicited a new prison from the state Department of Criminal Justice. One community in Illinois put together a rap song and bought television time as part of a public relations blitz for state legislators considering where to locate a new prison. In New York's Catskills region, the town of Fallsburgh tried to cut its own deal with a private prison company to transform a long-abandoned resort hotel into a medium-security penitentiary. The idea, which has been stalled by opposition from the governor and the union of prison guards, was to make the facility profitable by importing prisoners from the overcrowded prison systems of other states. The political muscle of unions of prison guards is also exerting itself as a force in favor of prison expansion. In California, where some guards make up to $60,000, the union has formed the state's largest political action committee to support tough-on-crime candidates.

Incentives for Growth

Like the military-industrial complex before it, the prison industry possesses the internal dynamics for its own growth. In his book *Search And Destroy: African American Males In the Criminal Justice System*, Jerome Miller theorizes that so many persons have been run through jails and prisons

(continued on page 77)

A Rage to Punish

Sol Wachtler

The success of crime reduction in almost every major American city is not in need of putative parents. It's difficult to pick up a paper without reading of someone claiming credit for such dramatic statistics as the 35 percent drop in the homicide rate in New York City or the 50 percent drop in murders in East St. Louis.

In the euphoria of this victory over violence, however, we should spend more time determining the reasons and less time congratulating ourselves.

Is an increased and aggressive police presence responsible? This may be true in New York, with its proactive policing and accountability of precinct captains, but it certainly is not true in East St. Louis, where there is no such practice and where a fiscal crisis has caused a severe reduction in the department.

Or maybe it's because crack cocaine is no longer the street drug of choice. After the truce in Afghanistan, the 80,000 poppy growers from that country were again able to supply heroin markets. That meant that crack was replaced by heroin on the streets. Although crime related to drugs would continue, heroin addicts tend to go on the "nod," whereas those who take crack are prone to violence. Also, despite all the talk about the "war on drugs," the drug market has become more organized and the fights and street violence over distribution and market share have settled into a mature, uncontested state of established turf.

Or, maybe, as some experts suggest, the baby boom population has aged past its crime prone years. Forty- and fifty-year olds simply commit fewer crimes than twenty- and thirty-year olds. Nobody gets credit for that but mother nature.

We should applaud the leadership responsible for better policing and be thankful that the crack epidemic is subsiding. At the same time, we should be careful not to credit factors and continue to pursue policies which have not contributed, and in fact may have been counter-productive to the reduction of crime. Such was the recent pronouncement of New Jersey's Governor Whitman, who attributed New Jersey's reduction of violent crime to "longer prison terms."

Keeping violent criminals behind bars is bound to have an effect on the reduction of violent crime. But our rage to punish has resulted in "longer prison terms" for far too many nonviolent offenders. In 1973, when I first became a judge on the New York State Court of Appeals, there were 12,550 inmates in our state prisons. Today, with the Rockefeller drug laws mandating a sentence of 15 years to life for the sale of 2 ounces of a hard drug (such as cocaine and heroin), there are over 70,000. *(continued on page 73)*

Sol Wachtler is the former Chief Judge of New York State's Court of Appeals and Chief Judge of the State of New York. He is the author of After the Madness: A Judge's Own Prison Memoir. *He lives with his wife, Joan, in Manahasset, New York.*

From *After the Madness*, by Sol Wachtler:

- Adopt a new philosophy based on public safety rather than punishment of sinners. One that is committed to locking up violent offenders to protect our communities, but uses more effective and affordable alternative programs and rehabilitative services for nonviolent offenders who find themselves in the criminal justice system simply because they are drug users.
- Eliminate mandatory drug sentences and return sentencing discretion to the judicial branch, where it belongs. As Judge Bellacosa wrote in his Angela Thompson dissent: "Prosecutors, as executive branch officers, should not enjoy the power to shackle judicial responsibility while they zealously seek to incarcerate masses of criminal drug offenders."
- Continue to explore punishment alternatives to imprisonment. For example, the government is in the process of closing military bases all over the country. Nonviolent first-time offenders charged with drug crimes should have their sentences vacated and be sent to one of these bases for between six months and two years, where they can do something useful and be trained. Any slipups and they go to prison. When they are discharged, the drug charges should be dismissed. They will reenter the community having been productive and having learned discipline and a trade—and without a felony conviction on their record.

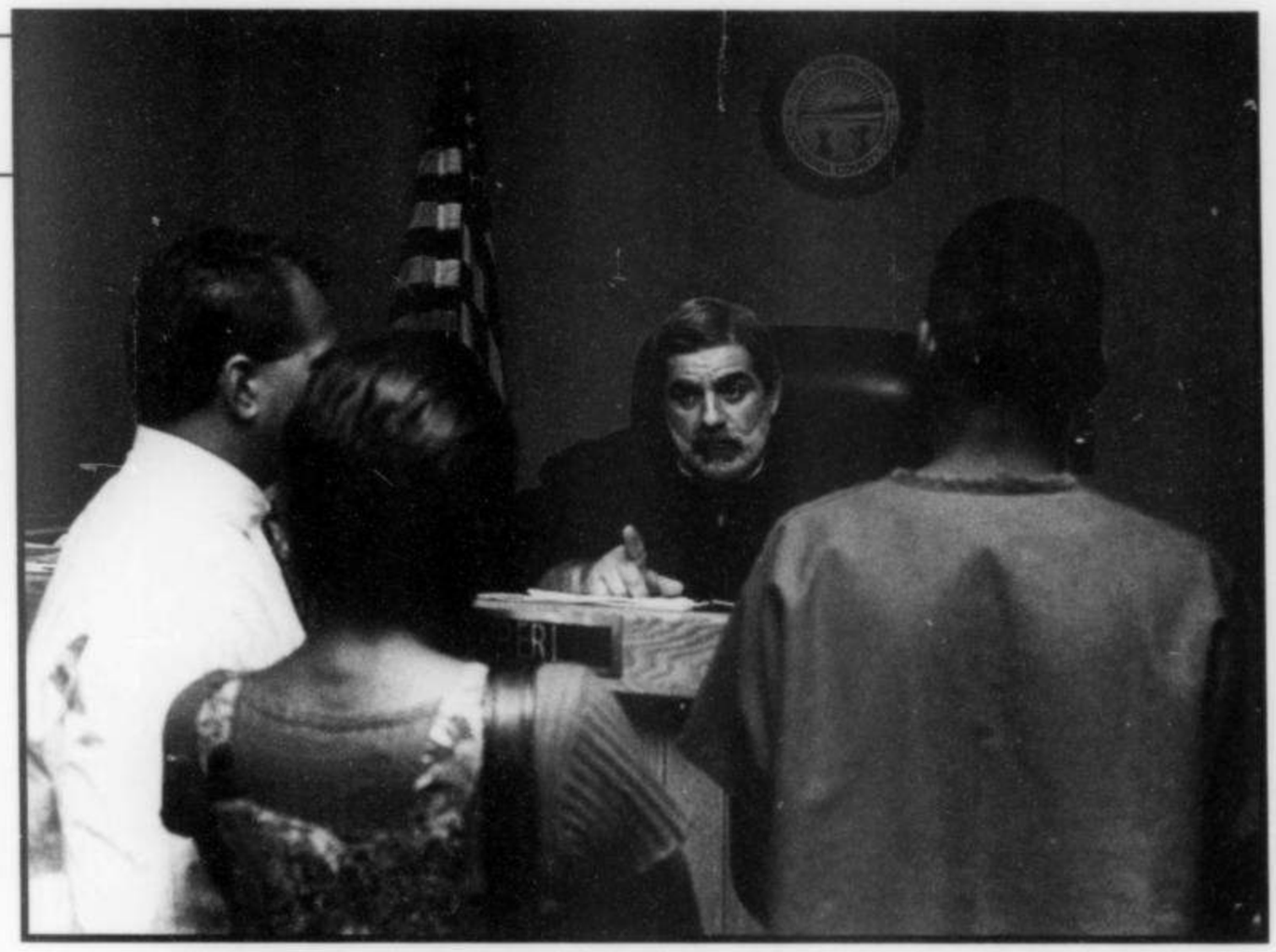
  Instead, these persons are now being subjected to a dehumanizing process that someone on the street cannot hope to understand. Many prison guards refuse to recognize that the punishment prisoners receive is to be taken away from family, husband, wives, children, family members, and communities—and to lose their freedom. Being sent to prison is their punishment, they are not, as some guards think, sent to prison to be punished. After ten to twenty years of humiliation and loss of self-esteem, these nonviolent offenders—almost all of whom have lost their families—come home to a hostile community with no job, no skills, and a prison mentality. And then we wonder why we have repeat offenders.
- No prison system—federal, state, or private—should be funded unless it provides treatment facilities for drug and alcohol abusers. Furthermore, all defendants who have a history of drug or alcohol addiction or abuse should not be allowed probation or supervised release unless provision has been made for their continued treatment or after care.
- The federal government or some private foundation should undertake a comprehensive study to find out what kind of drug rehabilitation should be used—which treatment or combination of treatments will work best. The same applies to education about drug abuse.

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IMAGINED FAMILIES

Women Behind Bars

Debra Jo Immergut



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE CAGAN / IMPACT VISUALS

Nadine Pecora is twenty-six years old. She has a kind face surrounded by brown curls, speaks with a broad Brooklyn accent, wears sensible looking plastic-framed eyeglasses and clothes that would not set her apart in any mall in America. On a translucent August morning, she sits with her son Nicholas, a shy eight-year old, enjoying the sunshine that falls on a tree-lined patio. She laughs and jokes with Nicholas about his infant brother, about school. It's a moment of utter normalcy in the life of a mother and son—and that's what makes it so exquisite for Nadine. Most days, her life is anything but normal. She is two years into a ten-year to life sentence in a maximum-security prison, the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, New York.

The patio adjoins the prison's visiting room, where inmates meet with those from the outside. Ordinarily, Nicholas comes with his father for a brief visit every weekend, but today, the hours mother and this son have together stretch luxuriously: Nicholas is spending four days at a unique "summer camp" run by Bedford Hills. At night, he goes to the home of a volunteer host family in the plush suburbs surrounding the institution. By day, he plays badminton with Nadine, eats pizza, or just hangs out and talks. "It's just me and him," Nadine says with a smile. "On a regular visit, either my mother's there, or my husband's there. Now, he can tell me things he might not want to say when anyone else is around."

Nadine was imprisoned for selling drugs to an undercover policeman; it was her first arrest. She smiles ruefully, and her voice drops as she talks about her case. The life sentence is part of the state's mandatory drug sentencing law, she says, "but I don't know where they came up with the ten years" that defines her minimum sentence. She shakes her head. "I mean, I could understand if I had a prior record, but my first time arrested? It makes no sense." The conviction is under appeal.

Because her crime was nonviolent, she will be eligible for the state's work-release program in 2003, "Nicholas says he's gonna come pick me up when I get out for good—he'll have his license. He tries to make a joke out of it." She laughs, turning to her son, whose sneakered feet don't touch the ground as he slumps in his chair. "Right? Who's gonna pick me up when I come home? Who's gonna be able to drive?"

Nicholas gives his mother a wan grin. "Me," he says.

Nadine is hardly living the life most American women imagine for themselves, yet her situation grows less unusual with every passing year. Since 1980, the number of women entering U.S. prisons has shot up nearly 400 percent, double the rate of men. As of September 1997, some 762,200 women were living behind bars, the vast majority of them imprisoned, like Nadine, for nonviolent drug or prostitution offenses. And like Nadine, more than three-quarters of them were mothers.

A 1991 survey by the Bureau of Justice tells a story of delicate family structures split asunder by crime. According to the report, two-thirds of all female inmates have at least one child younger than eighteen. Black and Hispanic women were slightly more likely to have minor children than white women. And those children were being raised on scant resources: 80 percent of incarcerated women report incomes of less than $2,000 in the year before their arrest.

Who cares for the children while their mothers are

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locked up? Typically, it's not their fathers. The Bureau of Justice survey found that only a quarter of female inmates (compared to nearly 90 percent of males), said that their minor children were living with the other parent. A third of white female inmates reported children to be living with their fathers at the time of the interview, compared to a quarter of Hispanic women and less than a fifth of black women. Across racial lines, it was the grandparents who most often stepped into the breach: 57 percent of black mothers, 55 percent of Hispanic mothers, and 41 percent of white mothers named one of the children's grandparents as primary caregiver. A smaller percentage of women had no relative to assume their parenting duties: nearly 10 percent reported that their children were in a foster home, agency, or institution.

Perhaps the most telling figure of all, and one that makes Nadine seem especially fortunate as she passes this precious summer week with her son: only 9 percent of incarcerated women with offspring under eighteen had seen their children since leaving the outside world behind.

"It's sort of like not being in jail when you're around the baby."

As they bask in the morning sun, Nadine and Nicholas are not alone. Children swarm around the patio, eating cotton candy and sno-cones, listening to music, playing games. Mothers sit on plastic chairs and brick retaining walls, chatting and watching the goings-on. Their kids, like Nicholas, are here as participants in the summer program; some 120 children will have taken part in this unlikely "camp" by season's end. In its eighteenth year, what began as an ad-hoc experiment by Sister Elaine Roulet, the director of the Bedford Hills Children's Center, has garnered lavish praise from prison reformers and is a pilot program of sorts for correctional facilities across the nation. Anything that helps cement bonds between mothers and children needs to be encouraged, says Joy Simpkins of the Women's Prison Association, a New York organization. "Visitations are an extraordinarily important part of keeping families together."

Today is carnival day for the children of Bedford Hills; the patio outside the visitor's center has been transformed into a makeshift fairground, and both "outside staff" (prison employees and volunteers) and "inside staff" ("inmate caregivers" assigned to work in the children's programs) have tried hard to make the atmosphere festive. Inmate Geraldine Hardwich, who usually works as a coordinator at the infant day care center, has draped herself in colored scarves and plastic beads and set up shop as the fortune teller "Madame Geraldine." Her accurate pronouncements astound the children, who don't know that she has grilled mothers beforehand about families, pets, and best friends. Another inmate runs a face-painting station. The younger children are daubed with spiders or flowers; the older ones get fake tattoos that read "Love" or "Peace."

The two sons of Evelyn Mateo fall into the older crowd: Christian is fourteen, and Daniel is eleven. Both boys are stocky, with street-smart buzz cuts and baggy shorts. They have had their fill of the morning's games and are waiting for the program leader to escort the kids to the prison gymnasium, where they can toss around a basketball. Though they seem a bit embarrassed to be thrown in with so many smaller children, the boys, who live with Evelyn's sister in the Bronx, are quick to say that they enjoy the program. They like to be with their mother—"I don't get to see her every day," says Christian, and they praise their host families, who have taken them to see *Spawn* and *Contact* at the local movie theaters.

Their mother, a soft-spoken woman of thirty-two who has been at Bedford Hills for seven months, will be in for nine more. As her sons drift off toward the gym, she watches them leave. "They're mad at me because I'm up here," she says. "Especially the older one. He's the type that don't show emotion, but I know he's got it inside, and that scares me a little." She knows her sons are at a critical age, an age at which they are bombarded with dangerous choices, but she has faith that, in her absence, her sister will be able to give them the guidance they need. Originally, she says, her family told the boys that she was in rehab, but she has insisted that they know the truth. "I want them to know that this is jail, so when they grow up they won't make the same mistake I did."

A correctional officer orders the mothers to queue for the trip to the gym (they are taken there by a different route than their children, because inmates must be body-searched when leaving the visitors' area). "I'm really upset with myself for being in prison," says Evelyn as she heads for the line. "Now's the time when they really need me."

The New York state prison system, of which Bedford Hills is a part, ranks third in female offender populations; it is exceeded only by Texas and California. Seventy-one percent of those prisoners were convicted of nonviolent crimes—primarily drug offenses. According to the Correctional Association of New York, 91 percent of women under custody for a drug offense are there because of mandatory sentencing laws passed in 1972, a code that punishes the single sale of two ounces of cocaine with the same sentence as a murder: fifteen years to life.

Prisoners' advocates and correctional officials alike name the mandatory drug sentencing laws as the major cause for the skyrocketing rates of female incarceration. "It has nothing to do with women's liberation as some scallawags have tried to insinuate," says Robert Gangi, executive director of the Correctional Association of New York. Instead, he says, police tactics increasingly focus on

drug sweeps that bring in low level users. Women are at a disadvantage as they move through the justice system, says Gangi, because they typically are less involved in illegal activities than men. "They have less savvy in negotiating with the system, and cooperating with the system. Women may have less information to barter with, or they may be frightened to talk because they don't feel as protected." The result, asserts Gangi, is that women often receive harsher sentences than the men arrested with them. And mandatory sentencing makes sure they stay locked up.

Despite its stringent laws, New York is one of the most progressive states when it comes to dealing with the children of inmates. Many women's and men's facilities have trailer visit programs, which allow families to spend weekends together on the prison grounds. In addition to the Bedford Hills summer program, Bedford Hills, Taconic State Prison, and Rikers Island have nursery programs that allow women to keep children under a year old with them in prison. "Any program that supports maintaining the maximum level of contact between parent and child is important, assuming the parent had some level of contact with the child before incarceration, and that there's something to build on," says Pamela Katz, a Washington-based lawyer who specializes in issues related to children of incarcerated parents. "It's just impossible to underestimate the importance of that connection and what it means to a child."

Ten-month old Cory Burns has been living at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility since his birth, two months into his mother Alice's sentence. "He doesn't know where he is and he's not going to know," says Alice. "The most important thing is, he's with his mother." She is wearing standard issue olive-drab uniform pants, a pink T-shirt of her own choosing, and tennis shoes. Cory is outfitted in a tiny version of a University of Michigan basketball uniform, shirt and shorts of shiny nylon gold-and-blue. Mother and son could be at a public park, at the beach, instead of locked behind the tall chain-link fences, topped with fat coils of razor ribbon, that cut Bedford Hills off from its surroundings.

In a couple of months, when Cory turns one year old, he will leave the prison, leave the nursery unit where he has lived with his mother, the room where they have slept side-by-side, he in his crib, she in her narrow bed. He must rejoin the outside world, according to the rules. He will be taken in by his grandmother. Alice will stay to serve out the rest of the time she received for her drug-related offense. It's just a few months, but the separation will be excruciating for them both, says Alice.

Nadine Pecora was also pregnant when she arrived in prison. Her second child, James, now twenty-one months old, spent his first twelve months of life at Bedford Hills. "It's sort of like not being in jail when you're around the baby," recalls Nadine wistfully. When he reached his first birthday, James was sent home to his father in Sheepshead Bay—Nadine remembers the date and time of the separation down to the minute: Saturday, September 7, 1996, 11:05 A.M.

"It was one of the hardest things," she says. "And I'm fortunate. With a lot of the mothers, their kids go into foster homes because there's no one to take them. I don't know how I would have dealt with that."

Nadine is housed on a special unit of the prison that offers substance-abuse rehabilitation. "It's the only drug program they have in the facility, so I figure, let me take it, with my drug history," says Nadine. "And it's working." She adds with a laugh, "Hopefully I'll be moved to the honor floor soon, get my own TV."

As mandatory drug sentencing laws come up for review by the State Assembly next year, a quarter of a century after they were first passed, advocacy groups are hoping that other alternatives for women like Nadine will be considered. "So many women in prison could be helped through community alternatives to prison and jail," says Simpkins, "either where they report to centers in the community or live in a supervised safe house." In order for long-term rehabilitation to work, says Simpkins, "mothers need a mosaic of services" that prisons do not provide: "A woman's life is complicated, because she's often a caregiver."

Alternatives to prison might make budgetary sense as well. Figures provided by the Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison project show that, while it costs about $30,000 a year to keep an inmate in a state prison, the average annual cost of outpatient drug treatment runs $2,700 to $3,600, and the cost of residential drug treatment is $17,000 to $20,000 per year. Treatment in the community provides a needed dose of reality, as well, argues Katz. "When women are locked up, of course they seem drug-free. What happens when they are thrown back into their neighborhood? It's just setting them up to fail. They need to be learning how to deal with their problems in the real world."

The real world seems very far away to Nadine, though. For now, she worries about staying as close to her family as her incarceration allows. "I'm petrified of being moved," she says. She knows that Bedford Hills inmates are often transferred to Albion Correctional Facility, a minimum-security prison some six hours north of New York City, at some point in their sentence. "My mother already told me, if they ship me to Albion she'll see me once a year. And my husband told me he'll see me once every three months."

If her husband and mother can't get to her, neither will her two sons. But as long as she stays at Bedford Hills she can see Nicholas and James often, and they can see her. Even a visit every week will never be enough to make up for lost time, though. When James toddles into the visiting room now she sighs. All she can think is, "Oh my God, look how big he's getting already…I won't be home until he's ten years old." ❑

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

President Clinton, Mandatory Minimums, and Disaffirmative Action

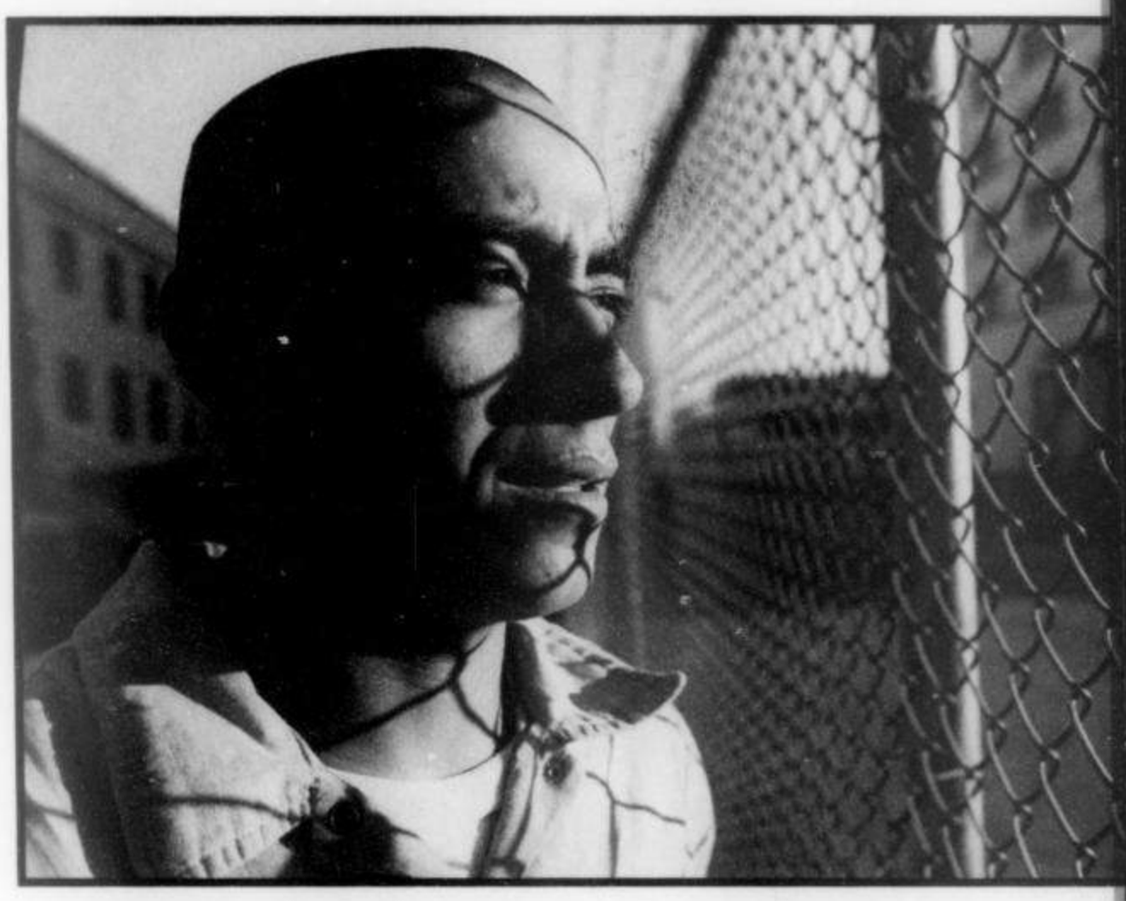
Michael Tonry

If President Clinton is serious in his stated resolve to make improved race relations and continued progress for black Americans themes of his second term, he will at last turn his attention to the effects of contemporary crime policies on disadvantaged black Americans. In particular, he will call for the repeal of most mandatory minimum sentencing laws, federal and state, and propose the elimination of current federal laws and sentencing guidelines that disproportionately punish crack cocaine offenses. Those and related tough on crime policies have devastated poor black Americans—not only the people imprisoned, but also their families, children, and communities—with few discernible offsetting benefits.

For two decades, American crime policy has been driven by sound-bite politics and nearly every elected politician's fear of being disparaged as soft on crime or drugs. Proposals have been made again and again to toughen penalties; no matter how unwise or ineffective the penalties proposed, few politicians have been willing to oppose them. Clinton has been no exception. Pundits regularly compliment him for "getting to the right of Republicans" and thereby "taking away the crime issue." Mandatory minimum laws—which require that people convicted of particular crimes be sentenced to prison for at least five, ten, or twenty years—have proliferated. So have "two and three strikes laws," which mandate lengthy or life sentences for people convicted of a second or third serious crime.

Crack and the 100:1 Rule

Consider drugs first. The federal 100:1 rule is the extreme case. Under federal law, a person convicted of selling 500 grams of powder cocaine, an amount larger than street-level dealers typically possess, faces a minimum prison sentence of five years. So does a person convicted of selling five grams of crack cocaine, a trifling amount often sold by street-level user-dealers. All of these laws disproportionately result in the imprisonment of black Americans.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAIN McLAUGHLIN / IMPACT VISUALS

The problem is a racial one because most people convicted of crack cocaine offenses are black, and few are white, while the opposite pattern holds for powder cocaine. In 1995, 88.4 percent of those convicted in federal courts for crack offenses were black and only 4.5 percent were white. A major study of racial disparities in federal prisons recently conducted for the U.S. Department of Justice by Douglas McDonald and Kenneth C. Carlson showed that the average sentence served by black prisoners (71 months) was 41 percent longer than the average served by whites (50 months). By contrast, during the middle 1980s, averages for whites (50 months) and blacks (53 months) were nearly the same.

Why had blacks' prison sentences so quickly become so much harsher than whites'? The answer, McDonald and Carlson found, was not that judges had suddenly become more discriminatory. The overriding cause was the enactment in 1986 of the 100:1 rule along with toughened mandatory minimums for violent and gun crimes. During the period they studied, 83 percent of people sentenced for crack cocaine crimes were black. Only 12 percent of Americans are black.

Virtually no one continues to justify the 100:1 rule on its merits. No informed observer claims that it results in reduced levels of drug use or trafficking. However, in 1995,

(continued on page 71)

Michael Tonry is Sonosky Professor of Law Public Policy at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America *(Oxford: 1995) and of* Sentencing Matters *(Oxford: 1996).*

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THE JEWISH LITERARY REVIVAL

First there was God's finger on Mount Sinai's tablets. Then came the eye-straining, wrist-numbing labor of words on sheep skin. Now narratives find themselves on paper with laser jet precision.

The people of the book have egos, and with that begot authors. What the Torah and Talmud couldn't explain, Jewish writers were all too willing to reimagine. The literature of the Jewish people has flirted with fictional worlds—and no where has this been more true than in America.

This century of American letters has, to a very large extent, been informed by Jewish writing. But around the 1980s, something happened. Young Jewish cultural escape artists—both the beneficiaries and victims of assimilation played to perfection—stopped writing about distinctively Jewish themes.

Until now. TIKKUN *is proud to be among the first to observe a new, surprisingly uncelebrated movement—the resurgence of Jewish writing in America. With this special literary symposium,* TIKKUN *asks the following questions: As we approach the end of the millennium, is Jewish American fiction experiencing a new beginning? Or are Jewish American novelists merely unfashionably late to the "identity politics" party? Is there something unique to the literary soul of the Jewish people that manifests itself inexorably—and mystically—as a Jewish story, no matter what the Diaspora does to make itself indistinct from other cultures? Perhaps the question lies in the burden of memory, with third and fourth generation American Jews, and children of Holocaust survivors, re-enacting experiences that they could never have possibly had.*

Which writers are at the forefront of this new trend? How are they—and their aesthetic material—different, if at all, from their literary precursors? And finally, what will be their ultimate legacy in a world that seems to have less and less use for the written word? This symposium seeks to offer a glimpse into the future of both Jewish, and American, literature.

—Thane Rosenbaum
Literary Editor

GHOST STORIES: THE NEW WAVE OF JEWISH WRITING

Morris Dickstein

The current resurgence of Jewish American writing in a world rife with assimilation is as surprising as the survival of the Jews themselves. As early as the 1960s, when writers like Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud were at the height of their powers, when Philip Roth had only recently made his spectacular debut, informed and sympathetic critics like Ted Solotaroff and Irving Howe worried aloud that younger Jewish writers were running out of material: their work was turning derivative and predictable as they lost contact with the immigrant experience and its vigorous culture.

Soon after the Holocaust, barely a decade after the postwar Jewish writers had touched a universal chord, their successors, cut off imaginatively from Europe and the ghetto, seemed unable to serve up the rich ethnic flavors of the past or to subsist on the thin gruel of the suburban present. By the Sixties young Jews were living much the same lives as other Americans. If anything singled them out, it was their widespread attraction to radical politics, not Jewish experience. With anti-Semitism and discrimination in sharp decline, the young were becoming even more assimilated than their Americanized parents, who had at least grown up with some Yiddish ringing in their ears.

But with the rise of black separatism, the Sixties climaxed with a surge of identity politics. Black nationalism forged a compelling model for radical feminism, gay liberation, and finally what Michael Novak called "the rise of the unmeltable ethnics." Over the next few years it became as fashionable to explore your roots as it once had been to transcend them. The fervent patriotism of the World War II generation and the existential humanism of the early Sixties

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Morris Dickstein's books include Gates of Eden *(Harvard) and* Double Agent *(Oxford), both recently reissued in paperback. He teaches English at CUNY, where he also directs the Center for the Humanities.* *Copyright © 1997 Morris Dickstein.*

BORDER ILLUSTRATION BY RUSS ANDO

were now seen as part of a discredited liberal mindset that had deprived us of personal meaning and led us into Vietnam. Culture, identity, and ethnic pride were the new American watchwords, multiculturalism the new faith.

For Jews there were special factors that contributed to a wave of ethnic pride, including the Six Day War of 1967, the dissolution of the New Left, and the growth of the Havura movement that reinvigorated Jewish prayer and ritual by infusing it with communitarian Sixties values. Because of their history of persecution, Jews had always been deeply invested in the Enlightenment vision of equal rights within a color-blind society. The new religious currents springing from the counterculture bridged the gap between Jewish particularism and Enlightenment universalism, especially by allowing women to play an equal role in the service. Not surprisingly, the women often brought an almost forgotten level of emotional and spiritual intensity to the old rituals. They were the Hasidim of the new feminism, dispelling the cobwebs of a musty formalism and rescuing Jewish religious practice from its old masculine dominance.

