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TIKKUN

MICAH L. SIFRY
THE NADER OPTION
A TIKKUN CONVERSATION WITH
RALPH NADER

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY

JULY/AUGUST 2000

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THE DIVINE RIGHT *of* CAPITAL

*Stockholders as the
New Aristocracy*

MARJORIE KELLY



SLAVERY TODAY

Moctar Teyeb

WHEN VOTING MATTERED

Michael Tomasky

TRANSLATED EROS

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi

GERMANS AND JEWS

Mimi Schwartz

POSTZIONISM JEROME SLATER WITH A
RESPONSE BY MICHAEL LERNER



Plus: Paul Simon on Primaries • Fiction by Judith Harris
Paul L. Wachtel on the Racial Divide
Michael Nagler on Jonathan Kozol • David Biale on *Kadosh*

She Forgets

The one who told me about the Holocaust, who taught me moral distinctions, who gave me music and told me jokes, is in a nursing home: lonely, scared, surrounded only by people so much worse off (inarticulate, incapacitated, drooling), she thinks she's in a crazy house.

She's not crazy.

She's there—I put her there—because she can't take care of herself, can't be left alone.

She's old.

She forgets.

She forgets her medicine.

She forgets what she's not supposed to eat.

She forgets what day it is.

She remembers who she is—and who she was—and knows she's not herself.

She can't remember what's wrong with her ("What's wrong with me, honey?") or why she's there, but she knows her brain isn't working right.

Her brain needs air.

Oxygen has a hard time squeezing through her hardened arteries.

So her blood congeals.

Little clots cause little strokes, which destroy her memory.

Aspirin, which thins the blood and helps keep the oxygen flowing, might help her remember.

But she's old.

Part of her stomach has turned upside-down.

Her food gets stuck in her chest, blocks her breath.

She panics, forces herself to vomit, which makes her bleed—which damages her heart.

A simple operation could fix her stomach.

But doctors won't operate on someone with a damaged heart.

And aspirin makes her bleed.

So she can't take aspirin.

So she forgets.

I live in another city.

Once, after I came to visit, she wasn't thinking about her food.

She ate too much, or too fast, and the food wouldn't go down.

So she panicked, forced herself to vomit, and had a heart attack.

She was in the hospital for three weeks (which she doesn't remember).

So I've had to put the one who gave me music and told me jokes, who taught me moral distinctions, and warned me never to forget the Holocaust—I've had to put her in a nursing home, a crazy house, where she's scared and lonely; where she stares out the window and asks: *"What day is today?"*

"Why can't I go home?"

"What's wrong with me, honey?"

"Why am I here?"

—Lloyd Schwartz

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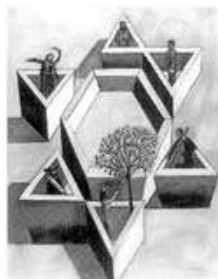
10 SLAVERY TODAY

People in Mauritania are still being bought and sold, according to **Moctar Teyeb** (10). Looking to America's slave-owning past, **Lawrence Bush** and **Jeffrey Dekro** call for reparations for African Americans in their column, *Torah of Money* (12).



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Why do stockholders lay claim to the wealth that corporations generate? Unless stockholders are venture capitalists, their money goes to other speculators, not to corporations themselves—so why should corporations be run primarily for their interests? **Marjorie Kelly** diagnoses what she calls the "divine right" of stockholders to profit, and calls for an end to the wealth bias that has created today's rich/poor divide.

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At the Center of the Universe
by Alejandro Mazón. Courtesy of
The Faulty Beagle Gallery, Kunkletown, PA.

Sikkum: TIKKUN RECOMMENDS ...

The Human Stain

Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin, 2000

All is forgiven, Philip! As bad and distorted as *American Pastoral* was, that's how good Roth's latest novel is. In telling the story of a light-skinned African American who managed to pass as white and Jewish, Roth unveils the primary sin of his own generation's assimilation into America. While Roth continues to present us with the voice of white male authority, he tells his story with elegance, wit, and intellectually provocative pleasures which make this book a terrific read.



The Legacy of Luna

Julia Butterfly Hill
HarperSanFrancisco, 2000

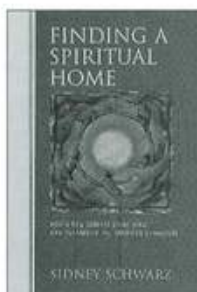
One person can make a difference—and Julia Butterfly Hill did just that by sitting for two years at the top of an old-growth redwood, preventing the loggers from cutting it down. Faced with wind and rain, threats of physical violence, and constant harassment from guards sent by Maxxam-corporation-owned Pacific Lumber, this young woman demonstrated remarkable courage and dedication. Written with humor and depth, Hill's account is an inspiring reminder that we can create an arena for powerful spiritual and moral witness wherever we are.



Finding A Spiritual Home

Sidney Schwarz
Jossey Bass, 2000

The spiritual crisis that led to a Jewish renewal movement has finally been noticed by the Jewish establishment, and Sidney Schwarz's new book is likely to play an important role in helping them understand what is at stake. Schwarz presents his findings through the stories of participants in every denomination who are at various stages of their own spiritual search. By recognizing that Jewish life has lost some of its most sensitive spiritual souls, Schwarz opens up the same kind of discussion we have been conducting in TIKKUN about how to rebuild Jewish life on a stronger spiritual foundation. Hopefully his voice will be heard.