The new emphasis on identity, the revival of interest in Jewish history, Jewish festivals, and sacred Jewish texts could not help but lead to a new Jewish writing that would confound the predictions of the critics. The generation of Bellow and Malamud had come to Judaism at their grandmother's knee, or at the kitchen table. It was an emotional remnant of a world that had formed them. They had witnessed the desperate struggle of their immigrant parents to make ends meet between the wars. They grasped at culture as a refuge from poverty, bigotry, and superstition. They were a secular generation that had broken out of the ghetto and broken into the university, only to be thrown back to being Jewish by the murderous nationalism of the Nazis and the bogus internationalism of the Soviets. Like all real writers, they plumbed the enigma of their own origins. Their faith in the melting pot was shattered, but their knowledge of Judaism was limited to memories of the immigrant family and the old neighborhood, which they saw through the prism of Joyce and Kafka rather than Sholom Aleichem and I.L. Peretz. They brought real Jews into modern American literature but left Judaism out.

Writing powerfully out of their own experience, the older writers could not begin to confront some of the emerging realities of Jewish life: the unexpected return to religion, the conflicts over assimilation, the youthful rebellion against suburbia, the key Jewish role in the New Left and the counterculture, the growing involvement of American Jews with Israel, and the newly-awakened memories of the Holocaust after 25 years of amnesia. New tonalities were soon heard in Jewish writing that sounded markedly different from the somber music of the postwar years. In Grace Paley's stories a Jewish woman's voice came through more clearly than in any American writer since Anzia Yezierska. Her radical politics, her ironic but sympathetic memories of immigrant life, her sense of family and community, and the tremendous craft with which she focused on the small interactions of everyday life would create an opening through which many younger women could walk.

The next small breakthrough was undoubtedly Cynthia Ozick's ferocious 1969 story "Envy, or Yiddish in America." Where Paley was deceptively gentle and oblique, Ozick's work was impacted and intense. She understood that as a Jewish writer she *was* a latecomer, hemmed in not only by established figures like Bellow, Malamud, and Roth, whom she could not hope to surpass at their own game, but by the ghosts of the recent Jewish dead, to whom she could never do full justice. Instead she focused on the rich language and literature that were murdered with them. Writing about an embittered Yiddish poet, and about the I.B. Singer-like writer whose success he envies, along with the young woman he tries to lure into becoming his translator, Ozick took our fiction onto a new terrain. She was much more actively engaged with the Jewish literary tradition. In a sense this was the postmodern turn in Jewish writing, a piece of writing about writing, full of pastiche and parody, in which the author's own belatedness becomes part of her subject. Yet the story also ended with a declaration of independence in which the young woman decides not to let her devouring predecessors, the ghosts of the Yiddish past, colonize her mind. Just as Singer had distanced himself from the Yiddish literary scene by digging deeply into earlier Jewish lore, Ozick reinvented American Jewish writing by becoming more rather than less Jewish, more rather than less literary. Many younger writers would soon join her.

Other dramatic changes in Jewish fiction came with works like Leslie Epstein's darkly comic treatment of the Holocaust in *King of the Jews* (1978), Philip Roth's warmed send-up of the older Jewish writers, including Malamud and Bellow, in *The Ghost Writer* (1979), and Steve Stern's bracingly original collection of stories *Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven* (1987). Epstein's work is influenced by the solemn but half-parodic treatment of history in works like Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* and E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime,* with its cartoonish mixture of real and invented characters. Painstakingly researched, finely crafted yet utterly fresh in tone, *King of the Jews* found a new way of representing the unspeakable. Roth's novella was perhaps inspired by Ozick's "Envy," since its situation is similar: a young writer, just coming into his own, caught between two difficult older figures, his spiritual fathers, almost impossible to please. And by bringing on a young woman who may or may not be Anne Frank, Roth even draws the Holocaust into his special angle of vision. Inspired perhaps by the Eastern European fiction he had been editing for Penguin, Roth begins to integrate a larger history into the continuing saga of his own life, as he would do even more dramatically in *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shyloc*—intricate dialectical works that signaled a playful postmodern turn in his own fiction.

The literariness and self-consciousness of Ozick and the later Roth are even more exaggerated in the stories of Steve Stern. The hallmark of Stern's work is his intense empathy for the past—the Jewish past, the immigrant past, the literary past—but also his keen awareness of how artificial, how anachronistic this sympathy can become. Stern is the paradigm of the young assimilated Jew whose imagination has been inflamed by books, haunted by the inaccessible. Like Singer and Ozick, he is absorbed by kabbalistic lore far removed from his Southern childhood and his secular present. His work transforms the tiny Jewish ghetto of his native Memphis into a version of 16th-century Prague or the Lower East Side of the turn of the century. We are told of one of his bookish heroes that "he nourished his head on exotic tales, failing to distinguish between the sacred and the profane." His seclusion has "left him whey-faced and puny, a bundle of nerves sustained on a diet of vicarious experience."

We recognize this bloodless figure out of Jewish folklore and fiction: the kabbalistic dreamer who dabbles dangerously in remote, esoteric knowledge. But he also belongs to a central strand in American literature, the horror stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Sherwood Anderson, which center on damaged characters who have lost human connection and withdrawn into a mental fastness of their own. Stern comes closest to Ozick and Roth—and closest to describing his own situation—in the concluding novella called "The Ghost and Saul Bozoff," in which a writer very much like himself, who dreams of writing some of the stories *he* has actually written, spends a month at a writer's colony in Vermont, where he is invaded by the spirit of a young Jewish woman who worked there many decades before. If Ozick's and Roth's stories grappled with the great writers who just preceded them, Stern's protagonist conjures up an unfulfilled writer of the more distant past, an Emma Lazarus-like figure who belongs to the immigrant era he most identifies with. As she unfolds her story he dreams of collaborating with her, becoming her "translator into the language of the living," only to realize that he has his own life to live, his own stories to tell, stories that no ghost writer can help him compose.

All of this finally is the story of how the younger Jewish writers have escaped from the shadow of their forebears, the ones who inspired and intimidated them yet mocked their pale imitations. These newcomers set out on a new course. They were born into a different world dominated not by remnants of European culture, not by struggling immigrants and their upwardly mobile children, but rather by shattering recollections of the Holocaust, by lively encounters between neo-orthodoxy and religious pluralism, by the decay of Zionism and the uneasy relations between Israel and the Diaspora, and by a tremendous variety of secular experiences, from vegetarianism and Buddhism to gay liberation and feminism. For some younger writers like David Leavitt and Michael Chabon, the consciousness of being Jews did not dominate their lives; but others like Stern, Allegra Goodman, Lev Raphael, Thane Rosenbaum, and Melvin Jules Bukiet—along with elders like Ozick, Epstein, Anne Roiphe, Francine Prose, Max Apple, and Alan Isler—have made their Jewish fantasies, feelings, and experiences absolutely central to their work.

When I mentioned these younger writers in a lecture in London last November, a well-known British publisher quickly challenged me. Who were these people, he asked? "I'm in New York all the time and I haven't heard of them." But such an unexpected development is worth our attention, I argued, insisting that it's too early to tell whether this new wave would achieve the stature or create the body of major work of a Bellow or a Roth. The ultimate test is not quantity but the challenge of taking possession of one's experience in an inimitable way that resonates beyond the writer's own life, as books like *The Magic Barrel, Herzog,* and *Portnoy's Complaint* definitively did.

While the jury is out, we can glance at two examples that tell us more about where Jewish American writing is heading. Allegra Goodman's *The Family Markowitz* (1996) and Thane Rosenbaum's *Elijah Visible* (1996) belong to the favorite genre of younger Jewish writers: the linked collection of stories, the almost-novel, often built around an autobiographical protagonist. In their concern with the twists and turns of family affairs they fit squarely into the Jewish literary tradition—Goodman's title has a long lineage—but instead of synthesizing this history into a family chronicle or a continuous memoir—seeing it against the backdrop of the times, as the classic Yiddish writers did—they project it in fragmentary glimpses and highlights, each with its own small epiphany.

Goodman's strength is in the brightness and charm of her writing and in her wonderful grasp of character through dialogue and details (for example, the quirky family matriarch, Rose Markowitz, hardly your conventional Jewish grandmother). Like Ozick, Goodman publishes in *The New Yorker* and *Commentary;* like Ozick she satirizes the secular and liberal Jews of the Sixties generation, those, for example, who turn the Passover seder into an appeal for the liberation of all "oppressed peoples of the world" and "all minorities." ("It doesn't say a single word about minorities in here," says their newly observant daughter, stubbornly reading the Hebrew.) But where Ozick in stories like "Bloodshed" or "Levitation" is fiercely polemical, skewering secular Jews as benighted and spiritless, Goodman is detached, amused, and forgiving. As she sees it, the foibles of intellectuals like Ed and Henry Markowitz—one a self-important strategic analyst, the other an aesthete of wavering sexual preference—belong to the ever-shifting human comedy rather than the history of modern nihilism.

Rosenbaum's stories in *Elijah Visible* are built around a family as strange and unsettling as Goodman's is seductive. Adam Posner's parents are ghostly middle-aged survivors,

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traumatized by all they've seen, distant and brooding, bereft of happiness but riddled with fear. With a touch of magic realism, their fate varies from story to story, but in all of them they are raising an only child in New York and Miami, a child with few links to ordinary life, and they are destined to sicken and die before he reaches the age of 20. For Adam's haunted parents and their friends, who were too stricken to have children at all, he is "their uncorrupted hope, the promise of a life unburdened by nightmare and guilt," which is itself perhaps the heaviest burden a child can bear. When Adam makes a friend who *is* ordinary, whose father plays ball with them, this robust man soon falls terminally ill, maiming this family as well. Adam feels his "DNA may be forever coded with the filmy stuff of damaged offspring, the handicap of an unwanted inheritance." When a Zorba-like uncle arrives from Europe to recall him to life, he too expires after completing his mission. Yet Rosenbaum conveys all this in a light, buoyant, rueful tone, as if bemused by the oddity of his own life and the history that shaped it.

Just as Ozick and Stern demonstrated the rich literary uses of buried Jewish traditions, the stories of Goodman and Rosenbaum show that the experience of the younger Jewish writers is too diverse to fit the brilliant formulas of their literary forebears. Today's Jewish writers are as likely to reach deeply into history as into memory; they deflate awe with irony and humor; they bracket their literary influences for fear of being overwhelmed by them; they play with ideas but know the risk of the will doing the work of the imagination; they have no fear of being 'minor' as long as they can be honest. Their work has given a real voice to a new generation seeking its contemporary identity in a Judaism scorned or abandoned by their parents. It is not yet a large voice but it surely is an interesting and eloquent one; on any frequency, it deserves to be heard. ❑

LOVE STORIES

Nessa Rapoport



A Simple Story

Once upon a time, there was a people. This people, beloved of God (although, of course, not the only people beloved of God nor always beloved in an evident way), created over thousands of years a magnificent culture of devotion. Despite the unconventional adversity and unspeakable catastrophe that afflicted them, the Jews spun of their languages a unique text and an equally distinctive interpretive mode that continues to bear fruit for all.

Now it happened that in the late twentieth century, millions of Jews were living in the United States of America, a country whose hospitality became unparalleled in Diaspora history. In 1990, the Jews held a survey and discovered that the rate of marriage between Jews and non-Jews had surged to stunning, unprecedented heights.

A great stocktaking ensued, for the Jews knew they were living in a century in which one third of their stories had already been murdered. To lose even one more was not bearable. Rabbinic and organizational leaders retreated within themselves as if it were the Day of Atonement. All the Jews asked searching questions about their task in the world and resolved to live each day in accord with the eternity planted within them since creation.

Humbly, leaders and citizens joined forces to find in every Jewish soul the divine image. They forsook denominational and territorial strife in an effort to mirror within their hearts the love of God for all of Israel. In sleep and wakefulness, in their houses and on their journeys, in communities everywhere and in the gift of their homeland, they tried, each in the vocabulary of his or her own nature (no one of which was the same), to retrieve the holiness in the everyday and release light into the darkness of the world.

By 1997, the *New York Time*s was reporting a harmony among Jews that was considered sociologically remarkable in the balkanized 1990s. Although the Jews were still fewer than 2% of the American population, their spiritual transformation was changing America. To mark the millennium, religious figures and politicians of many lands sought out Jews to learn the secret of love.

❧ ❧ ❧

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC FIELD

Nessa Rapoport is the author of a novel, Preparing for Sabbath, *and of* A Woman's Book of Grieving. *With Ted Solotaroff, she edited* The Schocken Book of Contemporary Jewish Fiction.
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All right, only the first two paragraphs are true. Here is the real ending, published in 2097.

A Teaching Story

Opening instruction: Read the first two paragraphs of the above story and continue here:

By 1997, the language of hatred and spite among Jews had escalated to the point where it was covered on the front pages of *The New York Times.* One hundred years later, even the greatest historians and commentators are perplexed that a crisis of such magnitude did not impel Jewish leaders and the Jewish people to remember together the story of how they were made, what they had endured for the story's sake, and the beauty they might have wrought in its name.

Closing instruction: Write a different ending to this story.

❧ ❧ ❧

An Allegorical Story

Once upon a time there was a little girl born into a devastating century. Her father and mother had to flee for their lives from the two greatest tyrants of the era. The girl was always grateful to her parents for imbuing her with an unshakable passion for freedom.

In the land of America she rose to great heights, attaining one of the highest ranks in the republic. She had everything a woman of prominence could desire with one exception: She had lost her story. Her parents, in their flight to safety, had chosen to leave her story behind and replace it with another.

The shelter they bequeathed her was breached by her very accomplishment. On the front pages of *The New York Times,* her true story was heralded. After much turmoil over many months, she returned to the place of her birth and sought out the details of the tragic tale her parents had never given her, a story "stronger, sadder, and richer," she assessed, than the one she had told herself and her children for many years.

And who knows if it was not for this moment that she had been summoned out of one story and compelled into another? ❧ ❧ ❧

Hidden Story

Once upon a time there was a writer—the writer speaking these words to you. Now this writer's mother employed a woman to help her in the house, a pious Catholic from Portugal.

One Friday afternoon, when the sun set early, the writer's mother lit the Sabbath candles while the woman was still there.

"We do that, too," the woman volunteered, "but in our family we do it in the basement."

Who could have foreseen, half a millennium after her ancestors' bodies were expelled or their souls exiled, that the faint Mediterranean scent of their Jewish story would persist into the Sabbath dusk of a Canadian winter?

❧ ❧ ❧

A Story of Translation

I am sitting in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement. As is my custom, I have, in addition to the prayer book, the anthology of biblical and rabbinic sources and stories called, in translation, *Days of Awe,* compiled by the great Hebrew writer S.Y. Agnon.

Now it happens that Agnon was a very learned Jew, among the most learned of all Jewish writers of his stature as a novelist and teller of tales. At the back of his collection is a bibliography of sources, abbreviated from the longer Hebrew version of the anthology.

I leaf through this list, fascinated by the names of the books, many of which are metaphorical plays on the names of their authors. I am also idly looking for some of my illustrious rabbinic ancestors. Indeed, I find at least one Rapoport rabbi whose name I did not know.

Suddenly, I am overwhelmed by all I do not know, by the fact that I am the recipient of what was in my childhood the most comprehensive Jewish learning, that I have devoted my days to exalting the incomparable literary tradition from which I descend, to extending that tradition by drawing on its architecture, suffusing my writing with its allusions, and singing the thousands-year-old song in my key, and yet I do not recognize many of these names and still am not sufficiently adept to bring them into my life directly, to seal their words upon my heart without an interpreter.

In my youth, I promised myself that when I reached the age at which the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva began to learn—the distant age of 40—I would be able to play tennis, speak Italian, and read a Hebrew novel or a rabbinic commentary with the same indescribable passion and pleasure with which I encounter an English story.

❧ ❧ ❧

The End

So it is for a Jewish writer, savoring the sweetness of our people's words, jubilantly uncovering hidden tales while mourning what is lost, the silenced voices who will never, until the end of days, be able to tell us all they know. ❑

TIKKUN *offers this reading list of Jewish novelists who have published books in the last few years and whose fictions focus on Jewish themes. If we missed anyone, we deeply apologize, and please let us know of our error. Our intention is to be as inclusive as possible.*

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Steven Bloom
Melvin Jules Bukiet
Michael Chabon
Robert Cohen
Myra Goldberg
Rebecca Goldstein
Allegra Goodman
Neil Gordon
Harvey Grossinger
Josh Henkin
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Allen Hoffman
Alan Isler
Jonathan Levi
Ellen Pall
Eileen Pollack
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Lev Raphael
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Is This Picasso, or Is it the Jews?

A Family Portrait at the End of History

Mark Shechner

A family portrait of Jewish American writers at present would be a gallery piece for sure, something you could take right over to MOMA and display as dada. You see the teeming extended clan, alright: *der zeyde* (Saul Bellow), *die bubbe* (Cynthia Ozick), the prosperous, erratic, high-achieving sons and daughters, from Philip Roth, the eldest, down to the brat of the month, whoever it may be. But they are all brats, these kids: strong-willed, self-centered, disobedient. And up front are the grandchildren, from the homegirl and everybody's sweetheart, Allegra Goodman, to the emigré who decamped to Israel to write the saga of the wandering Jew, Allen Hoffman. As in every family, there is a grouchy second something-or-other, twice removed, who would rather not be there, like Cousin Paul Auster or Uncle Norman Mailer. But here is the strange part. They are all looking away from the artist and from each other, staring off into the distance or up at the sky or out of the frame or burying their faces in books, newspapers, sports pages, political broadsides, or the rare Torah scroll. And the painter has taken some surrealist liberties. A green cow leaps over them all, a violin hovers at top dead center, and a disembodied hand is holding a disembodied penis. Or is that a salami? Who did this? Chagall? Soutine? And what is that background? A shtetl? A ghetto? A high-rise? A diorama of Jerusalem or Brooklyn or Warsaw in ruins? Is this Picasso, or is it the Jews?

I call it "The Family, American Branch: Present, Vocal, Quarrelsome—and Invisible." Present and vocal goes without saying. Consider the novels published in 1997 alone: *The Actual* by Saul Bellow, *The Gospel According to the Son* by Norman Mailer, *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth, *Pandaemonium* by Leslie Epstein, *The Bacon Fancier* by Alan Isler (who has returned to his native England, but let's count him), *The Puttermesser Papers* by Cynthia Ozick, and a posthumous *Complete Stories* by Bernard Malamud. It's been a banner year, following a previous banner year in 1996. Is there no end to the Jewish bull market? Can 1998 top it? Are the Jews gathering momentum as the world plunges toward the Christian millennium?

Mark Shechner is a Professor of English at SUNY, Buffalo. He is author of After the Revolution: An Essay on the Jewish-American Imagination, *and* Preserving the Hunger: An Isaac Rosenfeld Reader.

If this is a faithful portrait of Jewish fiction writers in America, how do we explain their virtual absence from what appear to be the front ranks of American literary consciousness? A few months ago I picked up two collections of contemporary American short stories where one might expect to find this consciousness registered: *The Best Short Stories of 1996,* edited by John Edgar Wideman, and *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories,* edited by Tobias Wolff. Wideman and Wolff are estimable and knowledgeable American writers, and one would imagine that if there were Jews around producing quality short fiction, these writers would have found them. Of the twenty-four stories in the Wideman anthology, I can find just one by a recognizable Jewish writer, Lynne Sharon Schwartz. Among the thirty-three stories in the Wolff collection, I can find none, though name is not always a giveaway to who is Jewish. But if I've missed one or two, I've missed only that, one or two, and the question remains: if Jewish American writers are so abundant and prolific, why are they not here? Are they not good enough to gain entry into collections like these? Are they not writing short stories and sticking rather to novels? Are they ghetto'd off by themselves, away from the multicultural mix that now defines the American literary scene? Just what is the status of the Ozicks, the Merkins, the Sterns (Richard, Daniel, or Steve), the Piercys, the Doctorows, the Roths, the Apples, the Bukiets, in a literary world that features names like Lan Samantha Chang, Peter Ho Davis, Junot Diaz, Jamaica Kincaid, Angel Patrinos, and Akhil Sharma—all names from the Wideman anthology?

Two anthologies are clearly not a very comprehensive picture, but other evidence can be cited. For example, in the MLA (Modern Langauge Association) list of job openings, the demand for instructors in minority literature or "multiculturalism" is clamorous, while nobody is looking for teachers of Jewish American literature. In the academy as in the anthology, the Jewish writer is about as much in demand as Latin Vulgate homilies of the tenth century, a situation, it appears, of paradox. For, despite a rich, varied, and voluminous fiction, Jewish writers in America, as anything like a "camp" or a "movement," are virtually invisible. If literature is a talent show, Jewish writers fail to move the applause meter. It certainly feels as though Jews are in the shadow and that the limelight has moved on. Save for the

truism that fashions change and that literary taste is, after all, subject to the winds of fashion, why should that be? Is there a clear historical situation that might tell us why this should be so?

In one of those swift and elegant phrases at which he is so adept, Philip Roth has a character say in *The Counterlife* that "Jews are to history what Eskimos are to snow," referring to that famous bromide that the Inuit language possesses no less than forty-seven different words for snow. It is apparently apocryphal, but you get the point. Whatever else we have been, we have been creatures of history, in it and of it, forming it and formed by it. Need I mention the movements, intellectual, spiritual, political, military, and catastrophic, that have swept through our communities since the seventeenth century: Sabbatainism, Hasidism, the Haskalah, Marxism, Zionism, Socialism, the Yiddishist movement, pogroms, emigrations, long marches, deportations, aliyahs, the Shoah, the founding of Israel, its wars with its neighbors, the long, turbulent, contentious, uncertain, and sometimes violent process of trying to make peace. And don't forget capitalism, the greatest transforming agent of them all that makes whole revolutions with the wave of a hand. No, we have more words for history than the Eskimos do for snow, and more reasons to fear history than they have to fear the predictable blizzards that they have long since learned how to weather. Who knows better than the Jews that history is a fire in which modern Jews, unlike the Biblical Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, can be consumed.

Would an end to history not be a welcome relief from all that? I'm thinking of Hegel's end of history, not Hitler's, a final realization of freedom and human potential that lies ineluctably at the end of the great helix of historical change. Hegel's argument, as it trickles down to us through Alexandre Kojève, Francis Fukuyama, and Paul Berman, is that history is not the endless collision of dialectics on out to the last whimper of starlight, but rather something like a corkscrew moving forward in spirals, toward a state in which emancipated, enlightened beings may freely realize their full potentials. If you look at the Jewish American middle class, that great assembly line of doctors, lawyers, judges, teachers, scientists, film-makers, musicians, politicians, businessmen, bankers, intellectuals, novelists, and talk show kibitzers, you might conclude that a certain ideal of emancipation has been attained: a culture in the full realization of its potential, at peace with its life, in command of its own destiny, and confident of its future. What we once dreamed, we have since become. In exile.

Given this plateau of success, safety, and status that Jews have reached, ours is not a time of dramatic generational change in Jewish life. Rather, the changes in profession, language, and world view between Jewish parents and their children are subject to no more than the standard fluctuations that attend any modern, steady state culture. Some children fall away or marry out, some put on the kippah, some make aliyah to Israel, some move into the family business or become professionals like their parents. But whatever the case, their family dramas aren't enlisted in broad panoramas of change like those that attended the first and second generations. Emancipation and social advancement in America have brought an end to the common destiny, replacing it with individual fortune. Except for the gradual identity erosion that many commentators have wrung their hands over, there are no large-scale pressures at work on Jewish life in the United States. As the parents are, so shall the children be, more or less—because they choose to be. Isn't that an end of history?

Reflect on how the material out of which previous Jewish generations made literature and formed major careers came so ready-to-hand to writers from Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, Henry Roth, Mike Gold, and Clifford Odets to Delmore Schwartz, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow. All had some variant of the same subject to work with: the conversion of the Jews, the great, threatening, puzzling, death-defying leap of Old World Jews into contemporary American life, and the spectacular juxtapositions of style, value, manners in their own lives that made them sometimes feel like freaks of nature or improbable hybrid beings. For them, to write about the self was also to write about multitudes, as the writers and their readers well understood. And yet look at how those multitudes dwindled from Abraham Cahan to Saul Bellow. It is no fault of Bellow's that his Moses Herzog fails the test of representativeness that David Levinsky had passed with honors. Between 1917 and 1964, Cahan's multitudes (the newly American and newly rich) dwindled to Bellow's thousands (the divorced and the neurotic) as history robbed subsequent writers of the option of representative writing, an option that remains open to writers of, say, African American, Native American, or Hispanic American descent. And while at the end of history the trade off of tension for release may be welcome to the mass of Jews, it does pose dilemmas for those who wish to make stories out of their Jewish self-awareness. Writers at the end of history are deprived of history's ready-to-wear social dramas, as if Jewish life itself has gone the way of the sweatshop and tensions can no longer be measured, cut, and sewn like jackets on Mulberry Street.

This does not distinguish Jews from other steady-state cultures in the United States, like Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and Anglo Americans, but it does distinguish them sharply from Hispanic or Black or Native Americans, who are very much in their histories, and thereby hangs one of the major tales of the American literary scene. To wit: the limelight cultures of the moment are cultures in crisis and in history, whose stories are the records of upheavals that affect not only themselves but the rest of America as well.

Jewish culture in America, by contrast, is not a culture in crisis; it is not undergoing upheaval, and it is not a victim culture—factors that in and of themselves would explain the prevailing marketplace disinterest in it no matter what its writers do. For Jews to return to center stage, it would appear, something terrible would have to happen to them, and the prospect of a catastrophe that would run up Jewish stock in the marketplace or on the MLA job market is remote. Just as there is a benign end of history, so too there is a benign marginalization, a moment when one is neither a threat nor an inspiration to anyone, and such a respite from the armature of history is not entirely to be lamented.

With history at a momentary standstill, what does Jewish fiction look like? Where generalization is ruled out, what generalizations is it safe to make? Here are a few that come to mind.

- There is no agreement about what might be called "home," whether it is properly America, the Old World, Israel, or self-defined "colonies of the spirit" as Saul Bellow once called them. Correspondingly, there is no consensus about what is proper Jewish subject matter.
- Centrifugal and centripetal pressures appear to be at war, sometimes within the individual writer. Desires to flee and to belong, to resist and to join up, typify that situation, and one need only read the novels of Philip Roth to see how such contradictions play out dramatically in an imagination that thrives upon the grapple of self against self.
- Dialogue between books has never seemed less evident. Remember the group portrait in which all eyes are looking away. Individual novels tend to be stand alone productions. Writers are more disconnected from each other than at any time in the past.
- The here and now recede, as Jewish fiction is less attached to sociology than ever before. The bulk of fictions are either set in the past or composed entirely out of personal imagination, Jewish folklore, collective myth. See, for example, the writing of Steve Stern (*Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven, A Plague of Dreamers*), Rebecca Goldstein *(Mazel)*, Thane Rosenbaum (*Elijah Visible*), Melvin Jules Bukiet (*While the Messiah Tarries, Stories of an Imaginary Childhood*).
- One sees a certain nostalgia for prior times of disadvantage and deprivation, even disaster. Shtetl and ghetto fiction, Holocaust fiction, and persecution fiction would appear to be growth stocks as the contemporary situation of ease and security seems harder to grapple with. See Cynthia Ozick (*The Shawl, The Messiah of Stockholm*), Alan Isler (*The Bacon Fancier)*, Bukiet (*After).*
- The questions of who is a Jew and who wants to be one are up for grabs. What DO we make of Paul Auster, Norman Mailer, Richard Price (*Ladies' Man, Clockers*), or Kathy Acker (*Blood and Guts in High School* and other classics of sexual degradation)? What do they make of themselves?
- The category of American writer might well be expanded to include *olim* who have put down roots in Israel and staged their writing there. Two come immediately to mind: Allen Hoffman (*Kagan's Superfecta, Small Worlds*) and Naomi Ragan (*Jephta's Daughter, Sotah*), and there are surely more.
- Every Jewish writer is middle class but nobody writes about it, save Allegra Goodman who in two novels, *Total Immersion* and *The Family Markowitz,* has taken it for her subject. It is not too much to say that she is an inheritor of the line of Abraham Cahan "look at what we have become" line of fiction. The question is how far she can push her material before exhausting it.
- There is a shadow world, at least for critics, of Jewish romance fiction, about which most of us know little but which may well do more to shape values and reflect mores than anything mentioned so far. Writers of these "Mogen David melodramas" would include Maise Mosco (*For Love and Duty*), Julie Ellis (*Far To Go* and *Commitment*), Steve Hartov (*The Heat of Ramadan*), Morris West (*Lazarus*), Fred Mustard Stewart (*Ellis Island*), and Doris Mortman (*First Born*). Read the cultural situation according to Mosco, Mortman, Ellis, et al, who enjoy far more robust sales than Bukiet, Rosenbaum, Goldstein, Merkin, Stern, et al, and you may come away with a far different assessment of Jewish writing, not to say Jewish life.

The present situation, then, can be read as a diaspora Babel and a token of deterioration, or as a sign that in the long progression from tribe to culture to civilization the Jews have at last attained the diversity, the complexity, and the inner dynamism of a full civilization. The corollary is that we are not likely to again see anything like a unified vision of culture from our writers or even a "Jewish" school of writing. The best we can hope for is a continued string of brilliant individuals, some of whom will want to identify as Jews and some of whom will not. As for the limelight, it works by laws of its own. It will swing back or it will not, and the current unfashionability of Jewish writers is only the neglect of the familiar, as Jews seem to most Americans to be just Protestants of another stripe, to whom, indeed, some are connected by marriage. Singling out Jewish fiction for special attention, then, is akin to singling out Methodist or Presbyterian or Mormon fiction. There may be little felt need to do so, and what price would we be willing to pay to get back the attention that we say we crave even as we know we'd be happier if it passed us by? ❑

AGAINST LOGIC

Rebecca Goldstein

Once upon a time, I resolved to live a rational life. This was a long time ago and I was very young, having quite recently emerged from the allegedly enchanted age of early childhood. I exited a skeptic.

Among other things, my plan for rationality called for hyper-vigilance in the matter of my beliefs. I would examine each one for blemishes, much as, say, my mother examined her chickens, which in those days she used to have to kosher herself—gutting, then salting and soaking them. Whenever my mother opened a chicken and found something questionable—a perforated lung, a spotted liver—she would proceed with caution, seeking rabbinical guidance as to whether the chicken was acceptable. As it was with my mother and her chickens, so it would be with me and my beliefs. I would examine each one for the taints of wishful thinking and faulty logic. Never would I allow the accidental features of my particular situation—the fact that I happened to have been born, for instance, into an Orthodox Jewish family—influence me in the solemn business of my beliefs.

And so it was that I became an analytic philosopher. If my story ended there, it would make sense. But against logic, I also became a writer of fiction. My hopeless passion for fiction had seemed to me, in the days when I hung exclusively with philosophers, a rather shameful little aberration. Plato had planned to rid his utopia of the epic poets, who were the novelists of his day. Fiction writers are enchanters, those who spread their dreams abroad; and Plato—whom I still revere—thoroughly disapproved of enchantment.

Even more implausibly, my stories often are—often enough, at least, for me to be asked to contribute to this forum—Jewish. This, to me, is odd. For though I have reconciled myself, even philosophically, to my love for fiction, I still chafe at allowing "the accidents of precedents" (as one of my own characters once put it) to determine the borders of my points of view. And so, unlike others whom I sometimes find myself grouped with as representatives of the re-awakening in Jewish American letters, I don't write exclusively on Jewish themes or about Jewish characters. My collection of short stories, *Strange Attractors*, contained nine pieces, five of which were, to some degree, Jewish, and this ratio has provided me with a precise mathematical answer (for me, still the best kind of answer) to the question of whether I am a Jewish writer. I am five-ninths a Jewish writer.

But even this fraction of Jewish is far more than I would ever have anticipated being back in the days when I was determined to let my mind be free from origins. Cynthia Ozick once said that her goal is to dream Jewish dreams. My own early goal could not have been more different. I wanted (like Descartes) to know and not dream, to know that I did not dream. And I wanted, too, (like Spinoza) to leave my Jewishness firmly behind.

…I am dreaming Jewish dreams. Deep down in the regions of psyche where fiction is born, regions supremely indifferent to criteria of rationality, being Jewish seems to matter to me quite a lot.

My desire to emulate, specifically, Spinoza was not unrelated to my experiences as, specifically, a girl. The long arm of patriarchy, well-muscled in Orthodoxy, had joined forces with the complicated dynamics of family life, to wreak its damage on my wee little psyche. I had hit on reason as my salvation, and yet my mind, as a girl's mind, was not to be taken as seriously as a boy's. The very course of its instruction was different, insidiously non-Talmudic in a culture in which the *gemorah-kopfs* rule.

Yet here I am, five-ninths a Jewish writer, and that is five-ninths more than I can rationally explain. I am dreaming, and at least five-ninths of the time, I am dreaming Jewish dreams. Deep down in the regions of psyche where fiction is born, regions supremely indifferent to criteria of rationality, being Jewish seems to matter to me quite a lot; and in this way my own small and personal story might be offered up as a metaphor for the very re-awakening in Jewish American letters which is the topic of this forum. For here we all of us are, after several generations that have tried their damnedest to shrug off the accidents of our shared

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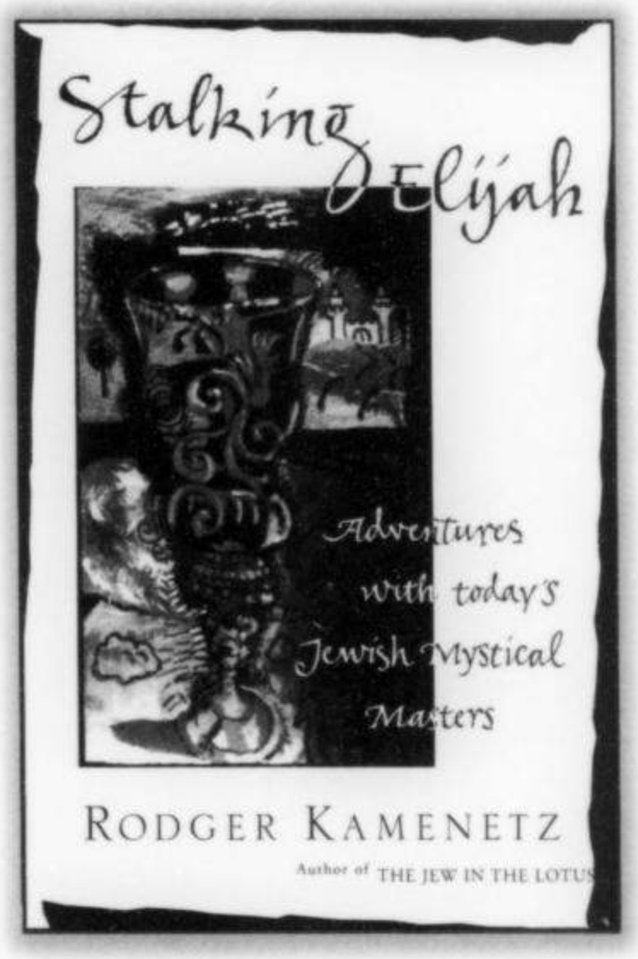
Rebecca Goldstein is the author of four novels, including The Mind-Body Problem *and, most recently,* Mazel, *which won the National Jewish Book Award and the Edward Lewis Wallant Award. In 1996, she became a MacArthur Fellow.*

precedents; here we all are, having sufficiently assimilated the culture at large to be able to inhabit, should we so choose, the inner worlds of characters to whom Jewishness is nothingness; here we all are, against logic, dreaming Jewish dreams.

Sanford Pinsker recently found cause, like me, to comment on the goal of Jewish dreaming that Cynthia Ozick once appropriated to herself, calling it "an honorable effort" but asserting that it was one that "a writer like I.B. Singer never had to undertake. Every dream he had was, by definition, a *Jewish* dream...." None of us writing today can be a Jewish writer in the same sense that I.B. Singer was. We are all of us perfectly capable of dreaming non-Jewish dreams, so perfectly capable that what calls out for explanation is that we can—*still can*—dream Jewish dreams, that we want to. At this particular, perhaps transient, stage in Jewish history, it takes a distinctly anomalous desire to become a Jewish dreamer, as it takes, as well, a sustained effort. For it is a very real problem to be able to discover *how* to do it, this Jewish-dreaming thing, in terms that make contemporary sense. We obviously cannot express the Jewish difference by testifying, as other generations of Jewish writers have so eloquently testified, to the yearning to be let in to the *other's* dream: to go to the good schools, live in the fine neighborhoods, mix with and marry the goldenly Christian girls and boys. Yearning flows in some other direction.

I have found, like several others linked in this suggested revival of Jewish American letters, that my Jewish dreams, at least sometimes, take me backward in time, into a past in which the texture of Jewishness was more richly felt. Perhaps it can be argued that some gathered strands from that textured past must always find their way into the Jewish dreams we weave, that to experience the world Jewishly is to experience it historically. The effort to imaginatively inhabit the past does not mean writing the sorts of stories that writers in the past would have written. To me, for example, it is of much interest to try to imagine what it must have been like to have been a gifted woman living back in some hidden-away little place in, say, Eastern Europe. This doesn't mean, of course, that the writers of that time—having lived, as they did, without the benefits of contemporary feminism—would have found such a woman fascinating material. Obviously (extropolating from us), there must have been a great number of such wildly brilliant women, and (again extropolating) I imagine that many of them must have been just as wildly neurotic. Since writing about such a girl in my last book, *Mazel,* I have heard from various people who have confirmed my imagination. One professor of Jewish Studies, who originally came from Poland, startled me by coming up to me after a talk and saying, "I knew your Fraydel. She lived in my village. She died as you said." So here is an aspect of the real past that has found its way into my dreams only because of my contemporary sensibility, which finds the plight of women of genius worthy of imagination.

But which ever way we choose to dream Jewishly these days, for us, it is a choice among many. And knowing, as we do, so many ways of being, other than being Jewish, it is only by desire, by anomalous and not very practical desire, that we delimit our imaginations so that they occupy this particular region in the spread of possibilities that are open to them. And what explains this desire? I can only say that for me this pull back into particularity has the unmistakable feel of love. It is a love far too complicated to yield me joy (only pages), but it is love. And love, luckily or not, makes a habit of silencing logic. ❑



Stalking Elijah

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MACHERS AND MOURNERS

Melvin Jules Bukiet

Jewish history is nothing to brag about. How many millennia now of loss, torture, humiliation, and atrocity? Pick your favorite episode—make a selection—Babylonian exile, Roman sack of Jerusalem, Crusades, Inquisition, pogroms in the Pale, and, of course, the Shoah. Take the true believers of any major faith and see what they've done; Christians, Moslems, Communists, New Deal Democrats with their delicately closed doors—it's surprising the Jains haven't gotten into the action.

Bitter, *moi?* How's bitterness possible when the "I can get it for you wholesale" slaughter of generations of ancestors has given us the gift of the greatest subject in the world, the same gift the snake gave Eve in Eden, knowledge of good and evil.

For as long as there's been a people of the book, the narrative of that book has been constructed of bad news, which any journalist worth his salt knows makes the front page. Some have a closer connection to the bad news of their particular era—Jews in Europe in the 1940s compared to Jews in the United States, for example—but every Jew shares in the heritage. As the Haggadah says, "We were all slaves in Egypt."

All this might be expected to merely provide *parnosah* (a living) for a spadeful of cemetery keepers. But as the day follows the night, human horror breeds literature, not only in Jewish history, but everywhere. Look at the flowering of Russian fiction under the Tsars or the magic realism that blossomed in dictatorial Latin America. Maybe we'd rather some other people have the advantage of such a context, but if this is history, so be it. And the simple—or complex—historical truth is that whether the people of the book have a natural predilection to literature or not, we have some of the best—or worst—tales to tell. To paraphrase one famous circumcised prose stylist, we take the story and write.

It's no surprise that given a subject as powerful as Jewish history, whether it occurs in the sun-blasted landscape of the Middle East or the killing fields of Mittel Europa or even lays tanning as tempting as Brenda Patimkin upon the bucolic swards of Lon Guyland, Jewish writers latch onto this material, but they do so in two distinct voices. The first is to be expected; the latter is not.

First, of course, there is the note of somber lamentation. They turn your mother to ashes; you cry, you cover the mirrors, you write poetry. You sing a dirge of recollection and sorrow (Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon…we wept"). This is a literature about the Golden Age, produced posthumously after the gold has been knocked out of your teeth. Sometimes it laments individual death ("Absalom! Absalom!"—the Jewish, paternal Pieta) and sometimes it mourns the loss of the people themselves: witness the primal grief in the memoiristic fiction of Primo Levi, compelled by circumstance to give up a career as a chemist to testify to the strange fire of his youth.

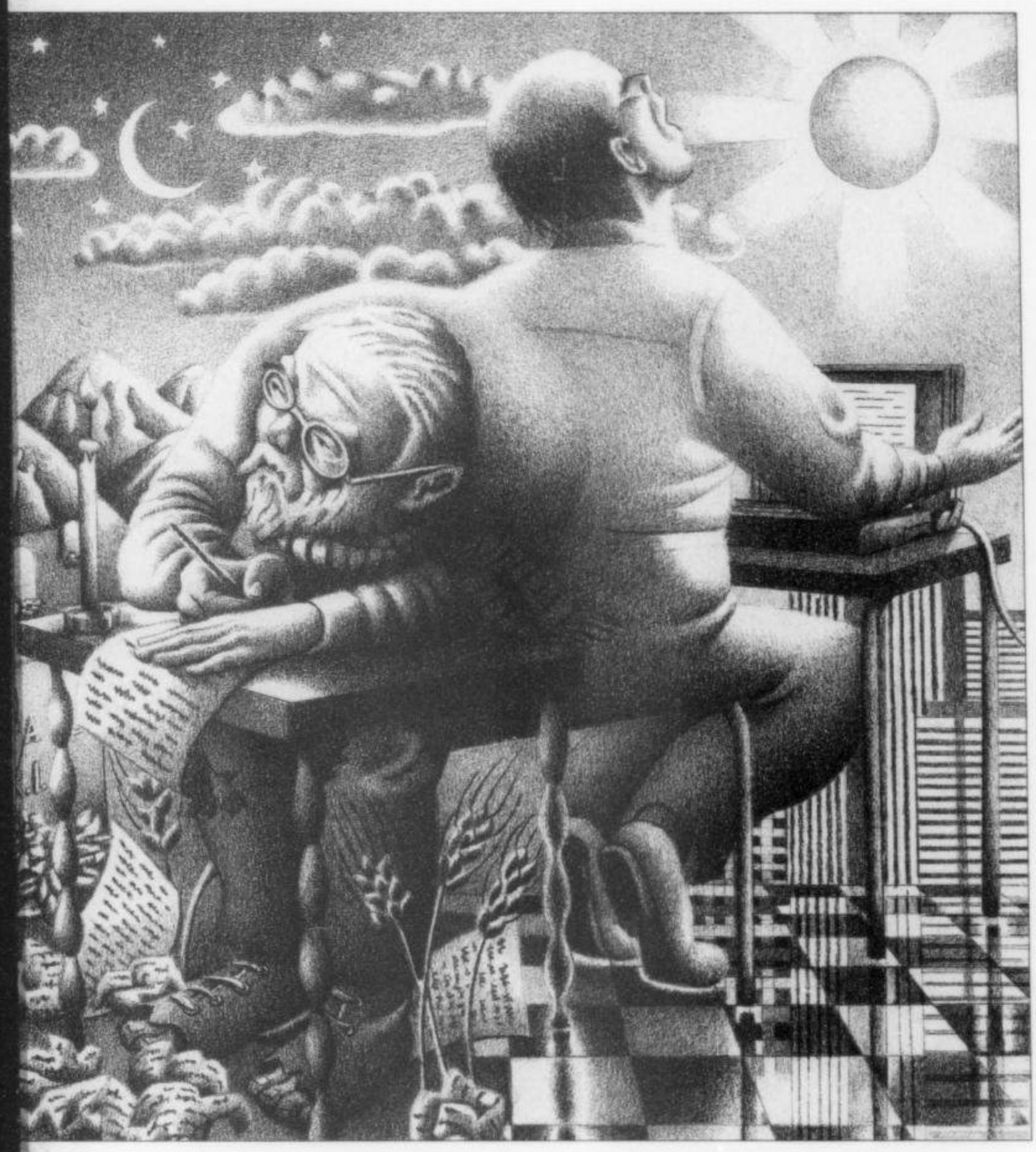
Memoir and poetry are genres that lend themselves to the literature of mourning, but an even slew of novelists whose works could not be more different share this spiritual kinship. Perhaps most miserable (and ironically, most giddy) is Steve Stern whose last three books (*Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven, Harry Kaplan's Adventures Underground,* and *A Plague of Dreamers*) take place in The Pinch, a district in pre-War Memphis, where a community of pixilated Jews have created what by any other name would be a shtetl. The Pinch is a Singeresque kind of place visited by angels, demons and flying rabbis in an exuberant magic realism. But where Singer, also a mourner, who once famously regretted that he "did not have the privilege of going through the Hitler Holocaust," lived in proximity to such places as Goray, Poland, Stern knows full well that the life he portrays no longer exists. Summoning the past becomes an act of historical revivification underlaid with a deep sorrow because of his awareness that shtetls and their God-knowing inhabitants only exist on paper now.

In her latest novel, *Mazel,* Rebecca Goldstein dares to create an actual shtetl, for which chutzpah she was castigated (along with Stern) by David Roskies for infidelity to reality. But what the literal rather than literary minded Roskies doesn't realize is that verisimilitude is a sociological virtue, not a fictional one. The precise point of imaginative reconstruction, anachronisms be damned, is that there is no longer a thing itself there to perceive, so Goldstein's Shluftchev is a misty vision not only for the author, but for her characters as they traverse the ocean to the New World that may not entail viral mass murder, but the culturally lethal strains of assimilation.

Beyond the gates of Ellis Island, nostalgia seeps into the streets of the Lower East Side through innumerable insipid dime novels about shepherds and lutists. But serious (if artistically crude) novels also arise (especially Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*). Years later, as the immigrants or their children become more adept in their adopted lingua franca, the simplicity of this vision is superseded by the more nuanced perceptions of outsiderness in Lore Segal's

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Melvin Jules Bukiet's most recent books are the collection While the Messiah Tarries *and the novel* After. *He teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.*



Other People's Houses and *Her First American* and Edward Lewis Wallant's *The Pawnbroker.* Whether the characters in these books occupy intellectual salons or slum hock shops, they all feel a similar sense of unbelonging.

Of course, the ultimate mourner in (loosely) contemporary Jewish letters is Bernard Malamud, whose corpus is replete with sad, sorrowing, wraith-like losers from the grocer in *The Assistant* to the blood-libeled victim of *The Fixer.*

Using the tone of Malamud to explore a different Jewish trauma is Thane Rosenbaum (disclosure: he's the literary editor of this magazine) whose collection *Elijah Visible* takes nine different children of survivors, and names them all Adam Posner. Childless themselves virtually throughout the collection, these Adams may have obeyed God's dictum to multiply, but cannot be fruitful after the Shoah has robbed them of any faith in a future. They are beaten down by genetic terror. These stories incorporate the physical extinction of the tribe into the domain of personal psychology. Furthermore, Adam, like his author, is at a double loss. Born in the 1950s and foreclosed from the pre-War world, he doesn't really know The War either (viz. Alain Finkielkraut's *The Imaginary Jew,* which discusses this quandary in lucidly brilliant philosophical terms).

The most recent book that conveys a distinctly Jewish anomie is *The Far Euphrates,* a first novel by Aryeh Lev Stollman, which concretizes this dilemma in its story of a perplexed boy who isolates himself from his rabbinical family by locking himself in his room for an entire year. Avowedly, this mournful youth is reenacting the Kabbalistic doctrine of *tsimtsum* or retreat, by means of which God separates himself from the primordial universe, thereby making space for flawed humanity.

Whether they're sly, earnest, or lugubrious, stylistically ornate or stark, Orthodox or atheistic, cultural or ethical, *milkekh* or *fleishig* Jews, these authors share one ultimate loss; none of them can produce a redemptive Jewish God who entails a viable rationale for Jewish existence. Beside individual angst, social unease, and genocide, they mourn the final perdition of the deity who defined and once unified the presumptively Chosen People.

Yearning for the distanced God, the mourner's response is to follow into ever-shrinking confinement beneath Tsarist heel, German boot, or American penny loafer. Yet maybe that self-effacing maneuver of these hunger artists is intended to effect its own *tsimtsum.* As God created for us a pathetic, lethal space that no one in their right mind would desire to occupy, the mourner salaams backwards out of the empty chamber while begging God to reassert a divine nature and make a long delayed reappearance.

Here's where the second voice comes bubbling to the surface, like lava. If the mourner follows God into the void while praying for lost faith and hoping against hope that sorrow may be relieved if not redeemed, another distinctly Jewish character perceives that same void…and steps in. The macher (big shot) is no less aware of tragedy than the mourner, yet he does not quail (like Joseph K.) before the ineffable mysteries and inequities of the earthly and heavenly tribunal, but spits in the judge's eye. Confronted with the presence of absence, the mourner retreats while the macher advances. The mourner looks to the past, the macher to the future. For the latter, *tsimtsum* becomes not an occasion for grief, but an opportunity for human regency.

Where the first mourners are the psalmists of the Bible, the first machers are the prophets, standing on hilltops,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY AMY HILL

raging. They've got their agenda, all right, but one gets the feeling that they rather enjoy their soapbox, and might not know exactly what to do if their warnings were heeded. Ezekiel shrieks about the final, apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog, quite certain that nobody will listen to him. In fact, God forbid. What would he do then: take up tailoring?

The macher's writing is alternately furious and funny and often, though not always, syntactically more erratic than the mourner's. It hops rather than flows. No metronomic chanting here, but a syncopated, rhetorical idiom that often draws as much attention to itself as its subject. Even when she maintains the social and theological subject matter of the mourner, the macher adds a willful, vibrant individualism to the mix.

In the little known but fabulous book *The Dance of Genghis Cohen,* French Jewish author Romain Gary presents a Jewish comedian about to be murdered by the Germans turn around at the brink of the death pit and shout, "Kiss my tuchis!"

Here's the macher's attitude toward God and History in a nutshell: So we're here. So we're alone. But we've got words. So fuck you.

Almost every Jewish writer—and most emblematic figures from Jewish lore and history—can be defined in one of the twin categories of machers and mourners. In secular Yiddish literature (indeed, until the 1860s there was no Hebrew word for literature), Sholom Aleichem, though a great deal tougher than "Fiddler on the Roof" sentimentality would give him credit for, is nonetheless a mourner, wryly bemoaning the wretchedness of his people, whereas Mendele Mocher Seforim is entirely unreconciled and spews venom. And back on the Lower East Side, Anzia Yezierska sobs with romantic longing, while Henry Roth's David Schearl learns how to "play bad" in a closet with a degenerate slum girl. By now the macher is beginning to discover a form of explosive verbal and sexual energy that reaches its climax in the liberated 1960s with the twin (no literary equivalence intended) voices of Philip Roth and Erica Jong.

Roth, who came of age in the horny adolescence of Jewish acculturation in America, has been accused of self-loathing. In fact, Roth adores the Jews of Newark who bring out the high comic tummler/macher in his prose, the prose itself being the ultimate value for the purest aesthetician we have. Look at *The Ghost Writer*, in which Lonoff, the elderly novelist, describes his vocation to the young would-be, Nathan Zuckerman. "I turn sentences around. That's my life."

Lonoff (based on Malamud) does indeed turn sentences, but it's Roth who turns the sentences about turning sentences, and thus draws attention from the sentences to the person turning the sentences. Take technique as a credo, and this is no less than a statement of the human power to make worlds out of words as a carpenter creates spindles on a lathe or the original divine worldworker makes Everything out of flux (even if He did nothing for Israel).

And of course, as sad-eyed Bern of the lowlands moans, Saul Bellow, well, bellows like Augie March. Montreal born, going at things as he's taught himself, free-style, Bellow continuously displays a fascination with people who have also gone at things free-style from gangsters to show biz types to Sigmund Adletsky, the nonagenarian billionaire who propels the action in this year's *The Actual.* Bellow is an incredibly keen social observer who sees his characters' flaws, but one gets the feeling that he really enjoys these bullies, perhaps because they do in their fictional worlds precisely what he does on paper. Adletsky doesn't only turn words; his words turns worlds and make things happen.

In Mark Helprin's lovely novella, *Ellis Island,* as well as his ponderous novel, *A Winter's Tale,* he creates a phantasmagorical Manhattan similar to Steve Stern's Pinch. Both involve literal flights of the imagination, but where Stern cringes, Helprin struts. The latter's high moral sentiments emblazoned on a silver salver are part of a wishful thinking world where virtue is ultimately rewarded. In other words, self-obsessed, breast or bosom-beating, the macher is an optimist.

Maybe it's the sense that people can change the world instead of merely bear witness to its pain that separates machers from mourners. Still, each mourner needs a macher—or vice versa—to complement him in some divine harmony. Stanley Elkin's crass *Bailbondsman* is the flip side of Edward Lewis Wallant's depressed *Pawnbroker.* In Israeli literature, Aharon Appelfeld and David Grossman (whose *The Book of Intimate Grammar* is one of the ultimate lonely boy novels) are mourners while Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua are machers. And in the writing of the Shoah, Elie Wiesel remembers the dead, often last seen entering a train, while the refugee protagonist of Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* gets vengeance by derailing a Polish passenger train.

Throughout Jewish history, the macher/mourner split reveals moieties of the Jewish mind that together form a unified characterological whole. In the Bible, Abraham, smashing Terach's statues, is the first macher, while Isaac, bound uncomplainingly upon the altar, is the first mourner for, if not martyr to, his father's incomprehensible blood lust. Jacob, devious usurper of Esau's birthright and sexual athlete, is a macher while Joseph, his son, is a wimpy mourner changed into a macher by destiny.

Far into a post-Biblical age, Hasidic Rebbes tend to be machers—it takes one to found a court, maintain an entourage—but Nachman of Bratslav with his weird mystical tales is the mournful exception to that rule. He leaves no successor and his followers are known as The Dead.

(continued on page 76)

After the Law

Steve Stern



Two decades ago, the late Irving Howe uttered a pronouncement that made an impression in the circles where such things matter. He predicted that, with greater distance from the immigrant experience and without some authentic connection to community, so-called Jewish American fiction would become attenuated; "it must suffer a depletion of resources, a thinning out of materials and memories." It would, in short, dry up. Now Mr. Howe was an honorable man, and twenty years since his assertion, no serious challengers have yet emerged to threaten the sovereignty of the generation of Roth, Bellow, & Malamud. After them, implied Mr. Howe, what can we look forward to but ever diminishing returns, a gradual shading into the American mainstream? After them, the desert: works too leached of Jewish identity to bear comparison to their predecessors; and who could argue with that? It's certainly not my intention to question the authority of Irving Howe (who was an honorable man), for the evidence still remains more in favor of burying Jewish American fiction than praising it.

Mr. Howe's dark forecast brings to mind the hasidic parable concerning the forest, the fire, and the prayer. This is the one where the Baal Shem Tov, when he has a problem, goes to the forest, lights a fire, says a prayer, and finds wisdom. The next generation has forgotten the prayer, but they can still go to the forest and light the fire; the generation after that has forgotten the prayer and can't make a fire, but they can still go to the forest. But the following generation is unable to find the forest, light the fire, or remember the prayer, though at least they know the story about forest, fire, and prayer—and that must suffice. Then along come the children of the children of the immigrants, so divorced from tradition and community that they can't even recall the story.

I offer myself as a case in point. Born at a considerable cultural and temporal remove from the Jewish East Side, in farthest Memphis, Tennessee, I grew up in a Reform congregation that—but for some residual Hebrew in the liturgy—may as well have been Methodist. When I felt the first pangs of a desire to write fiction back in the bracing climate of the Sixties, disaffection and alienation were the themes; antic nihilism was the method, its propagators a host of brainy *shaigetzes*. There were Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, illusionists such as Nabokov and Borges who played their intrepid games above the abyss, Samuel Beckett who managed eerie echo effects from his voices in a vacuum. In light of their artful inventions Jewish American fiction (wasn't Jewish American an oxymoron?) already seemed to me out of date.

Of course, one might contend that the pet themes of those authors had their source in the work of a Jew. For it was Kafka, the undisputed master of disaffection, who early in the century struck chords that still resonate like a tuning fork in the bones of his successors. Take his parable, "Before the Law," which might serve as a signature piece for the literature of marginality. In it, you'll recall, a man spends his life waiting for admission to the Palace of the Law, too timid to challenge the doorkeeper who forbids his entry; then just before the man's death, the doorkeeper reveals that this particular door had all along been reserved exclusively for him. In the tradition from which Franz Kafka was disaffiliated, Law and Torah are one and the same, an identification that would not have been lost on the parable's author. He would have known from infancy that Torah is the Book that the Jews are the people of. "The text is our homeland," remarked George Steiner, paraphrasing generations of rabbis before him; and by that logic, insofar as we are denied access to the Law, we are also homeless.

We're all Kafka's timid petitioner, anticipating neither Messiah nor Godot; we're a people for whom waiting has

ILLUSTRATION BY CYN MAURICE

Steve Stern is the author of two novels, two short story collections, and, most recently, of A Plague of Dreamers, *a collection of novellas. He is a writer in residence at Skidmore College.*

become a vocation. Problem is, for a writer of fiction, you're liable to get bored and impatient with a career predicated on the act of waiting. You want to break ranks, stretch your legs, take a walk—and again I offer the example of myself; for sometime during the mid-1980s I took a walk, turned a corner at Poplar Avenue and North Main Street in my hometown of Memphis, and stumbled quite unintentionally out of history proper. I fell through the fabric of time—which is especially thin around these blighted old ghetto neighborhoods—into a street populated by ghosts. There, in a city remarkable for erasing its own past, was an immigrant community of East European phantoms; in broad daylight they performed the timeless rites of poverty and superstition they'd imported wholesale from the Old Country. Naturally, being an orthodox spiritual bankrupt of a distinctly post-modern turn of mind, I didn't *believe* in ghosts, but seeing them was nonetheless eye-opening, and their antics made for diverting stories.

So I wrote a story about a North Main Street neighborhood that existed in symbiotic relation to, while at the same time remaining independent from, history. In other words, a place where anything could happen.

"The air is full of souls," wrote the Hebrew poet Judah Halevi, and Martin Buber: "All men are the abode of wandering souls." They were speaking figuratively, of course, but I'm here to tell you the atmosphere around North Main Street was thick with figurative souls, and each one had a story. I chose the tale of an old man who refuses to die and is dragged off to Paradise alive by the Angel of Death. "Original, no?" I thought, believing it safe to take credit for a tale whose source did not technically exist. Then, as if to disparage my vanity, the story aged before my eyes and sloughed its own skin; and beneath it, palimpsest-wise, was another story. This one was the hasidic tale about Rabbi Ben Levi, another obstinate, deathless old man, who deceives Malach Hamovess, the Angel of Death, into admitting him into Paradise alive. But Rabbi Ben Levi's story turned out to conceal yet another about Elijah the Prophet, also deathless; and Enoch, transformed while alive into the archangel Metatron. Thus did I sink into ever deeper strata of narrative, not touching bottom until I arrived at Genesis 5:24, a single line that spawned a whole literature: "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." And those were the generations of my piddling story.

I felt like Jonah, having discovered that the fish who swallowed him had been swallowed by a larger, and that one swallowed by an even larger, world without end.

The old wisdom, now defunct, has it that Torah prefigured the world. God used Torah as a blueprint for creation, then handed it to Moses on Sinai, and Moses read in it the tale of himself. He was a person of the Book, Moses, his story already told, while it was also in the process of unfolding; he was a character out of a fiction, who was nevertheless given an opportunity to determine his own (and his people's) historical destiny. It's said that on Sinai the oral Torah (the interpretation of the Law) was revealed along with the written, and for centuries thereafter the Jewish scribe viewed his work as the unfolding of revelation. His work was *received* even as it was *created*, which is a paradox, and in paradox you can confound the rational categories; you can conceive a vantage from which it's not unlikely to see ghosts.

Paradox can dissolve the distance from authenticity that Irving Howe cited as fatal to the Jewish branch of regional American fiction. History flows from Eden into exile, past landscapes strewn with carnage, washing us up high and dry on the brink of another millenium; but myth contains both Eden and exile and consecrates their respective truths. "Eternity," says William Blake, "is in love with the productions of time," and vice-versa. Time embraces timelessness the way the evil husks in Kabbalah surround the scattered sparks of the divine; the way secular stories contain the sacred. Crack the husk, strip the story from the tale, the folk narrative from the midrash, peel away apocrypha, pseudipigrapha, and Talmud—a very sexy operation—and you arrive at the glimmering source, the once and future Book itself. Or at least it's pretty to think so.

But let's face it, paradox is a trick of the intellect, and I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Howe that what's lost is lost; you can't get there from here. At this late date, what can harkening back to the archetypes result in but pale imitation, distant echoes of a once joyful noise? Once ritual was the means of bridging the gap between the sacred and the profane, but with the collapse of community, the rituals that myth requires are largely forgotten. All the traditional means of transcendence have had their day. Jacob's Ladder, doubtless gathering dust backstage in some abandoned Yiddish theater, is missing too many rungs; the Tree of Life is in need of a surgeon. And even should you stumble accidentally into the Garden through some neglected back door (at the corner, say, of Poplar Avenue and North Main), chances are you could never negotiate a safe return.

The ancients had a system of interpreting Scripture to which they ascribed the acronym *PaRDeS* (literally Hebrew for *garden*, or *Garden*). They moved in their exegesis through four stages: *peshat*, *reshev*, *drash*, and *sod*, which corresponded to literal, metaphorical, allegorical, and mystical readings of the Text. In this way their program involved a virtual ascent from the mundane to the sublime. There's a fable called "The Four Who Entered Paradise" that cautions against the perils of that ascent. In it four rabbis make a pilgrimage to the celestial Garden. Upon entering, one dies, another goes mad, another loses his faith, and only Akiva gets back to the world in one piece. Which is to say that the return to the sources is a journey beyond mere nostalgia; it is fraught with hazard, and finding your way there is no guarantee you will find your way back. Enter the

(continued on page 76)

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Post-Holocaust Literature

Sanford Pinsker



By the usual laws of literary justice, Jewish American fiction should have melted into the giant maw of assimilation. After all, the story of Jewish American literature may have begun with a chronicling of the shocks and sordid poverty that immigrants found (mostly on the lower East Side and mostly in the fictions of Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska and Henry Roth), but it became the saga of how a generation of immigrant sons managed to take the long psychic journey from Brooklyn tribalism to Manhattan sophistication. This second group of writers could be said to have achieved the victory of becoming American: in the years following World War II, Americans were so taken with things "Jewish"—whether it be Borsht Belt comics or Levy's rye bread—that the stage was set for such disparate writers as Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, I.B. Singer, and Philip Roth to be characterized as members of a Jewish American renaissance.

The same literary politics, however, that once inspired critic-writer Leslie Fiedler to talk about the "Judaization of Main Street" cooled off precipitously during the mid-1970s. After all, how many pale imitations of *Portnoy's Complaint* did anyone need? What else was left to be said? Quite a bit, as the newest generation of Jewish American writers has found. Their insistence on what could be called a literature of "return" or a "new Jewish literacy" has little to do with the usual pitched battles between the ambitious young and those prone to imagine that history will end when they do. Rather, it is a case of material that now chooses them (rather than the other way around) and that differs markedly from the strenuous efforts immigrant sons once made to escape from the parochialism of their parents.

Some of these writers, like Allegra Goodman and Rebecca Goldstein, explore the often deliciously comic ways that modern Orthodoxy and modernism rub against each other. Others, like Steve Stern, have discovered that the shtetl exerts an imaginative grip long after urban Jewish quarters gave way to suburban split levels. And then there are a considerable number of contemporary Jewish writers (among them Thomas Friedman, Barbara Finklestein, Art Spiegelman, J.J. Steinfield, Julie Salamon, Lev Raphael, Carol Ascher) who are children of survivors, creating a new genre I call post-Holocaust fiction. These fictionists share Melvin Jules Bukiet's stark insistence that "in the beginning was Auschwitz"—not, to be sure, the Auschwitz actually experienced in Mittel Europa, but rather the Auschwitz that, as Thane Rosenbaum likes to insist, is coded into their very genes.

Because these writers are formed by—and respond to—a shared condition as children of those who experienced the nightmare of the Shoah first-hand, Alan Berger, in a recent study, has called them *Children of Job* (SUNY Press 1997). To his credit, Berger does not lump all Holocaust survivors, or their children, into a single, easily defined category. Some embrace God and religious observance; some decidedly do not. Some point toward gestures of reconciliation while others continue to stoke the fires of loss, mourning, and unremitting fury. But can the Holocaust's second generation be termed "children of Job?" Perhaps, although I am surely not alone in finding The Book of Job's *deus ex machina*, fairy tale ending unconvincing. As Berger puts it, "The Job of antiquity suffered, and even rebelled, but he was granted a mystical experience of the deity and a divine 'confession' that the universe lacked perfection. The Book of Job 'answers' the question of theodicy by affirming divine majesty and human penance." In the world after Auschwitz, however, I believe Job's story demands a more complicated—and darker—telling. Elie Wiesel has pointed out the need for a sequel to the Book of Job, and that is what the children of survivors, albeit in very different forms and attitudes, are trying to write.

For example, behind the postmodernist dazzle of Melvin Jules Bukiet's latest novel, *After*, lies a quarrel with God that is as relentless as it is uncharacteristic of conventional Holocaust pieties. "I like everything about the synagogue except for God," Bukiet insists, going on to explain that he thinks "the Deity has unilaterally violated the covenant by killing 'the chosen people' time and again over the millennium." Bukiet, in short, carries on the tradition of Job, debating with a seemingly indifferent God by insisting that

ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN HARRIS

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He, too, must be a mentsh, and by creating fictional worlds that not only contend with God's handiwork, but that are, in the "truth" that serious fictions aim for, morally superior.

The children of survivors suffer in ways more diffuse, harder to pin down, than those of a generation who saw the horrors of night and fog with their own eyes. As Adam Posner, the mercurial protagonist of Thane Rosenbaum's *Elijah Visible,* puts it: "Adam's parents had been in the camps, transported there by rail, cattle cars, in fact. That was a long time ago, another country, another time, another people. An old, trite subject—unfit for dinnertime discussion, not in front of children, not the way to win friends among Gentiles. The Holocaust fades like a painting exposed to too much sun. A gradual diminishing of interest—once the rallying cry of the modern Diaspora: now like a freak accident of history, locked away in the attic, a hideous Anne Frank, trotted out only occasionally, as metaphorical mirror, reminding those of what was once done under the black eye of indifference." Given these realities, Posner gropes uneasily in the spiritual zone between memory and mourning. What he can't do, however, is add yet another brick to the monuments of indifference that surround him. And so the stories of *Elijah Visible* fracture both chronology and Posner's firm identity. In one, he is a painter, in another a lawyer, but always a man who must somehow come to terms with his parents' legacy of fear and caution.

Berger argues that writers like Rosenbaum and Bukiet are akin to the "replacement children" granted to Job in The Testament of Job, an obscure, pseudoepigraphic text written between the first century B.C.E. and the end of the second century C.E. Surrounded by the ten "replacement" children mentioned in The Book of Job's epilogue, this newly configured Job delivers a deathbed speech about the need to remember God, help the poor, assist those in need, and marry within the faith.

This Job sounds for all the world like a conventional rabbi delivering a very conventional Friday night sermon. Unfortunately, such pieties lack everything that makes the Book of Job so extraordinary: the grandeur of its poetry and the sophistication of its theology. Moreover, the harder issues (the ones that The Testament of Job refuses to raise) not only revolve around the question of "replacement" children, but also around what Emil Fackenheim has in mind when he insists that "a new 'generation,' and Jewish generations to come ever after, are not 'the Job of the gas chambers' [in Martin Buber's phrase]; they are Job's children." In effect, both Jewish history and the Jewish Bible must be rewritten, reconsidered, and perhaps most of all, reimagined after Auschwitz. Job's original children were forever lost in the darkness of theology, just as the children who were marched into gas chambers threaten to be doubly swallowed up by forgetfulness.

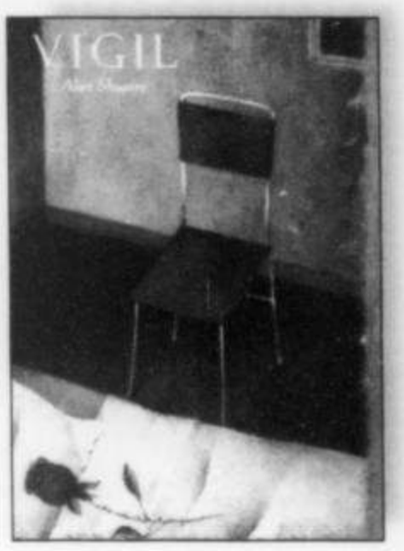
Berger would like members of the second Holocaust generation to extend their role to a general commitment to *tikkun olam* and a particular commitment to considerations of sexuality and/or identity politics. The Holocaust, however, was a unique event that must not be diluted by calls for social justice, however worthy or well-meaning. I prefer the works of those who think of *tikkun* in less programmatic ways—as a continuing struggle to imagine the unimaginable and in the process, to repair the individual.

For the same reason, I believe that Holocaust fiction must be evaluated on its own merits—the usual rules and standards of fiction cannot be suspended. One ought to be able to discuss—and eventually evaluate—works like Thomas Friedman's *Damaged Goods* or Julie Salamon's *White Lies* in the context of work by other contemporary Jewish American fictionists and, indeed, in the even larger context of postmodernist fiction by the likes of Thomas Pynchon, T.C. Boyle and David Foster Wallace. What makes a piece of fiction memorable is its ability to create believable characters and to make us care about what happens to them. Granted, writing about the lingering shadows of the Holocaust is a tall order. In their subject, these writers have had no choice; it is material that must be addressed. But what their art labors to recover has much to say not only about themselves, but also about everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike, trying to make their way through the special darkness of a post-Holocaust world. ❑

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CURRENT DEBATE

"Character Education" Misses the Point

RICK ULFIK, *composer and musician:*

Kids! I don't know what's wrong with these kids today
Kids! Who can understand anything they say?
Kids! They are disobedient, disrespectful oafs!
Noisy, crazy, sloppy, lazy loafers!
Why are they so dreadful? Kids!

☞ This song, from *Bye Bye Birdie* (by Lee Adams and Charles Strouse, 1960), probably represents a theme repeated every generation in which a good portion of adults deplore what's going on with young people. Our generation continues the pattern with a vengeance. In fact, some would say that youth problems are major factors in the decline of our culture and civilization.

Among the issues cited are: The mediocre level of reading, writing, math, and general learning skills possessed by young people who enter high school, college, and the job market; unacceptable levels of teen drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; teen violence; teen pregnancy and other sexual irresponsibility; stealing, dishonesty, disrespect for authority, decline in work ethic and responsibility, and lack of concern for the common good.

It is tempting these days to see education reform as a solution to these seemingly intractable problems. In the article "The Case for Character Education" (TIKKUN, January/ February 1997), Thomas Lickona paints a disturbing picture of America's youth and concludes that we need to explicitly teach children values like respect and honesty.

What Mr. Lickona leaves out of his analysis, however, is the impact on children *and on schools and teachers* of living in a society that predominantly values materialism and "me-firstism." These values are generated primarily by the competitive market and they are reflected in the way that the political structures of society allocate resources—most notably, in our society's refusal to allocate enough resources to end poverty, hunger, and homelessness. School reform is important, but is unlikely to have the desired consequence of changing the values of our children unless that reform is part of a larger meaning-oriented movement that is simultaneously challenging the larger context of selfishness that shapes our schools and shapes our teachers.

Rick Ulfik has taught math in the New York City public school system and is a member of the Education Task Force of the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning. He can be reached through the TIKKUN *office.*

My experience in the New York City public school system as a math teacher, music teacher, tutor, and High School Executive Internship Sponsor leads me to believe that focusing on solving character problems will have only a limited effect until we can create a climate in which students feel excited about the subjects they are learning and are self-motivated to be in school and engaged in the process of learning. If students are in school because of external motivation, namely out of fear of the consequences of not being in school (punishment of some sort) or out of the desire to "make it" in society (with the attendant value scheme already supplied by society with its emphasis on materialism and "looking out for number one"), they are unlikely to learn the values that Lickona correctly wishes to teach. The character issues worrying him, manifested as violence, dishonesty, disrespect, drug abuse, as well as the problems associated with scholastic underachievement, would be far less prevalent in children who are in schools where most or all of the students are self-motivated.

Rather than building on the intrinsic curiosity of children, their desire to soak up experience and to understand their world, or their early manifestations of wonder and excitement about the universe, our school system shifts the attention of our children to external motivations. Students are taught that what counts in school are test results, teacher approval, and grades. This, moderated or intensified by home and family conditions, minimizes the importance of, and often suppresses, the natural tendency of most children who first enter grade school to be eager and ready to absorb knowledge and experience.

This shift, from the natural curiosity, excitement, and wonder of discovery, to attention on the external motivations necessary for survival in school, plays out in many unfortunate ways, such as:

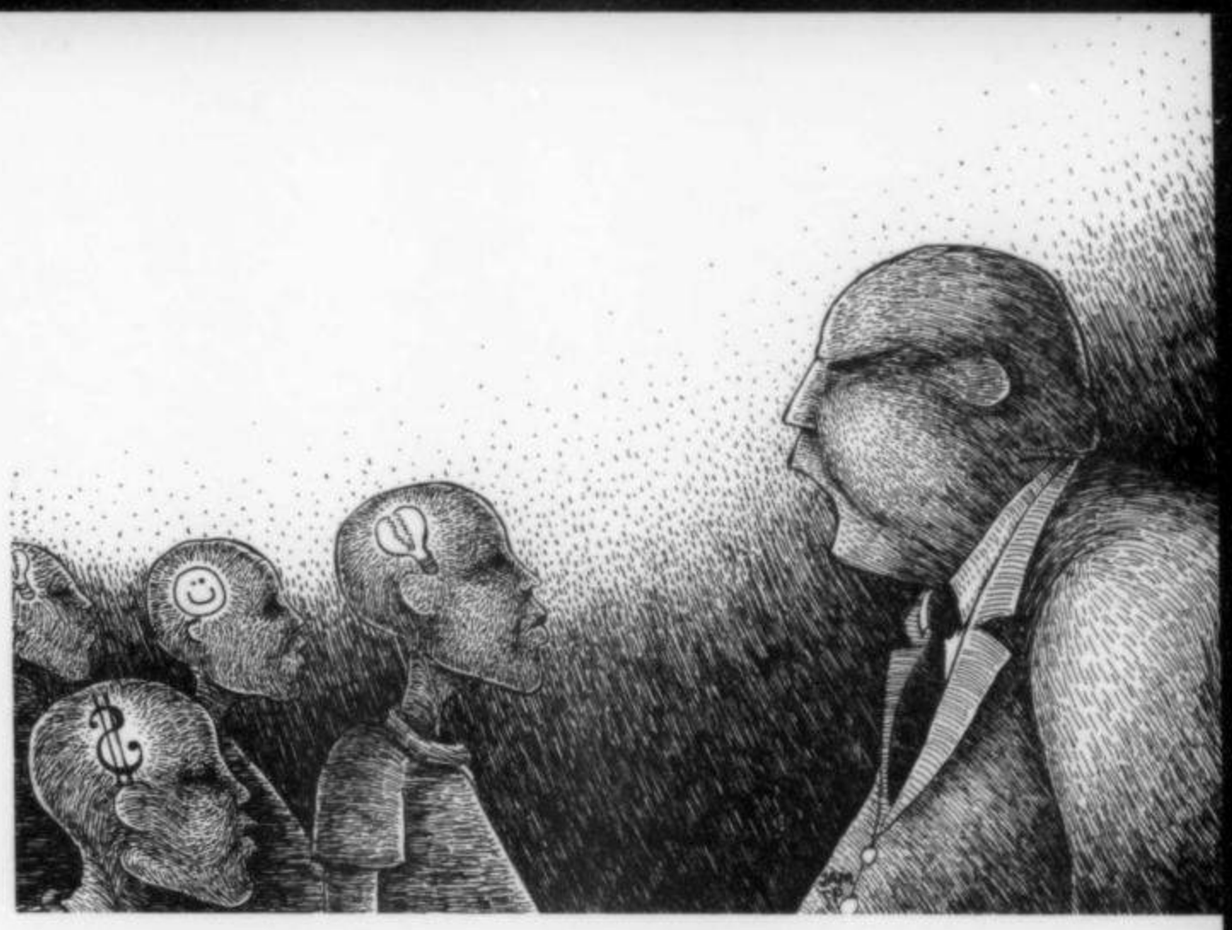
- Children realize that their own interests are considered less important than school requirements. On some level they sense they are not being accepted for who they are. This misrecognition causes many kids to suppress or otherwise transform portions of their personality to accommodate the current situation. There is also some loss of connection to adults.
- As external motivation becomes the norm in grade school, kids who accommodate by becoming "good" get used to doing only what is required, except for those subjects they still have an interest in. Other kids, for whom school becomes a tedious chore at best, may become "discipline

problems," showing character traits that Mr. Lickona would like to change.

■ Children are pulled into an ethos of competition in which comparisons are made between those who get good test scores and grades, and those who don't. This again reinforces the external as motivation rather than curiosity and interest in the content of the subjects; and it becomes the first warning to kids that they better look out for themselves because the rest of their world is doing just that. In a way, this is the foundation for the cynical idea that our society can never be different from the way it is now. The implicit values of the competitive marketplace (with money as its external motivation) are rooted in the "common sense" we learn in our school years.

■ By the time many kids get to high school, the process of learning for them has become unpleasant "work" and it continues to be forced on them. If some children see school as disagreeable and potentially dangerous because of grades and tests, then trust and respect for teachers and other adults will be damaged. Those kids will then be less likely to confide in or accept guidance from adults regarding sex, drugs, violence, etc. Kids see adults' ubiquitous focus on making money, they know the necessity for doing well in school to facilitate making money (clearly of more importance than the joy of doing whatever they would be paid for), and often see adults around them trying to "get over," that is, taking short cuts (sometimes illegal) to make money. Children are often unsure whether they can succeed in such a world. Their own ambivalence about "making it" and their own fears about whether they really can make it contribute to the adolescent rebellion (which today may start at much earlier ages as younger children learn more about the world they are being trained to enter). That rebellion, manifested in drugs, drinking, violence, and other anti-social behavior, is a consequence of the deficit of meaning in children's lives, a deficit caused in part by this unconscious pain at having to function in a school environment preparing students for a world with perverted values (and a world in which they are not sure they can really "succeed" and be valued). For some, this same crisis of meaning leads to early sexual involvements in the hope of attaining some deeper connection with someone than may be available in a competitive school atmosphere that has long since stripped away any meaning connected to learning.

By contrast, when children are self-motivated, their academic achievement, in areas of their interest, frequently exceeds scholastic standards. If their motivation is nurtured, their skills in reading also improve as they seek to learn more and more about their areas of interest. This leads to acquiring knowledge and skill in peripheral subject areas as well as improvement in general learning skills and a sense that learning is fun and useful. Combine this with positive acknowledgement by teachers and the school system in general, and you have children who are self-confident and



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAC McGILL

positive influences on the children and adults around them. This atmosphere of internal motivation is equally important for teachers, for it will allow them to sustain and rejuvenate their own enthusiasm and not leave the profession, as many have done, due to frustration over the system.

The single most important goal of grade school education should be to create self-motivated students. It doesn't matter whether they have attained specific levels of proficiency in reading or math by specific or uniform age levels. If they are self-motivated they will quickly go far beyond our current standards in those critical subject areas. As children interact by sharing the subjects they are learning with the other children and by working together on projects, their receptivity to values like empathy, respect and responsibility will be maximized by being in an environment where they are totally supported and acknowledged for being on their own paths of discovery.

I believe a fundamental restructuring of our primary educational system is necessary to create self-motivated students for whom learning is something they crave. In very brief and general terms, it can work this way:

First, the concept of teacher in the grade school classroom is expanded, at little or no extra cost, to include teaching assistants of several types: Visiting teachers from the same school; student teachers from college; high school students who get credit for assisting one day a week in specific subject areas; older students from the same school; students from the same class who periodically rotate as assistants; community elders and other adult volunteers; parents of the children in the school (even if it's two hours every six months, it's valuable). Other options, with expansion encouraged as the program develops over the years, might include people from the community's businesses, social service organizations, churches, synagogues, mosques, arts organizations, media organizations, and so on. These community organizations could be encouraged to contribute materials and equipment as well as people to their local schools. This would be mutually beneficial since the organizations would be reinforcing their ties to the community and introducing their professions to young people.

Next, with all these diverse and interesting people available to teachers in the classrooms, we could, at current expenditures, give considerably more individualized attention to students. The teaching "team" determines an area that a grade school child really loves. The child is encouraged to get more involved with it. Once a student loves learning about something, it is easy to get them to learn more about it. Teachers can then teach reading skills within the context of that subject area, as well as math, history, science and so on.

The only elementary school grades should be those given to teachers *reflecting whether their children are self-motivated or not!*

It is only in this context that character education has a chance of being effective. But even here, an important caveat: Though I share with Thomas Lickona a desire for schools to reinforce values like respect, caring, honesty, and self-discipline, I sharply disagree with any plan to superimpose character values by authority pressure. Mr. Lickona's example of having classes of school children line up on the football field to form the word "RESPECT" represents the same kind of short-term, crisis-management thinking that never fully addresses the conditions that cause America to have more people in prison than any other country in the world. Running stricter, high security schools saturated with values teaching is similar to hiring more police and building more prisons because these measures address the problem, they don't prevent the problem. You cannot coerce people into moral behavior, particularly when those doing the coercing (teachers, the school system) are representatives of a society that is immoral both in its value structure and in its allocation of resources and rewards.

The key societal lesson learned by young people (especially boys) from early childhood to adulthood is you must in some way outdo or overcome those around you to be noticed or respected, and to survive. In a society in which this is the common sense of daily life, the teaching of respect, empathy, caring, and honesty is likely to be deeply impaired. And if learning in general is not self-motivated, some kids will go along with it because they must, some will resist and become "problem children," and only a few will grow up seeing it as having meaning in their own lives.

Instead of focusing solely on treating the symptoms of teen misconduct and academic underachievement, let's prevent the disease in the first place.

TOM LICKONA, *professor of education at the State University of New York at Cortland*

☞ When our older son Mark was ten, we had a conversation about spelling, prompted by his having received good grades in that subject on his fifth-grade report card. Often he had to suffer inquiries that reflected my habit as a Piagetian psychologist of wanting to probe the thinking of children. In this case, I was interested in whether Mark understood that correct spellings are social conventions that people create to facilitate communication. Our exchange went like this:

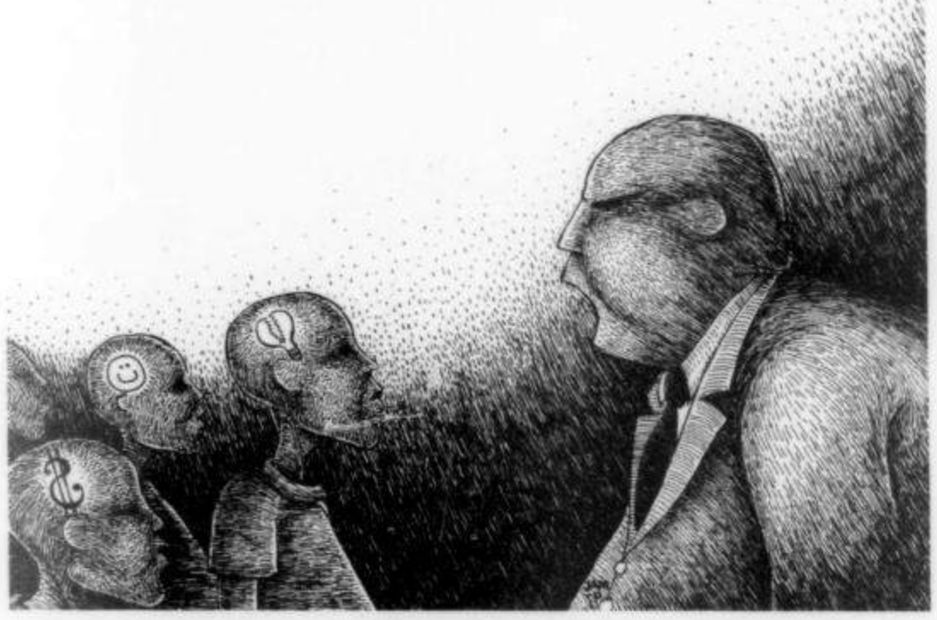
ME: Great job on spelling, Mark. You know, I'm curious, did you ever think about spelling? Why is spelling important?

MARK: Well, if you couldn't spell, you couldn't get into college or get a job.

ME: That's true, but what I meant was, why is it important for people to spell a word in a particular way? Why couldn't they spell "cat" k-a-t, for example?

MARK: But that wouldn't be the correct way to spell it.

ME: (with an effort to be whimsical) But how did people know what was the correct way to spell "cat"? How did they know in the beginning? Or take "stake" and "steak"—how



did people know one means a stick and the other means a piece of meat?

MARK: (now frustrated) Dad, are you challenging the dictionary?

ME: Look, I'm just raising some questions about this. Don't you ever ask your teachers questions like this about what you study?

MARK: If I ever asked my teachers questions like this, I'd drive them nuts! Teachers just want you to learn stuff, they don't want you to develop your mind!

Whether Mark truly thought teachers just want you to learn "stuff" and don't care if you learn to think, or whether he said what he did just because he was frustrated with my questions, I couldn't be sure. But as his father, I was taken aback and unsettled by his statement. During the previous two years, my wife and I had noticed that as Mark moved up through the elementary grades, he was having to memorize

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Tom Lickona is professor of education and director of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) at the State University of New York at Cortland, and author of Educating for Character *(Bantam Books, 1991).*

more and more information presented in a way—or at least tested for in a way—that was unrelated to any larger network of ideas or understandings.

And so I share Mr. Ulfik's concern about the quality of schooling in which character education takes place. He argues that to develop good character, we need good schools. We need schools that respect students by respecting their interests and that help young people become self-motivated learners. I very much agree.

Indeed, attention to the character of schools is a fundamental priority of the national Character Education Partnership (CEP), a coalition of organizations and individuals (on whose board I'm privileged to serve) that seeks to provide resources and standards for the character education movement. CEP's character education standards are set forth in the 1995 document, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." Here are those eleven principles, which we offer to schools and communities as guidelines for planning and assessing a character education initiative:

1. Character education promotes core ethical values—such as responsibility, honesty, caring, and respect for self and others—as the basis of good character.

2. "Character" must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.

3. Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.

4. The school must be a caring community.

5. To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action.

6. Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed.

7. Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation.

8. The school staff must become a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

9. Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students.

10. The school must recruit parents and community as full partners in the character-building effort.

11. Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

As of yet, there are no studies indicating the extent to which schools practicing "character education" are adhering to these eleven principles. But CEP's "Eleven Principles" document has been requested by and dissemi-

(continued on page 74)

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TORAT CHESED

Just a Moment

Of Children and the Spiritual Life

Bradley Shavit Artson

I'm finding God, these days, not in the Big Miracles, but in the little things. Rather than cultivating visions of seas splitting or of mountains leaping like lambs, I'm discovering the sacred in the constant interruptions and distractions of being a father. My children have given me the gift of the present.

This awareness of the holiness of the moment isn't my discovery alone. The Buddhists call it "mindfulness" and Jews call it "kavanah." More an attitude than a skill, when you focus on what you are doing or saying at a particular moment, you demonstrate kavanah. My two little children both constrain and cultivate a focus I didn't previously possess; they shape my kavanah.

God of Little Children

Prior to having children, my spiritual life was primarily one of sacred scriptures and prayer. On Shabbat, prior to going to synagogue, I would wake early so I could study Talmud for a few hours. When I prayed I would try to meditate or read some poetry first, to get in the right mood. The house was always appropriately quiet for contemplation or for study. Interruptions were rare.

Such an orientation bore rich fruit: my inner life was a bouquet of devotion and connection, what the mystics call *hitboddedut,* of uniting with the Holy One. Solitude and persistence are the requirements of an inner spirituality; productivity and accomplishment are its results.

Now, I look at that inner spirituality as through a veil; the quiet is gone, and I have no spare moments. I don't set my alarm anymore; instead, I am awakened (early) by my children. The day offers a series of hurdles: endless needs to be met, and those needs aren't my own. As a result, I don't have the time to sit down to read a book or to meditate on the marvel of life. Does that mean my spiritual life has atrophied, that I can't connect to the sacred? While my contemplative form of spirituality may be in abeyance, I've discovered—to my surprise—another spiritual form to take its place.

Instead of an inner listening, a meditative stance, mine is an engaged spirituality, a wrestling with little creatures who reveal themselves to be angels if I but show sufficient tenacity. If I hold on long enough, I become witness to the flowering of God's latest miracles: consciousness blossoms, speech finds a surer footing, character consolidates.

Answering the Call

My children call, and I must attend. I am obligated to my children, true enough. But the compulsion comes from a place deep within me. "*Nafsho keshurah be-nafsho,* His soul was bound up in his soul" says the Torah about father Jacob and his son, Joseph. My children are a part of me, and I am in exile without them. In their presence, surrounded by their noise, chaos, and demands, I feel grounded.

Which means that my spiritual life has been overturned completely. Silence is no longer haven; it is death. Israel is no longer a distant land, it is embodied as these two little forms. The ancient God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is now my God, the God of my Shira and my Jacob. My children call, and through them, I am called.

Kavanah of Kids

Before there were children, I bound my tefillin alone. Now, my four-year-olds scamper into their abba's study, take my tefillin bag and insist on "helping" me put them on. They then want to daven with me, shuckling back and forth as I do. After a few minutes, bored, they begin to play, while I, praying above them, no longer fight their energy, their chaos, and their din. I accept their uncontainable energy as God's bounty—limitless divine effusion of love, of health, and of life. My kavanah no longer focuses only on the words in the Siddur, but on the confluence of ancient words of praise and boundless childish enthusiasm. This is an encounter with God: raw, unrehearsed, imposing.

A popular American proverb holds that "life is what happens while we are busy making plans." It is in the distractions and interruptions that God is to be found. In the moment, open to what may come—bruised knees or child at play—we live. And our studies, our mitzvot, our communities, train us to be able to look to that moment and to see God in our children's smiles, to hear God in their squeals and shrieks. My children summon me to put down my plans, set aside my studies, and live. ❑

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PERSONAL STORY

The World of Our Fathers

Jim Petras



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK LEVITIN

My father's fruit, vegetable and fish store was in an overwhelmingly Jewish neighborhood. Most of the Jews were from Vilnius, and their first language was Yiddish, which my father spoke and I learned in a rudimentary way, as it was part of the job…just like all the Hadassah raffle tickets that we bought to maintain good will, a tax for the trade.The customers were divided between the "good" ones and the yentas: the good ones bought quality and quantity, without hassling too much on prices or sticking their fingers under the fish's gills, or squeezing tomatoes, or plucking the top row of bananas. The yentas gave you ulcers. Everything was, "How much," "Too much," or "Can you give me a bargain?" along with the litany of "They're too ripe…you should sell them at a discount," or "It's late, the holidays (Passover) are tomorrow, you'll have to throw the fish away. I'll take it off your hands if you give me a good price." Then there were the angels, the occasional refined Austrian or German Jews who didn't push forward on busy days and simply called out my father's name, and "Don't forget a nice piece of whitefish," while the Vilnius carp-eating crowd glanced back and some murmured, "Who can afford whitefish," "I only use a *shtickel* for flavor."

The sidewalks were crowded and the police would badger the store owners about the stacks of boxes on the sidewalk until they got their bag of vegetables or their Friday fillet of haddock—they were mostly Irish Catholics. Then there were the street peddlers who would park around the corner, underselling the store owners in a perennial war: the store owners calling on the police to keep them moving and the peddlers coming back. The street was rife with bookies and gambling: horses, dogs, numbers…. Jewish bookies working for Jewish gangsters protected by Irish policemen and sharing their take with Italian hitmen…an all-American city.

My father won in the competitive battles. Out of a dozen fish stores and peddlers of a decade earlier, he was one of the last two. But the demographics, as well as the emergence of the supermarkets, were against him. The older Jews with the big families that ate fish two or three times a week were dying off; their children had smaller families, moved to the suburbs, ate more beef, and didn't know the difference between fish caught overnight and week old "fresh" fish in the supermarkets that was a dime a pound cheaper. Anyway, they were less religious: they ate lobsters and shellfish instead of fish.

So what was better: the tough old ladies with varicose veins in their legs, with both hands full of stuffed shopping bags buying and appreciating your best, but causing you to eat your heart out, or the new bleach blondes from the upscale suburbs buying minimal amounts of cut fillets and bottled gefilte fish? My father learned to live with the former, but he was going out of business because of the latter.

Julius worked occasionally for my father during the rush of the Jewish holidays. He was a Vilnius man, illiterate but a great storyteller, a Communist who worked in a warehouse nights, and occasionally sold a dozen or so cans of crab meat to my father ("the carton broke open, the stores wouldn't take it").

I never knew if the stories he told were true, but they were politically inspirational.

"The Bishop with the long beard and the big stomach with the gold diamond ring would stand and tell the workers to accept their fate…and one day in the midst of a period of famine, a worker stood up and yelled, 'We don't want pie in the sky, we want it now,' and turned all the workers against him."

Julius was a peculiar Communist. Once he claimed to have attended a meeting where Trotsky was speaking to a mass gathering and Julius was there with him, organizing the revolution. Apart from the historic battles with Capitalism, he was constantly feuding with his neighbors who cut across his property…. So, he finally invested in a ten-foot fence.

The mornings were times of artistry. The fish shimmering under the ice, the tomatoes in pyramids, the stocks of greens, fresh and wet, the red onions hanging from the wall.

In the winter, during slow time, some retirees would

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James Petras is a professor of Sociology at State University of New York at Binghamton and co-author of Neo-Liberalism and Class Conflict in Latin America *(MacMillan Press).*

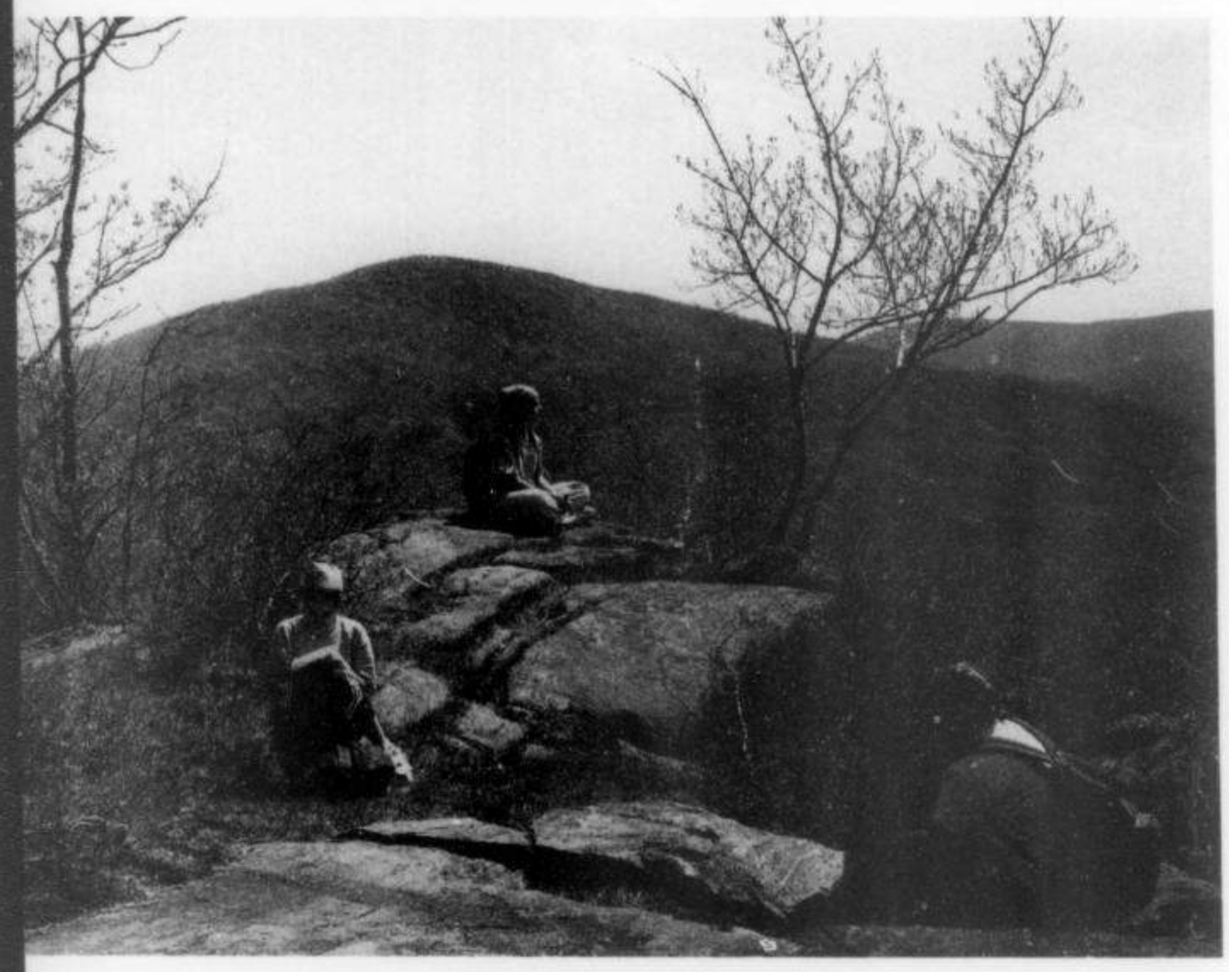
JUDAISM

To Open Our Eyes

Jewish Environmental Education

Shamu Fenyvesi

"We *pokeah ivrimed* it!" the children shouted in unison, pointing at a bright yellow shelf mushroom on a decaying stump. As we wound our way out of the swamp at the edge of the pond, I could see two students waving their arms and gesturing enthusiastically, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. By now, impatient with my slowness to comprehend, they repeated, "We *pokeah ivrimed* it!" and pointed with pride at the fungus they had discovered. Eventually I was able to decode the imaginative combination of Hebrew prayer and English verb ending, and a smile spread across my face.



The two sixth graders were recalling an activity we had done two days earlier, in which students were challenged to bring to life the words of the morning prayer *Pokeah Ivrim*: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who opens the eyes of the blind."

This use of the prayer, developed by Michal Smart, refers not to physical blindness, but to the distractions and prejudices, and to the lack of faith and imagination, which confine and cloud our perceptions of the surrounding world. In "*Pokeah Ivrim,*" a student leads a partner with closed eyes around a natural area. When the guiding student sees something he or she wants to share—the intricate pattern of veins in a fallen leaf, the sinewy trunk of a young ironwood, or deer tracks in the snow—the "blind" partner is invited to open his or her eyes and recite the blessing.

The urban and suburban sixth graders I was teaching at the Teva Learning Center had truly learned the meaning of this blessing. Over the course of four days together, they had honored much else besides the yellow fungus with these traditional words of graditude and awe.

Weaving together a commitment to Judaism and a love for the earth is the sustaining purpose of Jewish environmental education. Programs such as the Teva Learning Center and Yitziah: Jewish Wilderness Journeys have taken hundreds of Jews, young and old, observant and secular, into the forests to explore our relationship with the land. There are Green Shalom committees in synagogues, Israel study programs which focus on environmental issues, and two national Jewish environmental organizations—Shomrei Adamah: Keepers of the Earth and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL). The holiday of Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of the Trees, has become a ritual rallying point for Jews drawn to ecology.

I do not believe the growing interest in these activities represents merely the need for novel Jewish educational programming, nor do I think a Jewish nature hike is Jewish due solely to the heritage of those who wear the boots.

As an environmentalist, I have come to believe that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values, and the challenges of ecological healing demand both scientific know-how and religious imagination. Unless we can address the deeply religious questions which lie at the foundation of ecological issues, the fate of clean water and grizzly bears is forever threatened. What kind of beings are we? What do we value? What is the right way to live? How are we connected physically and spiritually to those with hooves, claws, wings, and tentacles? The unique views of various cultures—be they Celtic, Hopi, or Jewish—can inspire us to restore our ancestral spiritual connections to the land.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TEVA LEARNING CENTER STAFF

Shamu Fenyvesi has previously published in Orion *magazine,* Washington Jewish Week, *and* Response, *and has two essays forthcoming in the anthology* Ecology and the Jewish Spirit. *He teaches environmental studies and Judaism and ecology.*



Though the use of Native American perspectives is common in many environmental circles, as a Jew I search my inherited tradition for guidance. I was not able to embrace Judaism as an adult before I had explored its traditional stories and lessons about the land. How did my religiously observant farmer forebearers relate to their small piece of sandy land on Hungary's Great Plain? What was the relationship between the Israelites and the desert, between Jews and the land of Israel? In what ways does the ritual of blessing or the law of kashrut shape our daily lives from an ecological perspective?

Exploring with children and adults the connection between text and landscape, between the ethics of our forebearers and modern dilemmas, has convinced me of both the potential and the necessity of Jewish ecological revival. The importance of cultivating a sense of wonder and gratitude, of a belief in the interdependence of all life, and of an ethical code that emphasizes responsibility and restraint, are core concepts that Judaism and the environmental movement share. From our clay-bound origins in the Garden of Eden to the journey in the desert Wilderness, from the simple act of blessing bread to the legal debates of the Talmud, our tradition has great power to heal our relationship with the earth.

Jewish environmental education programs have several ambitious goals: to restore Jewish ecological wisdom, to bridge science and religious studies, to end Jewish alienation from the land, to cultivate a Jewish sense of place in North America, and, finally, to live up to the Edenic challenge of becoming tillers and protectors of the earth. The first step is developing the sense of awareness our tradition of blessings and miracles demands: that we pay keen attention to our surroundings and be willing to experience awe.

One of the rewards I experience working with children in the outdoors is sharing in their inspired perception of the world. They are not yet tainted by the compulsively rational adult world. In response to three days of hiking and learning at Teva, a Manhattan fifth grader wrote, "I never knew that God created so many beautiful things without motors." To me, this child's realization echoes Jacob's statement of awe when he awoke from his dream of angels and ladders: "God was in this place and I did not know it." Whether the catalyst is a dream or a walk in the forest, the insight is the same. The world—even our immediate surroundings—is more wondrous and sacred than we ever imagined.

To help us cultivate a sense of awe even in the most mundane contexts, we have the tradition of blessings. This most commonplace form of Jewish observance guides us toward attentiveness and gratitude. "Blessed are You, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." In reciting the blessing over the bread, we become aware of the miracle which transforms the grass seed—through the generosity of rain and the ingenuity of the human hand—into the staff of life. The simple phrase links us to earth, seed, rain, sun, and divine creative force. As we chant the blessing over the bread, we evoke our own creation from the red soil of Eden. We too were brought forth from the earth. After the blessing, we eat our bread with the humility and appreciation it deserves.

Blessings teach interdependence. According to the Talmud, someone who fails to say a blessing is considered a thief, someone who has "misappropriated sacred property." The parallel ecological credo is "there is no such thing as a free lunch."

But not all of Creation inspires a blessing. How are we to respond to those strange or threatening aspects of the natural world which may elicit a curse from sixth graders and adults alike? Among the lesser known traditional blessings (including those for hearing thunder, seeing lightning, and shooting stars), I like to teach students the blessing said upon seeing exceptionally odd people or creatures, "Blessed are You, King of the universe, who makes creatures different." When coming upon a slug or beetle, this blessing helps to guide us from aversion to admiration—from "gross!" to "wow!" What better way to celebrate the diversity of life, challenge our narrow concept of value, and expand our perception of beauty.

Raised in a culture that fears the non-Bambiesque forms of nature—wolves, slime molds, and insects—many of us are quick to stomp on them or flee. We offer seals and spotted owls our compassion as well as ethical and political commitment. But what about snails and beetles? Perhaps our aversions can be tamed by a rabbinic teaching: "Even those species which you may consider superfluous—like the flea or scorpion—have a purpose in God's Creation." One of the great lessons of modern day ecology is that all creatures have their place in an interdependent whole, and our love for whales and distaste for fungi have nothing to do with their value or ecological importance.

As inheritors of a rich tradition of ethics and laws, it is our job to bring the generations of commentary to bear on the dilemmas of life in the twentieth century. In the dining room at the Teva Learning Center, students are challenged to become *Baalei bal Tashchit*—masters of the law of not wasting. What does this law—derived originally from a biblical prohibition on cutting down fruit trees in time of war, but later expanded to include all kinds of wanton waste and destruction—tell us about the food we leave on



our plate, or the disposable kiddush cups at synagogue, or the amount of packaging in the products we choose? Students at Teva are fanatical about keeping their food waste and discarded napkins to an absolute minimum, and there is thunderous applause when it is announced that today's waste is less than yesterday's.

In the rocky southern Berkshire Mountains which serve as Teva's fall classroom, there is a place that the instructors have named "*gilgul* gulch." The name serves as a reminder that the ecological concept of nutrient cycling has its spiritual cousin in the kabbalistic belief of "*gilgul neshamot,*" the transmigration of souls. The recycling of soils and souls reminds us that uniquely independent existence and linear time are illusions. Yes, we all stood at Sinai.

I believe that there is great potential in fusing the disciplined curiosity and factual complexity of science with the powerful imagination and ethical depth of religion. Rather than memorizing the species name for a tree, students smell a twig, recite the appropriate blessing, explore connections between the mushroom and the tree, and learn about uses for the bark and wood. Although at Teva we teach about food chains, the demand for lumber, and nutrient cycles, we also evoke burning bushes and the mystical pantheism of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav and Rav Kook.

Tradition tells us that the burning bush was a common thorny bramble, which teaches that revelation can happen anywhere, through any medium. At that bush in the desert, God said to Moses "the place where you stand is holy ground" to remind us that every place where we seek God is sacred. You do not need acres of pristine forest to experience awe or a sense of connectedness. The cackle of a junkyard crow, the smell of bread, or a passage from the liturgy, has the power to connect us to the earth. The tabernacle was a portable structure and any expanse of earth and sky can serve as a *beit knesset.*

In this sense "Teva" is a misnamed program. "Teva" is the modern Hebrew word for nature. In Biblical Hebrew there is no such word for nature; our ancestors did not feel the sense of separation between the human and the natural environment that we feel. Laws having to do with the treatment of animals and the soil are listed along with rules guiding relations within the human community. The wilderness was our people's first home.

The Yitziah program was named for the transformative potential of group wilderness travel that our ancestors experienced in the sand dunes and high peaks of Sinai. If we leave our backyards to take journeys into the distant wilderness, it is only to learn more about ourselves and our homes. In the summer, I lead a wilderness trip in the deserts and mountains of the Southwest. Through readings, discussions, and ritual, we trace parallels between our journey and our ancestors' exodus from Egypt. Then and now, the wilderness provides both the stubborn challenges and the boundless potential necessary for building community and personal growth, leadership, and introspection.

As part of a conversation on Jewish coming-of-age in America, the group uses a pristine canyon stream in the Utah desert as a mikveh. How could these Jewish travelers ignore the latent power of *mayim hayyim,* living waters, in the wilderness? Jewish rituals mix with American soil: a Kiddush Lavana service (held out-of-doors by Talmudic requirement) is lit by wildcrafted birch torches. A Jewish farmer practices a modern day *payeh*—the Biblical practice of leaving the corners of the field for the poor—by donating portions of his harvest to the homeless. And the denuded slopes of the Washington Cascades are reforested as part of a Tu B'Shevat celebration.

However, as Jewish bioregionalists living in the Diaspora, we live double lives; even as we attempt to sink our roots and become acquainted with the American landscape, we pray and celebrate by the seasons and landscapes of Israel. When we evoke the Holy Land in prayer, story, and ritual, we should remember the Moriah plant that gives us the shape of our menorah as well as the almond blossoms that mark the time of Tu B'Shevat. The barren peaks of Moriah, Sinai, and Nebo beckoned our forbearers on their quest for spiritual ascension. The desert's two faces of stillness and turbulence invited the "soft murmuring" voice that Elijah heard while he sat in the cave at Horeb, and the whirlwind of Job's revelation. Our ancestors could imagine no greater abundance than the multitude of stars in the vast desert skies. From them we have learned that our paradise, both in this life and the next, is a garden which we are to till and tend. ❑

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JUDAISM

Cultivating Oneness

Charles Burack



ILLUSTRATION BY OENONE TERRILL

A few years ago, I felt an overwhelming need to transform my life so that the experience of mystical unity would occur more regularly and have a greater influence on the way I lived. I knew I could not create a sacred encounter—it is always a gift, an act of grace—but I also knew, having studied the writings of prophets, saints, and sages, that I could remove the barriers to spiritual awareness and create conditions conducive to divine connection.

Orthodox practice was no longer a viable path for me: I had rejected orthodoxy when I left rabbinical school twenty years ago. I could not accept the narrow beliefs, rigid rites, and discrimination against women, non-Jews and non-traditional Jews. I needed to develop a new set of spiritual practices that would facilitate my attunement to the Source of Life.

I was motivated as much by a deep hunger to experience the fulfillment and joy of spiritual union as by a real urgency to diminish bouts of loneliness and alienation. I wanted to feel more at home in the universe and in myself. I wanted to be more connected to all beings and to my own soul. And I wanted these connections to be based on deep love, understanding and acceptance.

Through a variety of practices—some modifications of traditional prayers, blessings and rituals, and some spontaneous creations—I have come to understand unity as a permanent reality which we only occasionally become aware of. *We are not separate from divinity but are of it.* The Supreme One pervades and encompasses all beings; nothing exists outside the Absolute All. The fundamental theological mistake is, I believe, to divide divinity from the world, to separate Creator from creation. Even the idea of "I and Thou"—an idea which I cherished in my youth—posits a gap, a split, a non-identity, between deity and cosmos. Whenever we assume or insist on separation, we create an enduring sense of spiritual alienation.

I would like to share a few of the practices—transformative techniques—which have helped to solidify my experience of essential unity. Since childhood, I have been attracted to the power and simplicity of the Shema. This central Jewish prayer proclaims the unity of God: *Hear, O Israel,* YHVH *is our God,* YHVH *is one.* Kabbalists understand YHVH as the primal unpronounceable name of God that signifies the eternal beauty (*tipheret*) and compassion (*rachamim*) at the heart of existence. Traditionally, we pronounce YHVH as Adonai, our Lord. As I have come to experience the world as a manifestation of the Infinite, and not as separate from the Great Breath, the Shema has taken on a different meaning and feeling for me. I no longer pray that a transcendent deity is one but that all is one: heaven and earth and beyond are all of one essence, one source, one seed.

During my daily walks in the Oakland hills, I often sing or chant the first verse of the Shema. Initially, I started with a familiar melody, which I repeated silently, softly, or loudly depending on where I was. As I chanted the verse over and over again it began to act like a mantra and for moments I would feel completely absorbed in the chanting. In those moments, the chant became my fundamental reality: it seemed to express itself through me, rather than I through it; it had a life of its own, and my life was an expression of its life.

Soon I noticed an impulse to move beyond traditional melodies. New melodies would spontaneously arise and I would allow them to flow through me. These melodies were often quite rudimentary—I am not musically gifted—but felt wonderfully uplifting or profoundly grounding. They reflected as well as created powerful transformations in my consciousness. After a while, I came to understand them as the Great Song expressing itself in a new modulation, a new key.

The sounds of the Hebrew words increasingly developed a pull over me. I would chant the words very slowly, letting each syllable reverberate in my body, feeling each resonate in my belly, chest, throat, mouth and forehead. It was as if my upper chakras had become the openings of a flute or the strings of a wind harp.

At times, I would begin chanting "Om" or "Shalom" because the "Om" sound reverberates lower and more profoundly in my body than do the syllables of the Shema, and

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Charles Burack teaches writing and literature at St. Mary's College of California and is founding director of the Center for Sacred Arts in Oakland. He recently received his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

also because "om" is the sound that Hindus and Buddhists repeat to access the fundamental unity of reality. It was important for me to engage my whole being, to permit my individual oneness to merge or dissolve into the Supreme Oneness. And it was also important to let other religious expressions of unity enter into my experience.

A time came when I felt an inner pressure to change the words of the Shema. At first I resisted this impulse because it seemed sacrilegious or disrespectful to alter the biblical words. But I began to sense that the energy behind the words pressed for a larger audience and a broader meaning. I began to feel that the One was always expressing itself to all peoples and to all beings, and in all ways: not only the Jews needed to hear of Unity; and not only the sense of hearing needed to be involved in experiencing Oneness. So I allowed the words—sometimes Hebrew, sometimes English, sometimes other languages—to spontaneously transform: *Hear, O peoples, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one. See, O men and women, Yah is our God, Yah is one. Feel, O children, Yah is our Divinity, Yah is one. Taste, O animals, Allah is our Creator, Allah is one. Sense, O trees, Allah is our Source, Allah is one. Know, O earth, God is our Ruler, God is one. Experience, O beings, Brahman is our Maker, Brahman is one.*

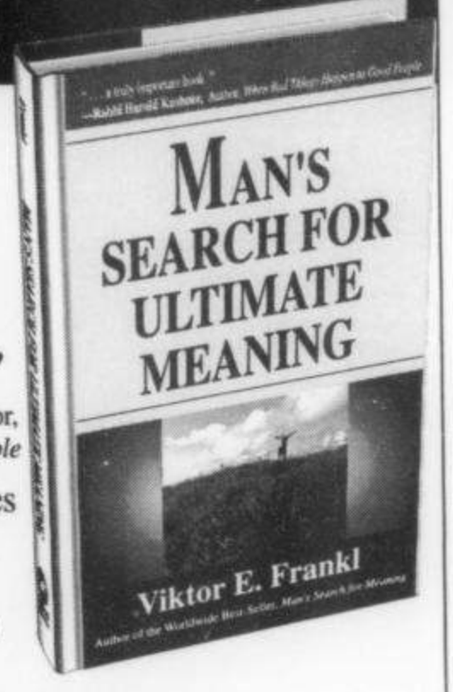
Part of my inspiration for addressing the various creatures came from my understanding of the Hindu expression "Thou art that" (*tat tvam asi*). Because every being is a part or expression of the One, each belongs to each, each is each. To deepen this awareness of identity, I began to address creatures that came to my attention with the silent statement "I am you." It could be a bird, a twig, a curb, a car, a crack in the sidewalk, a house, another person. Each time I allowed myself to meditate on, become one with, the being in my view. Then, I would ask myself how I was a bird or a car or the sidewalk. A bird manifested in me as the flight of my thoughts and feelings, the quickness of my responses, the soaring of my aspirations, the panoramic perspective of my highest moments, the temerity of my weak times, the feathery softness of the hair on my forearm. A car manifested in me as the metallic shell that sometimes hardens around me when I am afraid or angry. I discovered that I really did possess qualities of every being I met.

Sometimes, the creatures would seem to speak to me. It was always an inner voice—a voice in me inspired by the creature's presence. Many of the phrases formed epigrams or haikus. A few felt like short lyric poems. Unfortunately, I can no longer recall the exact words. All I can do is half-remember, half-create them: as I approached a brilliant yellow rose and said "I am you," I heard an inner voice say, "I greet the sun with flaming petals." And as I met a blade of grass, it seemed to say, "My tongue turns all to green glory." When I encountered a wooden fence, it said, "Boundaries are necessary too." And when I silently greeted passersby with "I am you," they usually offered a smile or a "hi" or a friendly look.

Most of these encounters were wondrously satisfying and joyous. But not all. Crossing the street on the way back to my apartment, I saw a man ahead of me crossing in the same direction and silently said to him, "I am you." Suddenly, he seemed to explode: he whirled around, took a wild swing at my head and cursed me profusely, his eyes barely focused. Shocked but alert, I instinctively stepped back, raised my fists, and shouted, "Stay back; don't touch me." In an instant, the intensity of his delirium seemed to diffuse and he immediately spun around and continued on across the street, mumbling to himself. I waited for a few seconds and then walked on. He proceeded north, while I turned westward.

My heart was still pounding when I heard an inner voice say, "This too is you; even the one who denies his connection is you." The voice seemed to break up my fear and I began to smile inwardly. I acknowledged to myself that my experience of oneness did not necessarily produce like experiences in others and that opposition and conflict too were part, a great part, of the unity. Perhaps the man had felt a streak of excessive cheerfulness or ease in my sense of oneness and was telling me so. Or perhaps my feeling of unity reminded him too much of his own sense of painful separation and alienation. Maybe I threatened to dissolve the psychic walls that he needed to survive. Or maybe I had simply gotten too close to him and had invaded his sphere of safety. Whatever the situation, I felt sure that the Unity, the Supreme Love, was vast enough to encompass every division, every difference, everything. ❑

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Call to Action

John Roark and Kevin Grumbach

Each day in the United States, patients and their caregivers suffer the indecencies of a health care system that is selling it soul to Wall Street.

- An eighty year old widow is forced out of the hospital before she has adequately recuperated from a hip fracture. She has no one at home to care for her.
- A physician refers a forty-five year old man who is terminally ill from liver disease for a life-saving transplant. The patient and physician receive a form letter from an administrator in the patient's managed care plan, denying authorization for the transplant.
- A forty year old jogger who has injured her knee is being evaluated by a physician. The physician's managed care contract is structured such that he will make more money at the end of the year by saving the health plan expenses for MRI scans and referrals to orthopedic specialists. The patient is worried whether she can still trust the physician to act in her best interest. The physician himself feels that his professionalism is being threatened by ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest.
- A family that has been seeing the same, trusted family physician for twenty years suddenly finds that their employer has changed managed care health plans. The new plan does not include their family physician as a "participating provider" and the family will be forced to switch to a new physician. Their old physician tells the family that she tried to join the new plan but was told they already have enough family physicians.
- A sixty year old man has recently become uninsured as a result of downsizing at his computer firm. He no longer can afford to fill his prescriptions for high blood pressure, and two years later suffers a stroke from uncontrolled hypertension.

This is the new face of American medicine. It is a face that is putting concern for profits ahead of care for patients, replacing trusting relationships between patients and caregivers with the bottom-line ethos of impersonal corporations, and becoming preoccupied with quick returns to shareholders rather than long-term investment in the health of all Americans.

The public, physicians, and other health professionals must take action now to prevent further violation of the core values of health care. We are joining a Call to Action to defend health care. The Call to Action is a growing movement among physicians and other health professionals who feel compelled to take a stand, and go on public record in opposition to health care becoming captive to the self-serving interests of large, profiteering corporations.

The fundamental question is: To whom should a nation's health care system be accountable—patients and the public, or shareholders and corporate boards? At this point in history, the answer to this question is leaning tragically toward the latter. Without meaningful public input, we in the United States have been turned over to a market driven, for-profit system of health care. When Americans are ill under this system, the decision-making process concerning their care is more accountable to profit-driven shareholders than to any medical standard.

Public resources of enormous worth—nonprofit hospitals and home health agencies—built over decades by taxes, charity, and devoted volunteers are being taken over by companies concerned more with making money than with patient care. Communities find vital services closed by remote executives; savings are committed not to pressing health needs, but to shareholders' profits. Not-for-profit institutions, forced to compete, must also curtail such unprofitable activities as research, teaching, and charity.

Fraud and related white collar crime is pervasive. In only one of the most recent scandals, Columbia HCA, the largest for-profit hospital chain and ninth largest employer in the nation, faces federal indictments for billion-dollar fraudulent billing schemes. The company recently has been convicted and fined 6.5 million dollars for bribery and making illegal payments. Several pension funds as well as numerous whistle blowers have filed suits against the company.

Concurrently, the numbers of uninsured continue to increase, while safety-net public hospitals close or cut back services and public health programs continue to deteriorate. Even many with insurance find coverage inadequate when they are most in need. Care or payment are too often denied for emergencies or expensive illnesses. The sick are denied appropriate nursing care, rushed out of hospital beds, and hurried through office visits. Increasingly, patient

John Roark and Kevin Grumbach are practicing physicians in the San Francisco Bay Area and board members of the California Physicians' Alliance, an affiliate of Physicians for a National Health Program.

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comfort, the special needs of the elderly, infirm, or disabled are ignored if they conflict with the demand for profit.

The central question is whether we as a nation and society wish to have health care handled as a market commodity or a public good. Will the system be accountable to patients and the public or to profit-oriented investors? We believe that the current system of perverse accountability violates core values held by the vast majority of our people.

The time is ripe for a national dialogue concerning this issue. Dr. Bernard Lown, the founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility, and others working in Massachusetts have issued a "Call to Action" to defend health care. (see sidebar for summary of principles contained in the "Call to Action") The response to this document in the medical and nursing communities around the country has been tremendous. It calls for a moratorium on for-profit takeovers of hospitals, insurance plans, HMOs, physicians' practices and other health care institutions. Meetings of health professionals open to the public are scheduled to convene around the country on the day prior to publication of the document on December 3, 1997. These meetings will be designed to call the public's attention to the deterioration of health care and initiate discussion of possible routes to a future of health care guided by science and compassion, rather than greed.

If we do not act now to defend our values, those who would benefit from their violation will continue to do immeasurable damage to our society. Specific actions you can take include writing or visiting your legislators and contacting your state's attorney general to request a moratorium on for-profit takeovers. On December 2nd, consider meeting with friends and colleagues in your home or workplace to discuss this issue, how it affects you and your local community, and what actions you might be able to take locally. Join your voice in this urgent public outcry. ❑

Call to Action: Principles

1. Medicine and nursing must not be diverted from their primary tasks: the relief of suffering, the prevention and treatment of illness, and the promotion of health. The efficient deployment of resources is critical, but must not detract from these goals.
2. Pursuit of corporate profit and personal fortune has no place in care giving.
3. Potent financial incentives that reward overcare or undercare weaken doctor-patient and nurse-patient bonds, and should be prohibited.
4. A patient's right to a physician, nurse or other health care professional of choice must not be curtailed.
5. Access to health care must be the right of all.

For more information contact: the California Physicians' Alliance, Tel: (510) 832-7134, E-mail: capa@ips.net.

Chanukah

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• The Ritual •

Each night of Chanukah we light candles, starting with the shamas (used to light the others) and one candle, and then adding one additional candle each night for a total of eight nights. The tradition is to sing, dance, and rejoice in our liberation and our freedom.

THE TRADITIONAL BLESSINGS OVER THE CANDLES:

• *All nights:* •

1. Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu, lehadleek ner, shel chanukah.

(Blessed are you, the force that rules all of existence, who sanctifies us by giving us a way of life directed by holy commandments and commanded us to light the lights of Chanukah.)

2. Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, she'asah nisim la'avoteynu, bayamim hahem, bazman hazeh.

(Blessed are you, the force that rules the universe, who made possible miracles for our ancestors, in those days, and also makes the same possible for us in our own times.)

• *Add on the first night:* •

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, shehechiyanu, vekee-imanu, veheeg-iyanu, lazman hazeh.

(Blessed are you, the force that rules the universe, who has kept us in life, made us flourish, and made it possible for us to reach this happy occasion.)

• The Story •

(The non-mythologized version you may never have heard)

When King Cyrus of Persia allowed the remnants of the ancient tribes of Judah and Benjamin to return from the exile imposed upon them by Babylonian conquerors in the seventh century before the common era (B.C.E.), they formed the kingdom of Judea. As part of the Persian Empire, and later as part of the empire of Alexander the Great, Judea had relative autonomy to shape its own internal religious life.

When Alexander died at the end of the fourth century B.C.E., his empire split into three rival factions, and Judea was caught between two of them: the Seleucids, centered in Syria, and the Ptolemies, centered in Egypt. For the next hundred-fifty years, these two kingdoms warred and each sought to incorporate Judea as part of its empire.

Although the battle was largely military, there was an important ideological dimension. Alexander had introduced the Jews to Hellenistic Greek culture—its philosophy, its literature, and its impressive technology and power. Forcibly dragged into the larger Mediterranean world, many Jews could see that "the real world" was dominated by wealth and power. Some Jews, primarily those who lived in and around the larger cities, saw an opportunity to join this larger world by becoming merchants and traders, or by establishing political and economic relationships with others in the Hellenistic empire. It was apparent to these Jews that their tribal religion would have little meaning to those who had conquered the world. The religion of their fathers seemed irrelevant in a world reshaped by the "modern" realities of science; they were drawn by the allure of a society that worshiped the body and saw reality in terms of what could be tasted, touched, and directly experienced by the senses.

These Jewish Hellenizers saw no point in resisting Greek rule. Their goal was to live in peace with the powers that ran the world. They could benefit from the connection to the expanding trade of the Hellenistic world. On the other hand, the vast majority of the Jewish people were small, independent farmers, who lived on the land and brought its produce to Jerusalem three times each year to celebrate their hard-won freedom from slavery. They bore the brunt of the oppressive taxes imposed first by the Greeks, and then, alternately, by Seleucids and Ptolemies. These Jews resented foreign rule and detested the city-dwelling elites who seemed to be culling favor with the Hellenistic conquerors, imitating their ways, abandoning the religion of the past, and becoming worshippers at the shrine of political and cultural "reality."

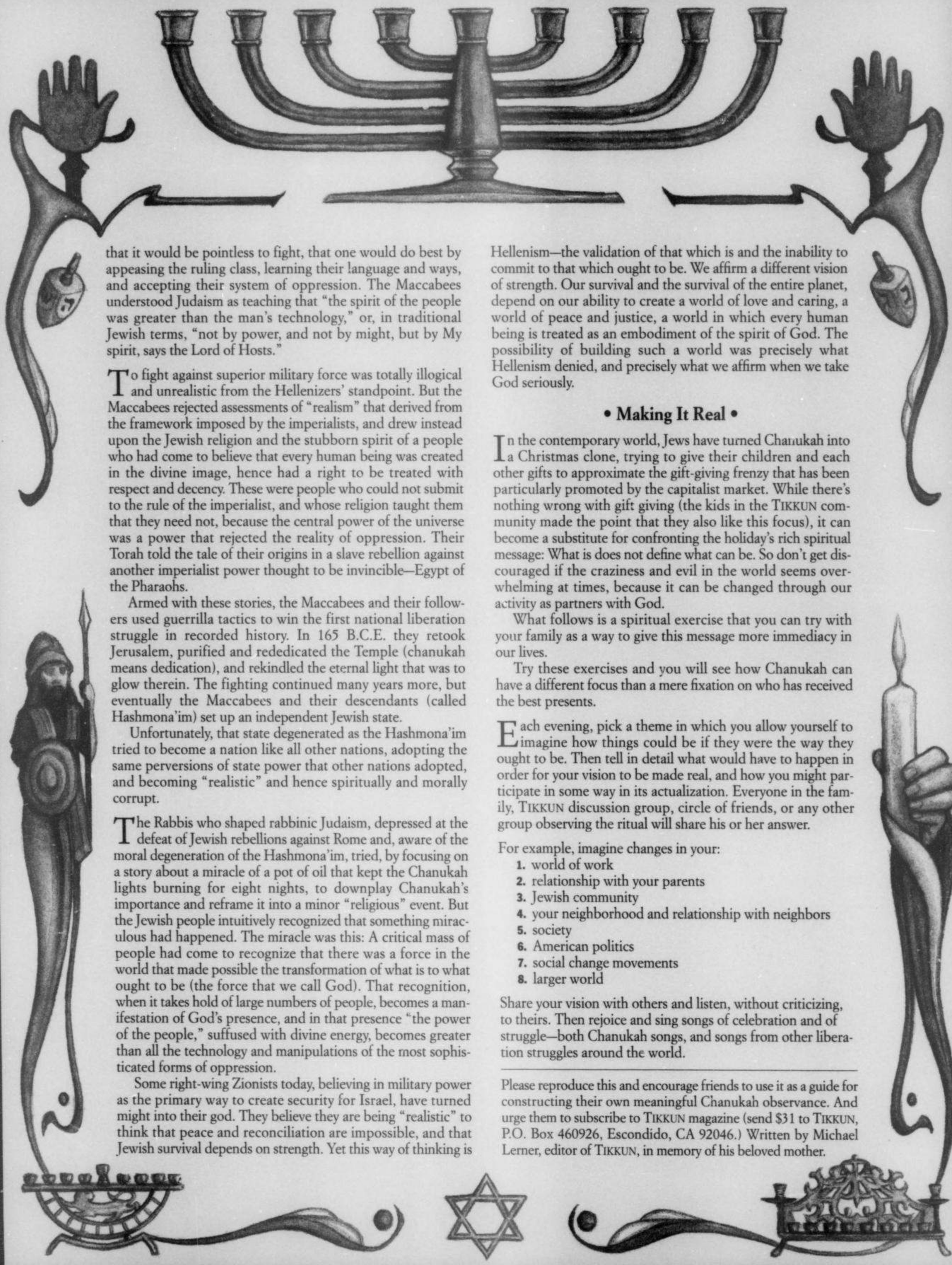
Judea's plight worsened considerably in the early part of the second century with the ascendence to the throne of the Seleucid Antiochus IV. Claiming that he wanted to "protect" Judea from the Ptolemies, Antiochus invaded Judea and marched toward Egypt, where his armies were defeated. He turned back to Judea and attempted to impose Hellenistic culture by force. He ordered the Temple in Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Greek gods and forbade the practice of circumcision, kashrut, and observance of the Sabbath.

To the already assimilated elites of the city, the new rules were insensitive, but did not constitute a major crisis. Perhaps Antiochus was a boor, but the culture he represented was "happening," while the Jewish religion he forbade was a remnant of the past.

Yet many of the people in the countryside, burdened by Seleucid taxes that expropriated more of their wealth, found the Hellenists' narcissistic fascination with their own power repugnant. The essence of their now-banned religion was its insistence that there was a single God governing the universe who made possible freedom from oppression. It was in the name of that God that they joined a rebellion against the Seleucids under the leadership of a country priest named Mattathais and his five sons (of whom Judah became the most famous, known as "the hammer" or Maccabee).

These Maccabees, as they came to be known, rejected the notion, shared by their contemporary Jewish establishment,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RUSS ANDO



that it would be pointless to fight, that one would do best by appeasing the ruling class, learning their language and ways, and accepting their system of oppression. The Maccabees understood Judaism as teaching that "the spirit of the people was greater than the man's technology," or, in traditional Jewish terms, "not by power, and not by might, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

To fight against superior military force was totally illogical and unrealistic from the Hellenizers' standpoint. But the Maccabees rejected assessments of "realism" that derived from the framework imposed by the imperialists, and drew instead upon the Jewish religion and the stubborn spirit of a people who had come to believe that every human being was created in the divine image, hence had a right to be treated with respect and decency. These were people who could not submit to the rule of the imperialist, and whose religion taught them that they need not, because the central power of the universe was a power that rejected the reality of oppression. Their Torah told the tale of their origins in a slave rebellion against another imperialist power thought to be invincible—Egypt of the Pharaohs.

Armed with these stories, the Maccabees and their followers used guerrilla tactics to win the first national liberation struggle in recorded history. In 165 B.C.E. they retook Jerusalem, purified and rededicated the Temple (chanukah means dedication), and rekindled the eternal light that was to glow therein. The fighting continued many years more, but eventually the Maccabees and their descendants (called Hashmona'im) set up an independent Jewish state.

Unfortunately, that state degenerated as the Hashmona'im tried to become a nation like all other nations, adopting the same perversions of state power that other nations adopted, and becoming "realistic" and hence spiritually and morally corrupt.

The Rabbis who shaped rabbinic Judaism, depressed at the defeat of Jewish rebellions against Rome and, aware of the moral degeneration of the Hashmona'im, tried, by focusing on a story about a miracle of a pot of oil that kept the Chanukah lights burning for eight nights, to downplay Chanukah's importance and reframe it into a minor "religious" event. But the Jewish people intuitively recognized that something miraculous had happened. The miracle was this: A critical mass of people had come to recognize that there was a force in the world that made possible the transformation of what is to what ought to be (the force that we call God). That recognition, when it takes hold of large numbers of people, becomes a manifestation of God's presence, and in that presence "the power of the people," suffused with divine energy, becomes greater than all the technology and manipulations of the most sophisticated forms of oppression.

Some right-wing Zionists today, believing in military power as the primary way to create security for Israel, have turned might into their god. They believe they are being "realistic" to think that peace and reconciliation are impossible, and that Jewish survival depends on strength. Yet this way of thinking is Hellenism—the validation of that which is and the inability to commit to that which ought to be. We affirm a different vision of strength. Our survival and the survival of the entire planet, depend on our ability to create a world of love and caring, a world of peace and justice, a world in which every human being is treated as an embodiment of the spirit of God. The possibility of building such a world was precisely what Hellenism denied, and precisely what we affirm when we take God seriously.

• Making It Real •

In the contemporary world, Jews have turned Chanukah into a Christmas clone, trying to give their children and each other gifts to approximate the gift-giving frenzy that has been particularly promoted by the capitalist market. While there's nothing wrong with gift giving (the kids in the TIKKUN community made the point that they also like this focus), it can become a substitute for confronting the holiday's rich spiritual message: What is does not define what can be. So don't get discouraged if the craziness and evil in the world seems overwhelming at times, because it can be changed through our activity as partners with God.

What follows is a spiritual exercise that you can try with your family as a way to give this message more immediacy in our lives.

Try these exercises and you will see how Chanukah can have a different focus than a mere fixation on who has received the best presents.

Each evening, pick a theme in which you allow yourself to imagine how things could be if they were the way they ought to be. Then tell in detail what would have to happen in order for your vision to be made real, and how you might participate in some way in its actualization. Everyone in the family, TIKKUN discussion group, circle of friends, or any other group observing the ritual will share his or her answer.

For example, imagine changes in your:

1. world of work
2. relationship with your parents
3. Jewish community
4. your neighborhood and relationship with neighbors
5. society
6. American politics
7. social change movements
8. larger world

Share your vision with others and listen, without criticizing, to theirs. Then rejoice and sing songs of celebration and of struggle—both Chanukah songs, and songs from other liberation struggles around the world.

Please reproduce this and encourage friends to use it as a guide for constructing their own meaningful Chanukah observance. And urge them to subscribe to TIKKUN magazine (send $31 to TIKKUN, P.O. Box 460926, Escondido, CA 92046.) Written by Michael Lerner, editor of TIKKUN, in memory of his beloved mother.

CHANUKAH MUSIC

Sounds of Renewal

Ya'acov Gabriel

As Chanukah approaches, I'd like to turn you on to a couple of oddball recordings you might want to share with the kids in your life. Dean Friedman had several pop records out in the 1970s on Columbia Records and is still a minor cult favorite in England. One of his more obscure projects is called "A Million Matzoh Balls" (Dean Friedman Productions, P.O. Box 1286, Peekskill, NY 10566), a group of songs he wrote for his kids and their Hebrew School.

These infectious and goofy songs are slyly irreverent, and they make you re-think the Jewish Holidays.

Friedman's album is manic, wild-eyed, under-produced, and thoroughly delightful. Dean's voice is higher than high, but it's not shrill or unpleasant. Like the writings of Shel Silverstein and Jimmy Buffet, these infectious and goofy songs are slyly irreverent, and they make you re-think the Jewish Holidays. In that way, they are renewing. "The Book of Life," for example, is about the New Year's theme of wanting to be given a happy Fate. By making it sound like Elvis' "Heartbreak Hotel," Dean takes some of the edge off the vision while teaching its essence. The three Chanukah songs are particularly charming, and it sounds like his local Peekskill shul kids are having a ball. If you like an artist with unfaked personality who encourages the zany in children, this is a cassette for you.

With similar intent, but in a big LA production style, is Doug Cotler's "It's So Amazing" (Sounds Write Productions, Inc., 6685 Norman Lane, San Diego, CA 92120; 619-697-6120). It's slick and satirical, with a Rosh Hashanah surfing song and a yodeling Cowboy Purim ditty as well. Doug, who is a cantor with five other recordings and is one of the mainstays of the annual CAJE (Jewish Educators) Conferences, sounds like Neil Sedaka and is a very polished singer indeed. On this record, however, he's not afraid to sing the hyper-dumb, silly words that little ones love. I've seen him live, and his rapport with kids is tremendous. Adults might like this recording, too, but it would have to be a forbidden, secret pleasure, like enjoying Xena, Warrior Princess or the Spice Girls.

One Chanukah present I can recommend for adults is Flory Jagoda's "Kantikas Di Mi Nona" (Tara Publications, 8 Music Fair Road, Owings Mills, MD 21117; 800-TARA-400). She is a native of Sarajevo and has been a one woman force to save the Sephardi music of that dying Jewish community. On this recording, she does some songs that sound flamenco, and others that feel Greek and Balkan.

"Hamia Asar," about the Holiday of Tu B'shvat when trees start awakening for spring, is in some strange, happy time signature that she handles effortlessly. "Buena Samana" is almost Mexican Mariachi in its harmonies and flavor. My personal favorite is "Ocho Candelikas," a Chanukah song she wrote. In it, she counts the candles in a Bosnian Spanish, from one to eight, while describing all the foods she'll eat and parties she'll attend with friends. The melodies are exotic, but her warm vocals and understatement give them a homey, familiar feel. She is a folk minimalist who knows exactly where to emotionally pitch each song. Listen to her and she will bring light to your Chanukah and your winter. ❑

Rabbi Ya'acov Gabriel leads the Jewish Renewal Congregation Har Shalom in Fort Collins, CO. He won a Canadian Grammy for producing and arranging and is a long time music reviewer for the CBC.

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Reading Spirit

Roger S. Gottlieb

- *The Others: How the Animals Made Us Human,* by Paul Shepard. Island Press, 1996.

- *Other Creations: Rediscovering the Spirituality of Animals,* by Christopher Manes. Doubleday, 1997.

- *The Spell of the Sensuous: Language and Perception in a More-than-Human World,* by David Abram. Pantheon, 1996.

Like Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey, the authors of these books find spiritual value in the natural world. However, their poetic evocation of wolves and redwoods is buttressed by philosophical analysis and historical arguments, which show that humanity's psychological, cognitive, moral and hence *spiritual* development springs from encounters with the fellow citizens of our biotic community. Because religious traditions of the world's dominant civilizations have generally asked us to identify with anything but with our physical, animalistic, 'natural' selves, these books have profound spiritual implications. They reveal that, as much as sacred texts or inner voices, our kinship and participation with 'the Others' can be a basis for religious aspiration.

Paul Shepard, in this most recent of his distinguished books on the human-nature relationship, offers a partly speculative and partly scholarly account of how human identity emerged from thousands of centuries of interactions with animals. The book examines more than a dozen areas of crucial connection. For instance, he suggests that children learn to think in generalities by observing different kinds of animals, that we use differences among animals to help us represent different aspects of our own psyches, and that the dynamic changeability of animals instructs us in our own capacity for growth. *The Others* is often brilliant (as in Shepard's description of the role of hunting in forming human intelligence, or of the way music originated in listening to animal sounds) if occasionally superficial (as in his confused foray into environmental ethics). Yet throughout, there is a distinctive sensibility, the spiritual implications of which are that the transcendence of the ego can be found as much in seeing ourselves as animals as in seeing ourselves as made in the "image of God." The "sacredness" of this animal identity, Shepard insists, comes not from "pictorial and esthetic images of nature," but from our membership in "metabolic chains." This membership shapes a "reciprocity with the Others, not an attunement to non-natural divinities or purified forms of consciousness." Our participation in the endless 'eat-and-be eaten' cycle even provides a kind of immortality, one very different—and somewhat less tainted by a clinging to personal identity—than that promised by an eternal life in heaven.

Unlike Shepard, who offers a biologically based reworking of spirituality, Christopher Manes explores the spiritual significance of animals through a description of the many ways in which religious life has unfolded in relation to non-human creatures. His well-written and thoroughly enjoyable book, *Other Creations,* introduces us to animal metaphors for the religious relationship (e.g., 'the lord is my shepherd'), explores the highly charged relations between animals and saints, and describes the debates over whether or not animals have souls and if they will be found in heaven. Manes (whose earlier *Green Rage* was a passionate account of the radical environmental group Earth First!) knows that a great deal of our sense of the spiritual importance of animals has been attenuated by a life in which animals are largely seen as pets, dinner, genetic raw material, or images on screens. Nevertheless, he suggests, our spiritual connection to animals still lives—in metaphors, rituals, and religious narratives. With effort, we can retrieve the knowledge that animals mediate between the mysteries of the universe and our own limited understanding. They are messengers from a sacred realm, bearers of mysterious and momentous truths.

With effort, we can retrieve the knowledge that animals mediate between the mysteries of the universe and our own limited understanding.

Roger S. Gottlieb is Professor of Philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Among his recent publications are This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment *and* The Ecological Community.

These books focus on what we have lost: recognition of the spiritual importance of cloud shapes, wolf-tracks, and bird calls.

In that regard, *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram is one of the decade's most important books on the intersection of human identity and non-human nature. Rooted in philosophical phenomenology and the shamanistic traditions of indigenous peoples, Abram's complex argument has two main strands. First, he claims that human mental phenomena were made possible by our connections to and transactions with our surroundings. Perception, language, our sense of time, and our very capacity for awareness depend on our physical setting. In short, "the human mind is not some otherworldly sense that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather, it is instilled and provoked...by the tension and participation between the human body and the animate earth." Second, however, once the magic of our relationship to streams, trees, and otters is contracted into a self-understanding defined primarily by an alphabet of purely human design with no mimetic relation to nature, our minds and our social practices become correspondingly limited. As a result, "the participatory proclivity of the senses [is] simply transferred from the depths of the surrounding life-world to the visible letters of the alphabet." When this occurs, Abram argues, we lose an essential wisdom made possible only by going *from* the social order *into* the 'more than human' environment that surrounds us. A society bound to an "unnatural" literacy finds the teachings of the more-than-human harder and harder to receive, with devastating consequences for ecosystems, species, and children living near toxic waste dumps.

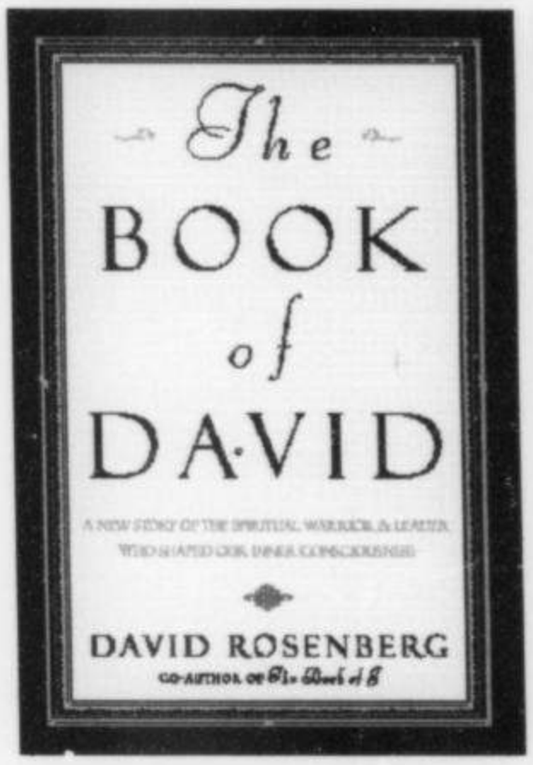
These powerful books focus on what we have lost: recognition of the spiritual importance of cloud shapes, wolf-tracks, and bird calls. Abram, Manes and Shepard do not seriously pose the question of recovery: how we might find our way back to a kinship with the Others, now that the deepest meanings of our own naturalness have been obscured by stultifying literacy, factory farms, and religious practices which ignore the more-than-human world.

In fact, the notion that we can reach outside ourselves and directly experience the wisdom of the 'more-than-human' is itself problematic. It has, after all, become a defining element of much postmodernist and Marxist thought that all knowledge, experience, and belief bear the stamp of the social. This axiom distinguishes these secular philosophies from spiritual perspectives in which visions of the Other can transform and enlighten. From a postmodern or Marxist perspective, one could pose the following problem for Abram, Manes, and Shepard: You may well be right that a certain sensitivity towards or care for the natural world has been lost through the development of two-dimensional literacy, human-centered religion, and a blindness to the animal world. Yet perhaps the visionary understanding of nature possessed by pre-literate peoples is simply the mark of a very different society, not some magical wisdom untouched by the human. Perhaps we never reach 'the Others,' but can only know 'ourselves.'

This question, we should notice, may be posed to any spiritual perspective, whether it is oriented towards our natural identity or towards a transcendent divinity. The only answer, I suspect, is to be found in the insights and conduct of those who have the visions. "By their fruits shall ye know them" is as valid for identifying those who have learned from nature as those who have learned from God. ❑

Who was King David? Who is he now?

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A Harmony Book

Crime, Race and Radical Lawyering

Gary Peller

▪ *Black Rage Confronts the Law* by Paul Harris. NYU Press, 1997.

As a radical criminal defense lawyer in the San Francisco Bay area for the last twenty-five years, Paul Harris has exemplified a legal "politics of meaning." He embraces many of the best features of the social struggles of the sixties and seventies while undertaking to expose, challenge, and transform the everyday legal culture in which he works. His legal practice embodies a qualitatively different understanding of law, power, and justice than the traditional models of progressive lawyering, as well as a basic human integrity that resists the forces that would subject his clients to an alienating legal process.

The old left saw "the rule of law" as a marginal, "superstructural" ideology created to legitimate class rule. Left lawyering meant representing workers and dissidents, occasionally winning symbolic concessions while believing that law served the ruling class in the final analysis, or at least until workers seized the reins of State power. Legal work was outside the "real" arenas where power is exercised. The main alternative to that Marxist tradition has historically been the civil liberties/civil rights model of progressive legal practice, which is also centered on the State. That liberal model assumes a neutral rule of law which wins people their rights against censorship or official discrimination and protects individuals by taming state power.

These traditional modes of left and liberal lawyering suffer from their common and narrow preoccupation with State power. Without diminishing its often courageous history, traditional progressive lawyering neglected the ways that legal culture itself constructs and distributes social power; by merely relating the content of legal rules to their supposed instrumental effects on the interests of this or that class, progressives failed to engage the politics of law in a more comprehensive sense.

The power of "law" extends beyond its discrete empirical effects such as "causing" people to be imprisoned or set free, to pay damages or not: legal institutions—encompassing courtrooms, law schools, hearing rooms, law offices, the discourse of legal argument, and doctrinal rules—enact cultural narratives about legitimacy and justice and perform symbolic rituals of neutrality, equality and detachment. Legal institutions help normalize everyday life by making people's experiences of isolation and alienation—in schools, at jobs, on the street—appear to be just and fair, to be the best one could reasonably hope for without risking even more extreme social disintegration.

Rather than understand progressive-lawyering as utilizing the same technical and professional legal skills as any other lawyer, Harris and other creative lawyers like him have been contesting the arenas of legal culture, treating their offices, the courtrooms, and the legal discourse of rules and argumentation all as political sites where the false and alienating ideology of a neutral and objective law can be exposed and disrupted and a new, more caring and humane legal culture developed. This means different, more egalitarian relations within the law office, between lawyers, paralegals, support staff, and other legal workers. It means a reconceived relationship with the "client" and an attempt to foster the client's participation in his own defense rather than simply relate to the proceedings as their passive subject. And it means an enlivened understanding of the trial itself to include, for example, strategies to challenge the ways that even the physical setting of the courtroom sends false messages about law's objectivity, neutrality and disembodiment.

Think about the somber tone of the courtroom, the judge in black robes which separate him from those in the everyday attire of civil society sitting up on a neutral perch at the elevated bench, the jury more or less randomly chosen, the formal rules of evidence, the professional demeanor of the attorneys, the wood paneling and heavy wood tables—all marking the courtroom as an official, depoliticized space outside the fray of normal life, and all vulnerable to resistance and subversion through seemingly simple human acts like a lawyer holding his client's hand rather than leaving him isolated in court—subtle embodiments of care and connection that, when performed by Harris, point the jury away from the despiritualized official space to the possibility of empathy and engagement.

In *Black Rage Confronts the Law,* Harris describes and defends the "black rage defense" that he and others developed to argue that particular African American defendants should be acquitted (by reason of "insanity") or bear "diminished responsibility" for

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various crimes they committed because the racial pressures under which they acted preclude holding them fully accountable. Harris' account of the black rage defense provides a window into the more general ways that he and other radical criminal lawyers transform the meaning of the trial, for the community as well as the defendant, by bringing the lived social reality of the defendant's life to the jury's consideration of the moral quality of his act.

The best parts of the book describe the existential transformation of the courtroom that can occur when the trial is opened up beyond the formal legal issues—whether the defendant committed the act with the relevant mental state—to consider the defendant in a wider time frame, as a real human being responding to a particular social existence, with its specific challenges, coping strategies, and ultimately comprehensible breaking points. As Harris puts it, the black rage defense challenges the usual legal construction of the defendant as a disembodied, abstracted-from-context perpetrator acting as an atomistic agent. "[I]t says to the American legal system: You cannot convict me without hearing who I am and what shaped me. I was not born with an M-1 carbine in my hands. My childhood dreams did not include robbing a bank."

Harris' 1971 "black rage" defense of Steven Robinson was apparently its first contemporary use. Robinson was a twenty-nine year old black man who had robbed a bank in the Fillmore, using an unloaded gun. As he was being led out of the bank by police, Robinson shouted to a gathering crowd, "Why are black people without jobs or homes when there is so much money in America's banks?" It turned out that Robinson clearly acted on a boiling, and racially specific, rage when he robbed his own neighborhood bank in an utterly irrational and partly involuntary response to the vector of race-related pressures that had recently converged on him. He faced losing his volunteer job as music director of the Malcolm X Community School, a small school built amid the rubble of Fillmore Street left by urban renewal and the 1968 riots, a community project embodying the hopeful aspiration to reclaim responsibility to educate black children with pride and dignity; the school was to be closed because of financial pressures. Despite appropriate training, he had been unable to keep a job as a draftsman in a white-dominated architectual market, and he was without a job for an extended period. In the midst of his unemployment, his fiancé and her daughter, with whom he lived, became sick and Robinson could not afford the necessary specialists. While they were both without work, his fiancé became pregnant. He rejected her suggestion of welfare, not wanting "the white man's handout." And then, after a night of anguish and frustration, without giving it much thought or planning, he attempted to rob the bank.

The fuller story of Robinson's act, seen in the highlights I have provided and the more detailed biography that Harris includes, shows that race shaped and constructed his experiences leading right up to the door of the bank, and that, seen in its racial dimensions, his act could plausibly be seen in terms of Robinson's normal controls simply snapping. Bringing the social context into the courtroom broke the colorblind, racially-neutral veneer of the proceedings. While the prosecutor argued that race had nothing to do with the case, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty by reason of insanity," agreeing with the defense contention that Robinson was temporarily insane when he tried to rob the bank.

The 1971 trial of James Johnson, Jr. was similarly dramatic. His horrible crime—shooting his foreman and two fellow workers at a Detroit Chrysler plant—was also an explosion of racially shaped rage, fueled by years of discrimination and humiliation. When the impact of the frightening, unsafe assembly line was combined with constant racial subordination in job assignments and basic treatment, the jury understood how a quiet, hard-working and responsible black man like Johnson could simply snap. They also returned a "not guilty by reason of insanity" verdict for the defense.

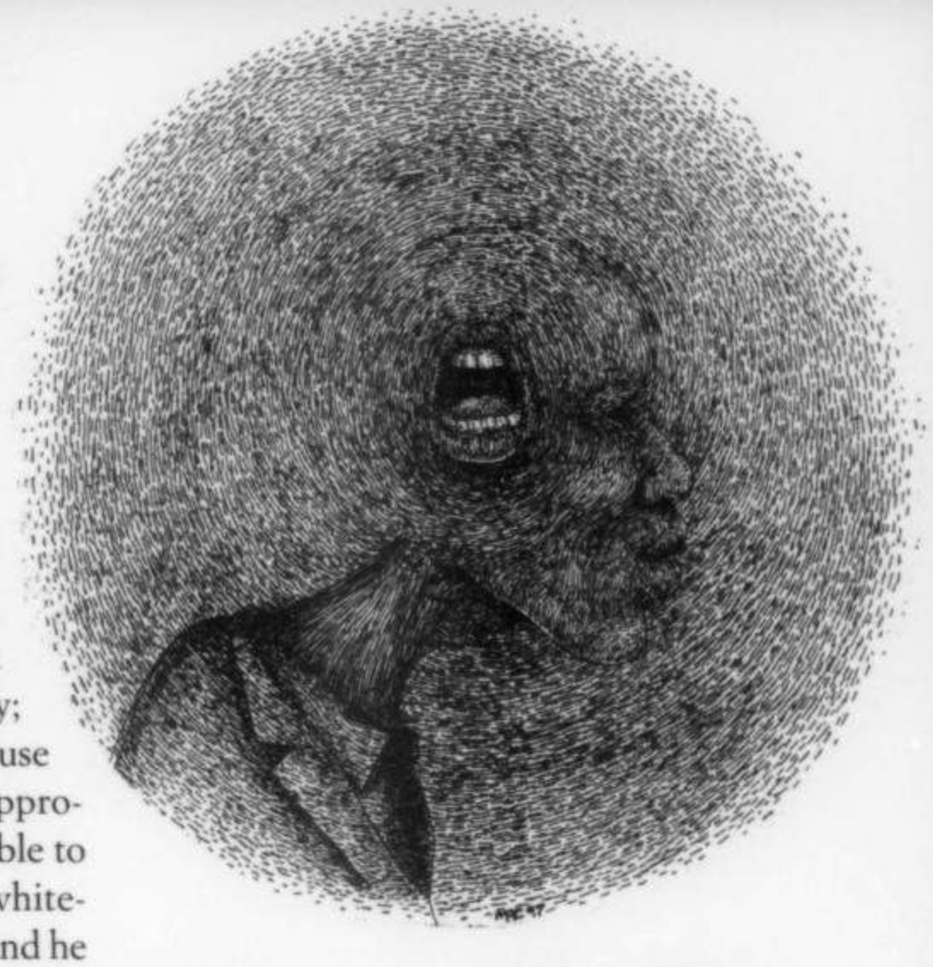


ILLUSTRATION BY MAC McGILL

The Robinson and Johnson trials are not simply interesting victories for smart defense attorneys and their lucky clients. The presentation of the black rage defense turned their trials into meaningful reflections on the lives of the defendants, as well as on the racial power dynamics in which they live and act. Rather than isolating them from the texture of their everyday lives, the Robinson and Johnson trials unfolded out to connect the defendants to the communities in which they lived. Despite the practical result that they were nevertheless confined, albeit to mental hospitals rather than jails, the presentation of such a contextualized view of the defendant helps subvert the reigning ideologies of criminal responsibility.

The black rage defense contests the reigning ideology legitimating criminal punishment by exposing the ultimately empty and abstract ways that legal discourse constructs the criminal "choice" upon which moral condemnation is purportedly based. "Liberal" societies like ours presume that someone deserves to be punished only if

they made a meaningful choice to commit a prohibited act. As a doctrinal matter, the law recognizes this idea by making available the excusing defenses of duress, incompetency, and insanity.

The problem for substantive criminal law doctrine is that it is based on a fundamental contradiction, well described by Victor Hugo in *Les Miserables* and reproduced in various other areas of law as well: If the legitimacy of punishment is based on the blameworthy choice of an individual defendant, then the law—and the criminal trial—must focus on the particular and unique quality of that choice. But to evaluate each defendant's conduct according to the unique character of his choices viewed in the context of his particular life would violate the idea of equality before the law. The analytic contradiction is "resolved" within criminal law doctrine the same way it was resolved in pre-New Deal, laissez faire contract law—by abstracting from the particularities of an individual's life to make the identification of choice a categorical inquiry and ultimately an empty formality.

Legal doctrine treats the choice of one who steals from need the same as one who steals from greed. While different circumstances might become mitigating or exacerbating factors for the relatively more discretionary sentencing practice, they are, amazingly, irrelevant to the finding of criminal culpability itself. Harris and other lawyers had to associate black rage with mental illness because, even though conventional, medically-oriented definitions of psychological disorder do not really correspond to the experiences of Steven Robinson and James Johnson, the insanity defense is the only doctrinal path to an individualized examination of the defendant and the internal, subjective meaning of his choices.

As Harris himself acknowledges, having to characterize black rage as a form of "insanity" partly undermines the very purpose of the defense, because it suggests that the defendant is simply a "crazy person," an individual overwhelmed by psychological and moral weakness of mind. But because the abstract, individualistic assumptions of the criminal law will not recognize a defense based on the shaping influences of concrete social realities like societal racism, Harris and others have had no other way to make the social context admissible except to channel it through an individualistic category such as the insanity defense.

This brings us to an important point that further indicates why I call Harris a "politics of meaning" attorney. Harris' way of dealing with the contradiction between his effort to reveal the social meaning of the defendant's action and his need to use an individualistic language and world view to accomplish that is more sophisticated than simply manipulating words (black rage in certain circumstances equals insanity). Instead, he works to establish a meaningful relation of moral empathy between himself and his clients and the jury, so that the jury comes to realize that justice requires a consideration of the social context no matter how much the law and the judge as conveyor of the law want to keep it out. What Harris means to do, whether he wins or loses these cases, is to restore the client's moral dignity by contextualizing what the client did within the full social reality of his or her life and so gaining the empathic recognition of that truth from the jury as the representatives of the community. In other words, he means to transcend the shallow individualism of the criminal law even though he must use its language to even get his client a hearing.

Harris emphasizes that, in his view, not every crime committed by blacks against whites is excusable in terms of black rage. The defense makes sense only when the background of racial subordination relates directly to the nature of the crime, and the defense is offered as a basis for jury empathy rather than as a way to externalize blame. Conversely, Harris contends that the animating idea of the black rage defense is not limited to blacks at all, because it really rests on the more general conviction that juries must be permitted to consider the social reality of the defendant's life and actions.

Harris is obviously sensitive to the easy criticisms that Alan Dershowitz and others have made that defenses like black rage lead down a slippery slope where anyone's actions can be excused because of their social environment. Harris responds by a careful delineation of when the defense is appropriate and when it is not. But I think the true significance of defenses like black rage, the urban survival syndrome, and the battered woman's syndrome is that they all exploit a fault line within legal ideology; these defendants are held morally accountable, but at the same time they are empathetically excused for their harmful behavior. Dershowitz and the other critics are right that there is no principled stopping point once law begins to consider the social, racial, sexual, and political meaning of an individual criminal defendants' behavior. The critics are wrong, however, when they assume that a legal culture can ignore the particular, contextualized quality of a defendant's criminal act and possibly be just. The overriding implication of all these new defenses is precisely to reveal the illegitimacy—on its own ideological terms—of the criminal law in its everyday, usual application.

I see Harris' depiction of the black rage defense in terms of the larger project of radical lawyers to reclaim legal arenas as sites of meaning and engagement and places to build an alternative legal culture. This is an important project, both in terms of the particular struggle against the alienating liberal legal ideology inscribed in courtrooms, in law school classrooms, and in the boundaries of legal argument, as well as in terms of developing a left politics that takes a broader view of the range of meaningful contestation across the existential space. ❑

CLINTON, MINIMUMS, AND DISAFFIRMATIVE ACTION

(continued from page 32)

when the U.S. Sentencing Commission proposed to eliminate the rule, Congress rejected the proposal and President Clinton announced that he too opposed the change.

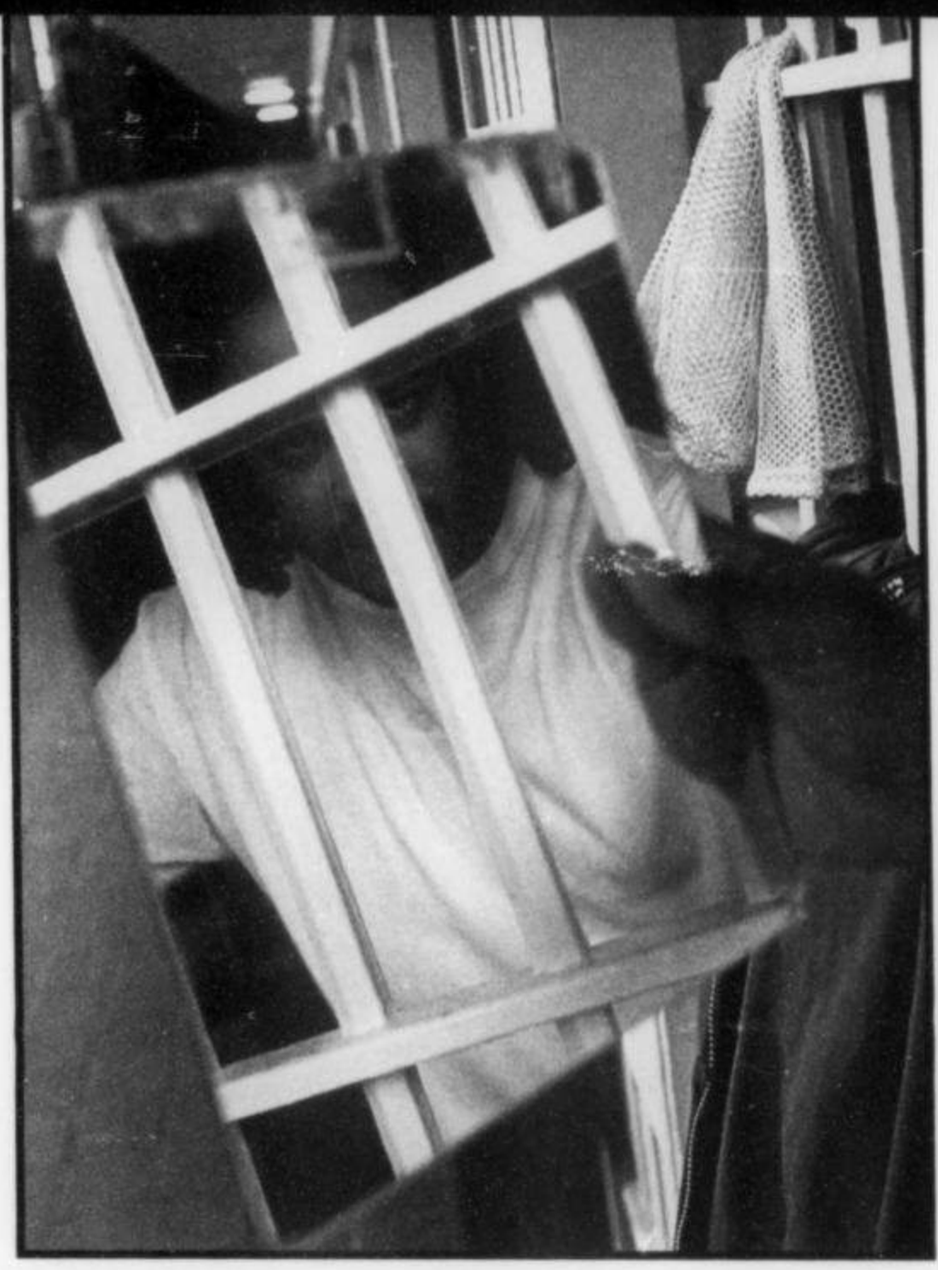
In April, the U.S. Sentencing Commission proposed reducing the differential from 100:1 to 5:1. Asked by President Clinton to review the proposal and offer recommendations, Attorney General Janet Reno and Drug Czar General Barry R. McCaffrey proposed a ten-to-one ratio with the crack threshold raised to 25 grams and the powder threshold reduced to 250 grams. (General McCaffrey's private opinion is that the differential should be entirely eliminated.)

President Clinton has endorsed the 25:250 proposal. Unhappily, that proposal offers no benefits and would only cause additional harm. It will continue to yield sharp racial differences in sentencing, because most people arrested for crack offenses will continue to be black and will sytematically receive harsher penalties. More importantly, 25 grams remains a very small quantity, one which will continue to ensnare small fry and user-dealers.

At the same time, the new lower 250 gram powder threshold will increase the scope of mandatory penalties for white defendants. To punish small-time white dealers more harshly in exchange for providing the appearance but not the reality of less harsh penalties for black crack dealers is nothing more than a cynical public relations ploy.

One argument for the crack/powder sentencing difference is that crack is inherently more dangerous than powder. That claim has been widely discredited and is only seldom heard. Several federal district courts and the Minnesota Supreme Court, which declared a Minnesota crack/powder sentencing differential unconstitutional on equal protection grounds, have considered the scientific evidence and held that crack and cocaine are pharmacologically indistinguishable. Drug Czar McCaffrey has been quoted in published interviews as agreeing that crack and power are indistinguishable pharmacologically and in their addictive properties.

But what's really wrong with crack cocaine sentencing is that the proportion of blacks in prison is vastly higher than their proportions among users and sellers. Since the early 1970s, the National Institute on Drug Abuse has sponsored drug use surveys of high school and college students, young adults, and representative samples of the general population. As a result we know quite a lot about racial differences in drug use patterns. In 1993, 12 percent of white Americans reported using some form of cocaine at least once in their lives, compared with only 9.4 percent of blacks. More blacks (3.4 percent) than whites (1.6 percent) reported having used crack at least once, but that difference cannot explain why 83 percent of those sentenced for crack offenses are black. Likewise, though we lack firm estimates of the racial characteristics of people who sell drugs, the



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN / IMPACT VISUALS

best estimate, by Jamie Fellner of Human Rights Watch, is that somewhat more than 12 percent of crack dealers are black—nowhere enough to explain the disparities.

The real, and among informed people widely accepted, explanation for the disparity can be found in police practices. White dealers in cocaine and crack live in working and middle class neighborhoods and sell their drugs in private and indoors. Black dealers, especially of crack, live in underclass neighborhoods and sell their drugs to strangers and in public. When policymakers call for increased drug arrests, both police departments and individual officers have incentives to make as many arrests as they can. It is immeasurably easier to arrest street-level drug dealers in deteriorated inner-city neighborhoods than dealers of any race elsewhere. Police arrest so many more blacks than whites for drug crimes not because blacks commit proportionately more drug crimes but because they commit them under circumstances that make arrests easier for police.

Drugs and Mandatory Minimum Sentences

The 100:1 rule is but one of the many mandatory minimum sentence laws for drug crimes enacted since 1980. They reflect reliance on a drug control strategy that few informed law enforcement officials or drug policy scholars any longer accept. The Reagan and Bush administrations' War on Drugs gave heavy emphasis to "supply-side" law enforcement efforts, including massive arrests of street-level drug dealers and lengthy prison sentences for those convicted. Within a few years, it became clear, however, that the emphasis on street-level dealers was misguided.

The goal was to make drugs more difficult to find and buy. The logic was that the heavy emphasis on low level

dealers would make selling riskier and dealers harder to find. Both effects were predicted to make prices rise which, in any normal market, should make consumption fall. Unfortunately, evidence from many sources, including the Drug Enforcement Agency and the RAND Corporation, shows that street-level prices for both crack and powder alternated between stability and decline throughout the late '80s and the '90s.

Part of the problem is that arrests of dealers on street corners seldom reduce the number of sellers, and have no effect on the number of potential buyers. To disadvantaged underclass kids, the rewards from drug dealing appear so great, compared with the legitimate opportunities available to them, that there has been what social scientists call a "100 percent replacement effect." The drug market works like any other labor market; people are attracted to jobs that (seem to) pay more than other jobs that are available.

Prospective dealers are queued, waiting to replace those who drop out. To middle class people this may seem paradoxical. Why would any sensible person become a drug dealer when the risks of imprisonment are so high? There are three answers. First, in many inner city areas, the wealth of successful dealers is conspicuous and provides powerful temptation. Disturbing role models they may be, but role models they are.

Second, although a street dealer's likelihood of arrest and imprisonment over six or twelve months is high, the chances of arrest for any deal are negligible; the ratio of deals to arrests in many cities is 200:1, or higher. "Wannabe" dealers see others selling drugs successfully and lucratively for months on end.

Third, young disadvantaged men, like young men everywhere, are susceptible to the illusion of invulnerability. Many boys take risks that in later life seem incomprehensible, and most survive. For disadvantaged ghetto kids, unfortunately, the risk is that they will spend years or decades in prison, and hundreds of thousands do.

Recently, neoconservative black economist Glenn Lourie, formerly a supporter of the Drug Wars and mandatory penalties despite their disproportionate impact on blacks, acknowledged that "the punitive anti-drug crusade is...not producing benefits commensurable with its substantive costs." He asks: "Do we really want to pursue a policy targeting street-level retail dealers for mandatory prison terms that imposed great costs on a vulnerable part of society while accomplishing little in objective terms? Is this not too high a price to pay in order to provide politicians with a symbol of their righteous determination to "do something" about a problem which, at its root, lies in the consumption habits of the society, rather than in the criminality of its impoverished, urban youth?"

Besides, there are better ways to deal with drug-dependent offenders. For at least ten years, the evidence has been clear and strong that well-managed drug treatment programs can reduce drug dependence (and related criminality) of drug-using offenders, including many who have been coerced into treatment. That's why special "drug courts," which divert offenders from prosecution to treatment, have proliferated. Attorney Genral Janet Reno was a pioneering supporter of drug courts while serving as District Attorney in Dade County, Florida.

Violence and Mandatory Penalties

Mandatory minimums for violent crimes receive less attention than those for drug crimes, but the problem is much the same. Two- and three- strikes laws and other recent laws creating and increasing minimum penalties have disproportionate impact on blacks and are inflating racial disparities in prison. The problem is that blacks have much higher violent crime rates than whites. Every year since 1975, 43 to 46 percent of people arrested for the serious violent crimes of murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault have been black. Any law that singles out violent crimes for harsher penalties in the nature of things disproportionately affects black offenders.

A massive social science literature shows, it is widely agreed, that arrest patterns for violent crimes primarily result from racial differences in crime patterns and not from police or other bias. The reasons are well understood; many more blacks than whites live in deteriorated neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, are raised in single parent households, attend substandard urban schools, and experience conditions that have long been known to be correlated with high crime rates (for blacks and whites both: whites in prison for violent crimes have, except for race, the same social and economic backgrounds as violent black offenders).

Few people worry about the effects on black Americans of sentencing policies for violent crimes, but we should. The conditions of life that make drug dealing look like a sensible decision to so many young urban blacks also lead to their higher rates of violent crime. If we worry at all about the effects of drug penalties on minority offenders' later lives, we should worry as well about the effects of violent-crime penalties.

Lengthy mandatory minimum sentences for violent crimes might make sense if there were reason to believe they deterred crime or incapacitated convicted criminals. Unfortunately, however, the best evidence from every Western country that has an empirical research tradition is that mandatory sentences and increased penalties have either no deterrent effects on crime rates, or have short-term effects that soon waste away.

Imprisonment can prevent crimes by incapacitating offenders, but is cost-effective only if the people imprisoned would otherwise have committed serious new crimes. Unfortunately, we aren't very good at predicting who will commit new violent crimes; one accurate prediction for three inaccurate ones is the best current methods can

achieve. More importantly, violence is a young man's game and few people commit serious violent crimes after age thirty-five. As a result, penal policies that keep people in prison beyond age thirty-five don't accomplish much. Penal policies that confine people for twenty, thirty, or forty years or for their lifetime may bring satisfaction to bystanders, but they have little to do with public safety.

Judges and prosecutors do not like to be gratuitously cruel, even when legislators tell them they should be. As a result, given widespread skepticism about the effectiveness of mandatory penalties, practitioners often search for, and find, ways to circumvent their application. This too has a racial dimension: practitioners are much likelier to evade enforcement of harsh laws when white defendants are involved. This may be because white defendants appear sympathetic since many have families, community ties, and job skills, or because black defendants may appear unsympathetic due to stereotypes about black street criminals; Some practitioners may simply be bigots. Whatever the explanation, white defendants are considerably more likely than blacks to benefit from behind-the-scenes efforts to lessen the bite of harsh laws.

No one disagrees that people who commit serious violent crimes deserve to be sent to prison. Indeed, because much violent crime involves victims and assailants of the same race, failure to punish violent black offenders would be—in effect—to devalue crimes against black victims. Until twenty years ago in this country, however, harsh sentences for serious crimes were measured in years, and prison terms as long as ten years were rare—a situation that still prevails today in most other Western countries. As with drug sentencing, if sentencing for violent crimes conformed to international and historic American levels, sentences for all offenders would decline and black offenders would disproportionately benefit.

Disaffirmative Action

Modern American crime policies are simply not compatible with honest public policies aimed at improved race relations in America and improvement in the life chances of disadvantaged black Americans. Recent widely publicized studies have shown that one-fourth to one-third of young black men are at any moment in jail or prison, or on probation or on parole. In some cities, including Baltimore and Washington, D.C., half or more of young black men are entangled in the criminal justice system.

By removing large percentages of young men from minority neighborhoods, criminal justice and drug policies handicap their prospects for achieving conventional, law-abiding lives. Could any community, black or white, survive or resist decay if a third to a half of its men were immersed in the justice system on any one day?

Too-long prison terms not only waste lives but, as labor economist Richard Freeman and others have convincingly shown, they also greatly diminish ex-prisoners' subsequent job prospects and average earnings. Overuse of imprisonment does avoidable damage to prisoners' domestic partners and children: men in prison or with prison records do not make very appealing marriage prospects and they cannot, and after prison's separation are much less likely to, support their families or be fathers to their children.

And that's why President Clinton's simultaneous support for affirmative action and harsh crime control policies is ironic. Affirmative action is designed to help black Americans overcome the legacies of slavery and racial segregation. Meanwhile, mandatory minimums, three-strikes laws, and similar policies do unnecessary damage to black offenders, their families, and their communities. In fact, such policies could be called disaffirmative action because they impede the progress of disadvantaged urban blacks into the American mainstream. It is hard to see how current crime control policies can be reconciled with the civil rights and race relations themes to which President Clinton has tied his second term. ❑

A Rage to Punish *(continued from page 28)*

Some of the most appalling statistics come from the federal system. Under the widely criticized Federal Sentencing Guidelines, an astonishing 92 percent of federal prison admissions are for nonviolent crimes. The recently created Coalition for Federal Sentencing Reform has asked Congress to review this policy, but Congress appears to be too busy crafting still longer sentences for still lesser crimes.

Indeed, the result is just the opposite. The effects of long-term incarceration for these individuals resonates outward. While I was in prison, I witnessed the deterioration of the self-esteem and humanity of many of my fellow inmates. The longer their terms of incarceration, the more dysfunctional they became. New "no-frills" prison regulations have deprived prisons of the ability to rehabilitate and educate those who want to turn their lives around—there is little therapy or treatment to help people cope with the drug, alcohol, or emotional disorders that brought them to prison in the first place. Men and women lose their spouses, and persons with criminal records have a harder time finding work to maintain families. When they are released—in three, five, or ten years—they are filled with bitterness, ready to explode.

As we assess the reduction in crime, instead of searching for or claiming credit for this success, we should look for ways to do better. The fact is that the massive incarceration of nonviolent criminals does not reduce crime. It costs us $30,000 a year to lock someone up and three times that much to build every cell. Study after study has shown that investing these funds in crime prevention, early intervention with youth, alternatives to incarceration, and drug treatment programs would be far more effective in reducing crime. Our rush to vengeance may make us feel good, but it won't make us safe. ❑

CHARACTER EDUCATION *(from page 55)*
nated to thousands of schools across the country, and it represents the defining vision of the national character education organization whose special focus is schools. It is this kind of comprehensive character education that we would invite Mr. Ulfik and other TIKKUN readers to consider supporting in their community's schools.

Permit me to expand on just three of these principles in order to show what they mean for the moral life of the school:

Principle four says "the school must be a caring community." It must progress toward becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring, and just society we seek to create in our nation. The school can do this by becoming a moral community that helps students form caring attachments to adults and to each other. These caring relationships will foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person.

All children and adolescents have a need to belong. They are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups that meet this need. The daily life of classrooms, as well as all other parts of the school environment (including the corridors, cafeteria, playground, and school bus), must be imbued with core values such as concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness, and fairness.

Principle six says that "effective character education requires a meaningful and challenging curriculum." Character education and academic learning must be seen as mutually supportive. In a caring classroom and school where students feel liked and respected by their teachers and fellow students, students are more likely to work hard and achieve. Reciprocally, when students are enabled to succeed at the work of school, they are more likely to feel valued and cared about as persons.

A curriculum that helps all students succeed is one whose content and pedagogy are sophisticated enough to engage all learners. That means moving beyond a skill-and-drill, paper-and-pencil curriculum to one that is inherently interesting and meaningful for students. A character education school makes effective use of active teaching and learning methods such as cooperative learning, problem-solving approaches, and projects that integrate different subjects. One of the most authentic ways to respect children is to respect the way they learn.

Principle seven says "character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation." As students develop good character, they develop a stronger inner commitment to doing what their moral judgment tells them is right. Schools, especially in their approach to discipline, should strive to develop this intrinsic commitment to doing what's right. They should minimize reliance on extrinsic rewards and punishments that distract students' attention from the real reasons to behave responsibly: the rights and needs of self and others. The enforcement of fair consequences for rule-breaking should be done in a way that fosters the students' understanding of the rule and willingness to abide by it in the future.

Similarly, within the academic curriculum, intrinsic motivation should be fostered in every way possible. This can be done by helping students experience the challenge and interest of subject matter, the desire to work cooperatively with other students, and the fulfillment of making a positive difference in another person's life or in their school or community.

All of this I assume Mr. Ulfik would take as common ground. We also agree that building the character of the young is more likely to succeed if it is part of an effort to create a more moral society. When Dennis Rodman and Madonna are kids' heroes, when greed, dishonesty, sexual decadence, and violence toward life born and preborn are the cultural context, educating for character is an uphill battle. That said, however, I think there are two areas—human nature and the role of authority—on which Mr. Ulfik and I may disagree.

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First, human nature. What causes bad behavior? Mr. Ulfik seems to say that bad schools—and the corrupt culture whose messages they transmit—are the main cause of bad behavior. "If learning is not self-motivated," he writes, "some kids will go along with it because they must, some will resist and become 'problem children'…"

To be sure, a meaningless, mind-deadening, excessively competitive curriculum exacerbates the tendency toward disruptive and rebellious behavior and may lead many youth who would otherwise be prosocial, productive learners to act in ways harmful to self and others. I agree, for example, that an absence of meaning in teenagers' lives contributes to their involvement in self-destructive activities such as sex, drugs, and drinking. But suppose for a moment that all classrooms were suddenly transformed into wonderful educational environments where learning was as meaningful as Mr. Ulfik and all of us would like it to be. Suppose, too, that all parents provided nurturing homes, that television and advertising presented only good values, and that our capitalist economy became committed to providing full employment and a decent wage to everyone needing work.

Would bad behavior disappear? Would everybody have good character?

Obviously not. Why not? Because of human nature. Sin would still be with us. As anyone who has tried to raise a child soon discovers, children have a capacity for both good and evil—for fairness and unfairness, honesty and deceit, altruism and selfishness, kindness and cruelty. Indeed, in classical wisdom, the tendency toward sin is the stronger of the two tendencies. In his book *Transformation in Christ* (1948), the philosopher Dietrick von Hildebrand identifies this belief as a basic premise of the Christian tradition (hence our need for redemption) but points out that "the truly great among the non-Christian thinkers, such as Plato, were aware of [this dual aspect of our existence]. They perceived that man, according to his essence as a spiritual person, is ordained to the Good, but no less clearly did they perceive the downward drift in man's nature: his proclivity toward bad things… They understood that the Good is more proper to man, more adequate to his inmost meaning: yet at the same time, that evil comes easier to him…"

So we could have loving families and schools that foster self-motivation, but character education would still face a formidable challenge: human nature. Precisely because of the shortcomings of our human nature, developing good character is a life-long task. Many of us struggle along—trying, for example, to grow in everyday virtues like charity toward our co-workers and patience with our spouses and children—knowing we are dependent for our progress on the grace of God. Nearly all of us, if we are honest, know we have miles to go before we sleep.

Enter authority. Mr. Ulfik writes, "I sharply disagree with any plan to superimpose values by authority pressure." (He cites, as a case of negative pressure, my TIKKUN article's example of having students line up on the football field to form the word RESPECT—taken out of context from the story of a school in which students, parents, and faculty all shared leadership of a wide-ranging character education effort. It's unlikely this school could have successfully carried out the above RESPECT exercise if there was not an overall positive ethos surrounding the character initiative.)

From the standpoint of classical thinking about human nature, the moral authority of responsible adults has a positive and essential role to play in developing the character of children. From this perspective, obedience to legitimate authority is a virtue. Some critics of character education have objected to schools teaching children obedience, treating it as akin to raising good Nazis. But unquestioning, Nazi-like obedience is a corruption of obedience. Properly understood, the virtue of obedience means, as one elementary school teaches it, "following rules when it does not go against justice." Obedience to rules and laws is our general duty, but justice may conflict with obedience, as when our boss tells us to lie, cheat, or steal. Correctly taught, then, obedience is not blind; it requires moral judgment and personal responsibility.

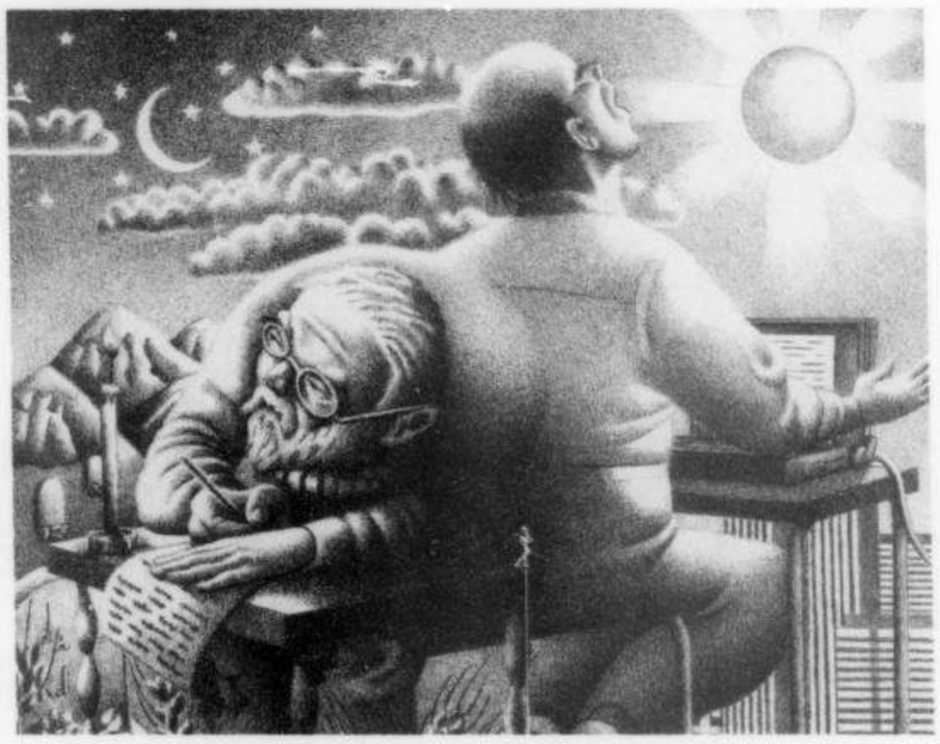
The virtue of obedience is especially important as children are being formed. A child's obedience makes it possible for parents and teachers to carry out their responsibilities to guide and care for children. If a child does not have a disposition to obey, life is very difficult for everyone and not much moral education can be accomplished. Through a proper obedience to their parents and teachers children can learn many things: self-control ("no treats before dinner," "homework before TV"), responsibility ("pick up your toys," "feed the cat"), concern for the welfare of others ("pulling hair hurts, never pull hair!"), good manners ("remember to say please and thank you"), respect for the needs of the group ("raise your hand to speak," "take turns"), and a generalized respect for just rules and laws. In both the school and home, authority figures should, of course, always teach children the reasons behind rules and requests so as to develop internalized standards of conscience that will eventually come to govern a child's behavior in the absence of authority.

I don't know to what extent Mr. Ulfik would agree or disagree with what I have said about human nature and the need for adult authority in bringing up a moral child. But even if we differ somewhat on those issues, there is much in his thoughtful essay that character educators would applaud. Those of us who want to raise good kids—and to have the help of schools in that enterprise—would do well to heed Mr. Ulfik's counsel: We must improve the learning environments of our schools and the character of our culture if we are serious about improving the character of our children. ❑

MACHERS AND MOURNERS *(continued from page 46)*

Zionists and Communists are machers; socialists are mourners. Liberals are mourners; conservatives are machers (or want to be). Therapists are mourners; their patients are machers. The administrators who run UJA are mourners, while the financiers whose names are chiseled into the marble walls of the museums and hospitals the mourners raise funds for are machers. The Jews who invented Hollywood were uniformly machers, but Steven Spielberg with his jellied lens and sentimental "Some Germans were good" whining is a mourner with a macher's marketing clout.

Obviously, these categories are not mutually exclusive: within every macher lies a mourner curled up in a fetal ball, and within every mourner (especially the literary ones) there's a raging macher waiting to burst out of the cage. Machers are surely aware of the precariousness of their situation, and mourners are secretly proud of their world-making capacities. Both contain elements of poignancy and bravado.



Rather than a diminution of Jewish literary energy noted by some critics, we can perceive a veritable stampede between the two camps of machers and mourners, and they keep coming. Besides the writers I've mentioned are many others including Myra Goldberg and Jonathan Rosen and Tova Reich (mourners), Michael Chabon and Francine Prose and Jonathan Levi and Neil Gordon (machers), as well as the less clearly definable Allegra Goodman and Robert Cohen and Gerald Shapiro and more (a forthcoming first novel by Joseph Skibell sounds uncannily like *Genghis Cohen*), most of them mourners or machers or idiosyncratic combinations of the two, informed by and informing the unique nature of Jewishness in a post-Judaic era. If the critics are correct in believing that this literature will wither and die under the universal blending force of modernity (as doom speaking demographers foresee the end of Jewish population) and believe that the unholy alliance of Sony and Disney and Microsoft will accomplish what Hitler didn't, at least that death—sometimes lamented, sometimes defied—will go extraordinarily well-recorded. ❑

AFTER THE LAW *(continued from page 48)*

dream-time, wherein you're a contemporary of the patriarchs, the martyrs, the exiles, the immigrants, and you stand to lose your own moment in history.

Follow the example of Akiva and his cronies and, lacking their credentials, you're likely to die an obscure death, lose the little credibility you have (your faith is already forfeit), and catch hell from critics anxious to remind you that "You're no Roth, no Bellow—*tahkeh*, you're no Akiva."

Best to play it safe. Irving Howe left no prescription for the restoration of the Jewish wasteland—the literary landscape would merely become increasingly parched, the distance between fiction and truth as regards the Jewish American endeavor becoming an ever wider divide. Certainly my generation, already (at least in my own case) rapidly aging, lacks the authority and experience to attempt any such *tikkun,* an exercise that from this vantage appears frankly imprudent. Besides, haven't we got heartache enough, what with a chronic spiritual homelessness that not even the emergence of the State of Israel could mitigate?

Of course, there's always a lunatic fringe, hotheads who assert that, homeless before the Palace of the Law, we are also lawless, which is a condition less compatible with pathos and passivity; a stance that paradoxically inspires a certain chutzpah in the face of paralysis. We're outlaws, they bluster, renegades who, with no license to enter the Palace, might just storm it.... But who are they kidding? Better they should bow to the wisdom of their elders, acknowledge the rectitude of the honorable Mr. Howe, and learn to grow old with dignity outside the Palace walls.

Still, I have this recurring dream. In it I'm the old man in Kafka's parable, sick of waiting but too broken in spirit to do anything else. I'm nodding off as usual, when up walks this scrawny kid, bold as you please, sporting an outlandish getup—long caftan, skullcap, earlocks, impish grin. Without ceremony, with maybe a whooping taunt, he scrambles between the legs of the giant doorkeeper, who chases him into the Palace. The next thing I know, from a narrow casement above me the scrolls of the Law drop into my lap; then the kid himself leaps out and hits the ground running. That's when I recognize him from a story I didn't know I knew. It's Hershel Ostropolier, the Jewish Eulenspiegl, hero of a whole cycle of trickster tales, and having escaped some story for the sake of performing this theft, he's no doubt on his way back to another. Above me the doorkeeper is stuck half-in and half-out of the window, shouting bloody murder, while Hershel calls over his shoulder as he runs away: "Life is like a glass of tea!" "Nu?" say I, noticing that my old bones have begun to stir; I'm in motion for the first time in memory, following Hershel. "Why is life like a glass of tea?" I holler, and he answers without breaking stride, "Shmendrik, what am I, a philosopher?" Wondering if that's my name, Shmendrik, I hug the scrolls to my chest and continue to give chase. When last seen we're still running. ❑

The World of Our Fathers *(continued from page 57)*
come in for a game of checkers, a glass of schnapps, a sliced red onion with herring and tomatoes, salted with a granular kosher salt in a red and yellow box.

My father knew the mothers, fathers, children, grandchildren…some would tell their stories and others would ask about his family. Many were friendly, some were occasionally nasty, "You mean your son goes to college?" one once asked my father incredulously. My usually even-tempered dad looked up angrily, "Why, do you think only Jews go to college?" I think my father respected me for going to the university, although we never talked about it.

There was hardly ever any mention of ethnic discrimination. I only remember one incident when a notorious "yenta" came in and asked the prices on all the fish, and kept saying "too much," and finally, "for that price I can buy it from a Jew."

My father told her never to step in the store again. She never did for as long as I remember.

Occasionally when the older women spoke to my father in Yiddish, some of the younger women would scold them. "He's not a Jew." "So what, he understands everything." "Frankela" they would say affectionately. "I know him since he was a young man before he got married. I used to buy from him off of the truck. Do you remember Frankela?" The young bleach blondes had absolute disdain on their faces. "Frankela, Jimela, why do you have to make everyone a Jew?" the suburbanites would ask, shaking their heads.

The best customers were the Irish police lieutenants who would come down and buy two of everything and "the best" and charge it to the bookies. The second best was the Jewish gangster who would occasionally accompany his mother and tell us to give her the best, and tell his mother not to bargain. "I'm paying for it," he would say and roll out a big wad of fifty dollar bills to pay for it.

My friends were the push-cart delivery boys from the deli who were called "coolies" because they would be loaded up with groceries, pushing their way up the hill for the minimum wage of fifty cents an hour. Which was more than I got: I was family labor.

When I went to college I worked in Boston part-time to pay my expenses, and because business was declining. The last competitor committed suicide.

My father died in the kitchen one morning at 5 a.m., dressed to go to the fish market…. When we put up a sign in the door, several old women stood in front of the store in disbelief. One was even crying. It was all a life—a hard life, from morning to night on your feet, hands in the ice, the smells, the blood and slime, but it was something more than making a living…it was a way of life that's gone forever.

Who knows today about the horse thieves from Galicia, the Communists from Vilnius, the differences between yentas and the rest—it was all an education. You learn to be multicultural when you sell a fish. ❑

Fear, Crime, and Punishment *(continued from page 27)*
that the violent ethos of the correctional facility has increasingly come to shape behavior on the streets and undermine respect for the law. To survive prison, one must develop skills whose most efficient use on the outside are in activities that often land one back in prison. Skills that give one status in prison, like the ability to inflict violence on those who show disrespect, are not left behind at the prison gate. On the outside, where there are millions of guns available, these skills play out in a most incendiary fashion. The resulting violence, including drive-bys and executions over Nike sneakers, appear senseless only to those who know nothing about prison culture. The number of persons being convicted of a crime for the second or more time almost doubled between 1980 and 1995, and has been increasing steadily since. Most prisons have utterly failed to offer rehabilitative programs to help inmates develop the life skills they need to operate productively on the outside.

Prisons have been used so injudiciously that they have lost their stigmatizing effect. In the low income communities that provide the raw material for the prison industry, it is no longer shameful to have been incarcerated. In many ways, prison has become a rite of passage, the imprimatur that confers standing. In this way, the overuse of prison contributes to high rates of crime in inner-city communities. When we invest billions in prisons rather than public schools and universities, we are sending a powerful message to our young people that we expect them to fail. And when they do fail, they simply live up to the expectations we had for them.

For our political leaders, the war on crime has brought unintended benefits. In an era when there is no predominant evil threatening us from abroad, crime has replaced Communism as the leading menace to domestic tranquillity. A politician cannot win election by questioning the basic tenants of prison expansion any more than he or she could have won office by challenging the military buildup during the Cold War. For the media, violent crime has become material for entertainment programming. The violent images that attract the most viewers stoke public fear in such a way that building new prisons appears as the only logical response to the crime problem. The need to make basic distinctions—like the one between violent and nonviolent crime—is simply too dissonant to justify the interruption of our local programming.

There is nothing more viscerally disturbing than the fear of being victimized by a violent crime. What is so troubling is that much of our fear does not stem from crime itself, but from the cultivating of our deep-seated anxieties by those institutions that benefit economically and politically when fear is inflamed. Private industry and government are united in support of a crime policy that is designed to ensure that we will spend the most money on the most militant responses possible, whether or not that represents wise public policy. Sadly, these policies destroy lives and devastate communities in the name of saving them. Sound familiar? ❑

TEN WAYS TO RECOGNIZE *(continued from page 80)*
yellow and green, drizzled with olive oil and seasoned with preserved lemon, chili peppers, and cumin. Flavors shouldn't be obvious, Mom says; mix the unexpected: chicken with sweet tomato jam and dark honey, fish with almond paste and confectioners sugar, preserves made from baby eggplants and walnuts, *tagines* simmered with *smen,* saffron and *za'atar.* And *ma fille,* remember the importance of cinnamon.

THREE: *The Knafo Wheel.*

My cousin handed it to me one night at a lecture in New York. A huge sheet of paper to revolve, separated into sections: a round graph. I look at the center: Maklouf Knafo. The one who burned to death along with the other forty-nine *nisrafim* (burnt ones) in Oufran. And the branches spread out from him. Knafos, Knafos, as far as the finger extends. Knafos in Mogador of course, because that's where his wife walked with her baby. I close my eyes and imagine her voyage. A young woman, her eight–day-old infant son (just circumcised by Maklouf that morning), walking down the mountain paths—rocky and steep. But the danger is not in the rocks and winding roads; it is in the robbers and brigands who populate these mountains. A young woman and her baby. I scan the Knafo wheel, turn it around and around, try to read between the black lines and words and letters, but find no name for this young woman. A nameless woman making her way down the mountains to save her son. Nameless—except for her husband's name, Knafo. Is she under God's wing as she stumbles down the road? Sun burns on her head. The baby is hot, hungry, crying. How does she maintain her supply of milk? Everything she owns is on her back. The baby cradled in a blanket against her breasts. Her husband left behind. Her husband, Maklouf Knafo. She walks fast, head down, afraid to breathe, to smell smoke.

FOUR: *Purple Palestinians.*

Now this goes back years: we all lived in a shabby apartment building on Valencia in the Mission in San Francisco—above a bar, across from a bar, next door to a bar. Stumbling over drunks and homeless—only back then we didn't call them homeless, we called them bums. And winos. And I was alone for the first time in my life, scared to death, but—here's the great mixture I can't get a handle on—high on hippie life, memories of my strange isolated family haunting me, trying with my gut to be as American as you, and to that end, sitting in my third-floor apartment in the Mission, looking down at the barmaid, at least eighty, with enormous pale tits and iridescent blue eye-shadow, walking to the bar on the corner to start her shift, and I set pen to paper and begin the American novel—as interpreted by a Moroccan Jewish immigrant girl. But I've been burned already, even though I'm barely twenty-one. The first story I sent out returns with a rejection note: *You write well. Next time try writing about the* real *Jews.*

I am frozen to my soul. Too afraid to inquire more deeply into what the editor means. So ashamed I tear the note into a thousand slivers, shred them with my fingers, and throw them down the toilet. There. It's gone.

"And the pain?" as my father would say. He's known for that final aside, the joke after the punch line that sends it spinning into another dimension. He is known for that, the ironic aside that makes people realize that no joke has an end. No story truly finishes.

And so I write about an old Polish Jewish man as I stare outside and ignore Hassan from down the hall, banging on my door and screaming: I'm going to rape you the way you raped Palestine! And Amar, his roommate, the head cab-driver (the one who gives them all purple Hafiz Cab tee-shirts when they arrive in the city, and the one who cooks for me and gets high with me, and we listen to Procol Harum and wonder over *A Whiter Shade of Pale* together, and stare at each other, attracted though trying not to be). Amar, sweet Amar, with the desert eyes and the tightest purple tee-shirt of all, tells his friend: leave her alone. She's a girl, she can't rape anyone….

FIVE: *Exotic.*

Erotique. I line my eyes with black *kohl* and wear large gold hoops and long gypsy skirts and low-cut hand-embroidered Romanian blouses. Paint my toenails red and wear sandals that tie around my ankles. But my legs are always cold so I begin to wear leggings beneath my skirts—and don't realize it's the way Arab women dress until my mother tells me. I play up the exotic, pronounce words with a faint French accent, *le bagel, qu'est-ce que c'est?* Boys like me; you and your crazy name, one murmurs as he bites my ear. They see me and think of *Casablanca* and Ingrid Bergman and play it again Sam. My first real boyfriend is black. He tells me: I am from Afrikaaa. I tell him: so am I. He tells me: I am black first, a man second. I tell him: in Paris they call me *pieds noirs,* black feet. He tells me: here, they call me nigger. I tell him: they called me *dhimmi,* or the lowest of the low. We outblack each other, and even in bed, scratch and lash and attack, until we lie back, exhausted and content. We're an odd couple: he listens to Jimi and (in secret) Sweet Baby James. I listen to James Brown and John Lee Hooker. I dance better than he does. Later, the best dancer I will ever see, a Moroccan soul-sex machine come to life, whom I watched move to James Brown for hours at a time in a Netanya club called Azazel (or Hell), died at twenty-one in the Yom Kippur War.

SIX: *Memory.*

The years in the sunless *mellahs* and *juderías* and *quartiers juifs* have bleached our skin until it's fashionably Mediterranean, only a shade or two darker than yours. Our nomadic history has given us a variety of languages, none of which is ours, but all of which we have learned to speak—

with a bite. You can recognize us by the rage we carry in us, the rage of the colonized, those who are still not permitted to meet the master class eye to eye. The bitter eyes that now refuse to stay lowered, the angry tongue that can no longer be silenced, the poet's heart that it spite of everything continues to dream and hope, the soul that cannot forget. There is no wind and the smell of burning flesh remains in the square, incapable of moving elsewhere and freeing us.

SEVEN: *Invisible.*

Even within postcolonial, third world, border-crossing, multicultural ethnic feminist identities, I am nowhere to be found. I dare you. Look for me. Born in Morocco, raised in America, in a small town—a Jew from Africa who probably scared my Pennsylvania-Dutch neighbors as much as they scared me—a minority within a minority. Be invisible, my father told me. I tried—but my black feet peeked out from every disguise. And now when I take off my veil and let you see the scratched lines of henna crisscrossing my face, the embroidered scrolls and curlicues that lace my palms, you avert your eyes. By multicultural, I didn't mean you. Latina is hot now. Lesbian Latina even better. Caribbean, mon? Remote Indian provinces, hot as curry. Even Arab American, hotter than you. Who you anyway? Afrikaan? Arab Jew? Oriental Jew? Tied in with Israel. Israel not hot.

EIGHT: *Nomad.*

I believe she traveled north to Taroudant in the Grand Atlas, then wound her way down the rocky hills and ravines to the east and the breezes of the Atlantic Ocean, and north once more, following the coastline past Cap Guir and Tamanar to Mogador. Mountain air is thin and clear, but in the Anti-Atlas Mountains it is pale gray, tainted with smoke. Take a deep breath. The smoke doesn't escape. Locked in the square, over a hundred years later, it smells of death, the end of the oldest Jewish community in Morocco, with a hiss and crack.

NINE: *The Choice: Life or death?*

Take a deep breath and decide if it's going to be life or death, says Bou Halassa, the sheik who owns the Jews of Oufran. Think carefully, he says. The choice is simple: Die as Jews, or live as Muslims—under my protection. All you have to do is say the words: *There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet.*

The sun is shining. It is a July morning in 1790 in the Anti-Atlas Mountains. Bou Halassa is on horseback, surrounded by his men who are already at work building the funeral pyre. The fifty Jews, merchants all, are wearing black (the only color permitted them); they are barefoot (no shoes allowed for Jews); and they are standing on the ground because they are not permitted to ride a horse. The horse is considered too noble an animal to carry a lowly Jew. Bou has interrupted the *souk el'khemiss,* the Thursday morning market. Merchants selling carpets and leather, artisans with brass trays and iron kettles. Cattle, mules, donkeys, chickens.

The leader of the Jews, Rabbi Naphtali Afriat, tells them: We have no choice. To say the words and live a lie is another form of death. To die for God is to live forever as Jews. It's the only way to carry on our faith so that our children can be Jews. So that everything doesn't die this morning.

A young man on the edge of the group is torn. Only this morning, with his own hands, he circumcised his first son. Die—for what? For Bou Halassa's whim? Bou is a tyrant, a sadist, notorious in the mountains for his hatred of Jews. Even though Bou's men have swords and are now circling the Jews, we are fifty in number—maybe we can fight back? And if they overpower us, then what? If we walk into the flames, will he then turn on our women and children?

Afriat, his gold earring glinting in the sun, announces in his quavering voice: We have decided. We choose death—in the name of God. You do not frighten us, Bou Halassa. You will answer for your brutality to God, not to us.

The young man bolts—without a thought, without hesitation—slips from the crowd of Jews and Arabs, and runs to his small cottage. Then he does—what? I'd love to see this scene: how he convinces her to take the baby and leave without him. I can almost hear her: you've already come this far! They don't know you're gone! Come with us. You'll do more good to us alive than dead. Why should you die for this sadist? Come with us!

He walks his wife and baby to the town wall, the stone wall that enclosed Oufran. She is unwieldy: the blanket that supports her baby forces her to lean forward, while the bag Maklouf stuffed with bread and dates loads down her back. He helps push her up the wall, and for a moment is caught there, in the cobblestones, between death and life—his wife's hand pulling him up, the hand of "God" pulling him back. Beneath his feet, red and purple flowers sprout in crevices between the rocks.

TEN: *The Question of Home.*

The sun shines through Amar's window. The Moody Blues sing about nights in white satin. I lean over Amar's shoulder as he fries a mixture of eggs, potatoes, and meat on the stove. The violent Hassan has left San Francisco. Crazy, Amar tells me, tapping his temple and handing me a fat joint. I breathe in the harsh smoke and the pungent spices that smell like my mother's food. You have to create your own home wherever you go, he says. This sounds wise, heavy. But first you have to know what a home is, I say, and hand back the joint. With a deep sigh that echoes through me, I move to the window, sit on the edge and lean out. The sun licks my cheeks with burning tongue. The old barmaid walks down the street. I yell to her. She squints up, sees me, and waves, smiles an orange and yellow smile. Her blue-veined, speckled tits jiggle like blobs of cream cheese, like gefilte fish squashed in satin. ❑

ESSAY

Ten Ways to Recognize a Sephardic "Jew-ess"

Ruth Knafo Setton

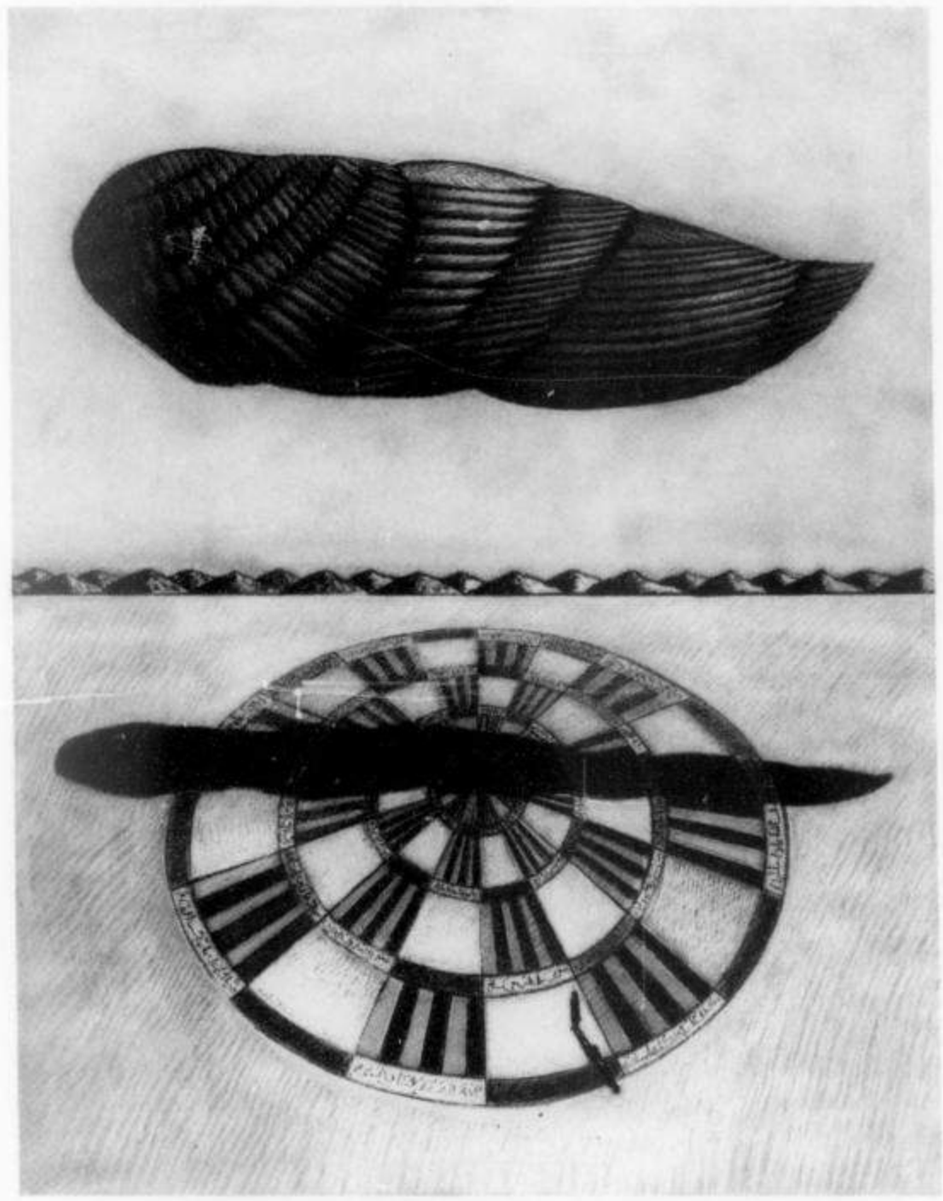


ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD ROSS

ONE: *Name.*

Often unpronounceable, unmanageable, redolent of incense and cumin. A name that twists letters into spirals the way a djinn emerges from a lamp. Abitbol. Afriat. Bahboul. Buzaglo. Aflalo. Dweck. Ohayon. Ben'Attar. Bensussan. Chouraqui. The Spanish echoes too, of arches and Alhambra, dusty streets and brown hoods: Cabessa, Corcos, Mendes, Pinto. But the true names are weirdly resonant, heavy, harsh, satisfying; a name you can sink your teeth into, one that emerges from dirt and mud and roots: Knafo. A certain brilliantly colored cloak, *knaf* also refers to a honey-drenched, shredded phyllo dough Middle Eastern sweet, the kind set a thousand on a large tray in Jaffa or Casablanca that you eat with your fingers, swirling the flaking pastry and syrup and nut mixture on your tongue with burning Moroccan mint tea—perfumed with a drop of orange blossom water. *Knafo.* Say this name aloud, every which way you can imagine. Try being called Knaf-Knuf. Knasoo—a singularly ugly aberration, Konfoo, Kanfa, Knee, or in a stroke of malevolent genius: Kohenfo. The mysterious letter "k." To pronounce or not? Arabs whisper it like a "h." Hanafo. It's a breath, a wing. Knaf in Hebrew is a wing. Legend has it that Knafo means "under God's wing," even to be protected by God because we are literally under His wing. This was especially evident for Maklouf Knafo and his family on a Thursday morning in July 1790, in the Berber village of Oufran hidden in the Anti-Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

TWO: *Food.*

Feed this child. Wide-eyed and yearning. This child has never tasted a bagel! Her mother distrusts anything served in a gel. Gefilte fish? She whisks her child away from it quickly. Kugel? The dough is too heavy, sinks into the stomach. Lox and cream cheese? Mom clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth. They don't know how to be subtle, she murmurs, wielding her knife and beginning to chop. Behind her henna'd hair—beautiful auburn waves flowing down her back—I see my American backyard. A swing set on which my little sister soars, lost in her recurring daydream of rescuing stray cats and dogs and bringing them to her doll hospital. A sandbox in which my tiny naked brother sits and throws handfuls of sand back and forth. Mom chops, cuts, slices. I lean on my elbow and watch everyone at once. Even my dad far away at work sorting produce at the A&P, struggling to make sense of English syllables—coiled and Germanic—as opposed to fluid French, guttural Arabic.

I think about my own rescue fantasy. Every night in bed I return to our little backyard. The alley behind is flooded. Help! Help! someone screams. It's *I Love Lucy!* I race from my yard to save her, bring my trusty canoe through the gate, and paddle up the hill. I pull her into the boat. Her red hair gleams in the dark. She thanks me, and I set her safely in my backyard, and return to save Desi and little Ricky. It's a dangerous world, something I can't remember ever learning and yet something I must have always known. To open the front door is to enter danger. I prefer leaving from the back, where I can ease my way into the outside world, through the yard and the gate, down the alley and around the corner past Old Man Minnich's store and his display of comic books and penny candy in the window.

See, Mom says, and gestures towards the salads: oranges and black olives, the colors alone nearly sending me on another voyage; purple beets and celery; cooked peppers red,

(continued on page 78)

Ruth Knafo Setton is the author of Suleika. *The recipient of an NEA and two Pennsylvania Council of Arts fellowships, her fiction and essays have appeard widely. She teaches at Lafayette College. She was born in Safi, Morocco.*

Ravages

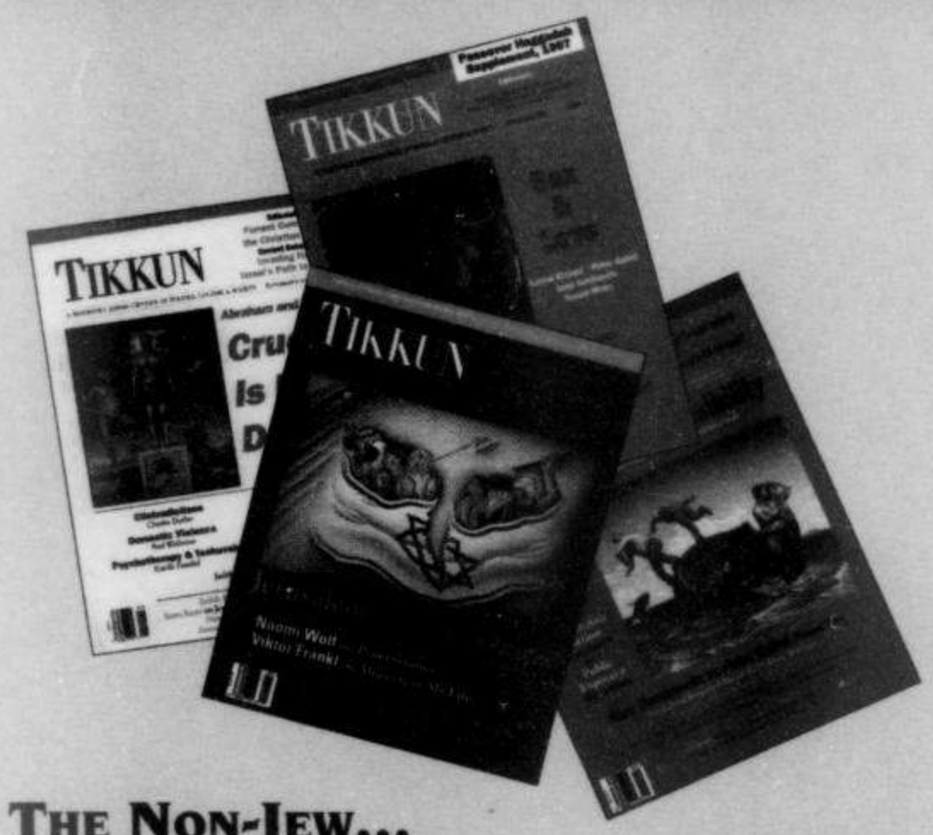
An oil fire down below, and on the lit box
an unmoving figure, a man from behind, forearms
bare, walking a path that curves through cared for
green, each plant placed so unfurling it sculpts
a sort of speech. I breathe with difficulty
and dark rises from the snow. All month
I've been precarious, at a threshold, near
an entrance. No one will say what lies
or what tells the truth. No one can.
If I could, for once, make another visible
this way—outside cars slice silent air,
and they say the weather's changing.
Last night I heard a man declare with pride
he no longer reads the news—and what they do
they do in our name. Yes, she is beautiful,
like a wide river or an uncomplicated view
of the ocean, but my eyes blank—even
inner vision can't see her now. Such a wide
silence suddenly I've lost my taste
for spiritual ventriloquy, want to know
just the circling of my own pale hours.
How did this happen again? Nothing happens
again. Eccentricity in her walk, a tilt
as she moves, and I watch as the taxi pulls
south, as she diminishes, the driver's language
nothing I can speak. Every time she's left,
I've let her go without protest, and as
the print of her body leaves mine, ceased
to understand myself. Shoppers interrupted
crossing a street; at the next cut, faces
turned to the wall, blood splashed up stucco;
then the look of wound-scraped skin,
a dying face in bright color. I stay away
from the news, he says. Frozen rain picks at
window glass and illness sinks through my abdomen.
I'd get an image of your face and long to
fall toward you into touch, just touch.
A desert, the sickle moon, black sky
and fire lights her face. Here, light seems to
crack not extend, and I can't remember
who died yesterday. He was not
old, and he did what I do at the desk,
something beneath his hands to put word to paper.
As we stood there, she pulled me toward her
by the belt and thrust in with her hand.
Tonight cold divides skin from body heat.
What was it like before cars? before oil burned
in the cellar or jets blanched the sky as if
speed made a difference? In a sunlit room,
I love you more… In the kitchen, orange
clivia, its yellow centers, how its broad leaves
shape the light. If I followed her, would I turn
to look back? *We're through half our lives.*
Yes, I answer, as if there were no dead
on certain streets in Europe, no shoppers
hurrying across a square as a wall shudders
from the end of a room—and through a window
you see a face dart forward. On waking,
I beg in the empty dark. Was this a life?
It's the same magenta comforter my sister
carried from Norway as I lay in an oak bed
with a man who loved me, before the telephone
kept memory or screens were linked to language.
It's as if I missed ten or twenty years, certain
lengths of skirt, cuts of jacket. That's where
the Chinese laundry was! I remember the day
I went to say goodbye, the man looking at me
with a fast smile. I was sure I was going somewhere.
Here, from below the fields late at night,
you can hear the train along the river wailing,
wailing hard, between water and the mountains.

— Honor Moore

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