Rattling the Cage

Toward Legal Rights for Animals

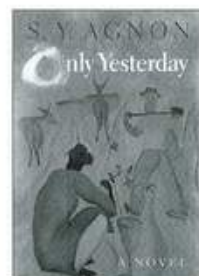
Steven M. Wise
Perseus Books, 2000

There is an immense amount of cruelty to animals, and perhaps the only way to stop or lessen it is to grant legal rights to animals whose pains, lives, and freedoms are intentionally ignored, often maliciously trampled, and routinely abused. Before you dismiss such views as "political correctness" run wild, read this stunning book which Jane Goodall describes as "the animals' Magna Carta." Even those of us who worry about "rights-based" solutions to moral problems will find Wise's argument for considering some animals persons troubling and worthy of considerable thought.

Only Yesterday

S.Y. Agnon
Princeton, 2000

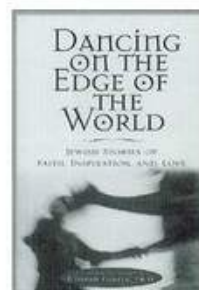
Israeli Fiction Laureate S.Y. Agnon's famous masterpiece, *Only Yesterday*, has finally been translated into English. In this tale of an immigrant to Palestine, Agnon demonstrates his particular talent for telling a contemporary tale in language that makes one think one is reading a classic text of the midrashic past. In an accompanying volume, Princeton has published a translation of Amos Oz's *The Silence of Heaven*—a kind of running commentary on Agnon's text by one of Israel's most beloved novelists (and a frequent TIKKUN author).



Dancing on the Edge of the World

Miriyam Glazer
Lowell House, NTC/Contemporary Publishing Group, 2000

Miriyam Glazer has assembled a group of "Jewish stories of Faith, Inspiration and Love" from an array of writers including Yehuda Amichai, Melvin J. Bukiet, Nava Semel, Yaffa Eliach, Rodger Kamenetz, Howard Schwartz, Aryeh Cohen, Bradley Shavit Artson, Alicia Ostriker, Sally Weber, Chana Bloch, and Irena Klepfisz. Though the writing is uneven, taken together these stories are filled with wisdom and joy—well worth reading and useful sources of inspiration.



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Letters to the Editor

Dr. Laura

To The Editor:

Danny Goldberg, in his column "The People v. Dr. Laura" (May/June 2000), seems to agree that the Stop Dr. Laura campaign is not about the First Amendment, yet proceeds to argue that we need to protect Dr. Laura's freedom of speech. He also believes that pressuring Paramount not to carry the Dr. Laura television show would restrict the "free marketplace of ideas." Goldberg misses the point.

The Stop Dr. Laura campaign has got nothing to do with the First Amendment or free speech. It is a reaction to the absence of any sort of "free marketplace of ideas." In suggesting that such a marketplace exists, Goldberg ignores decades of scholarship which have found that 1) the political and economic interests of the corporate conglomerates which own most mainstream media outlets filter out



most progressive analyses, 2) the product which does reach the airwaves is supply driven, not demand driven, and 3) since a meaningful democracy depends on a critical national discourse, the absence of such a discourse has disastrous effects on our ability to uphold democratic values.

What would happen if Michael Lerner and Cornel West went to Paramount with the idea of making a television show articulating the values of a progressive politics of meaning? How would Paramount sell advertising space to AT&T and Chevy for a program that might give people the idea that corporate profit shouldn't be the most important societal goal? They wouldn't, they don't, and yet they have little trouble with Dr. Laura. This is a form of censorship, no doubt. But even a libertarian would find it difficult to argue that Lerner's and West's free speech is being compromised.

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A popular movement which pressures the corporate media to responsibly present a more balanced view across the political spectrum—or even better, which demands that, for the sake of democracy, media shouldn't be privately owned in the first place—is at the cutting edge of progressive politics. The Stop Dr. Laura campaign is part of that larger movement.

DANIEL MILLER
Chicago, IL

Danny Goldberg responds:

First, let me reiterate that I detest Dr. Laura's attitude toward gays and lesbians. My argument is that campaigns such as Stop Dr. Laura do more harm than good.

Frankly, if I could get rid of media that offends me with no adverse consequences, I might do it. But the real world doesn't work that way.

Corporations usually withdraw from things that are "controversial" without too much regard for the reasons behind the controversy. Getting corporations in the habit of eliminating controversy creates a climate that also will repress all sorts of speech that gay activists, feminists, and other progressives want out there. It's that

same climate of diversity that creates the Dr. Lauras of the world. I don't think you can have one without the other.

Even though the organizers of these efforts refrain from calling for censorship (instead, they demand "corporate responsibility"), they clearly want the same result as censorship: the removal from mass media of material offensive to their particular beliefs. Either boycotts to stamp out offensive media are legitimate or they're not. The more they are used, the more empowered become the shrillest voices in the society. Even when, on occasion, one of those choruses speaks for one's own sensibilities, the result will be no better than that of a short-term high followed by a long, unpleasant hangover.

Neo-Stalinist?

To the Editor:

Regarding Budd Schulberg's comment that "Navasky still calls John Howard Lawson a progressive.... I consider Navasky a neo-Stalinist because he should know better" (May/June 2000)—what I wrote more than twenty-five years ago was not that John Howard Lawson was a progressive, although he certainly considered himself one.

Rather, I reported in the *New York Times Magazine*: "Whatever he once was, John Howard Lawson today [1973] is arthritic in tone, humble in claim, but crystal clear in recollection of what he was and wasn't in the old days."

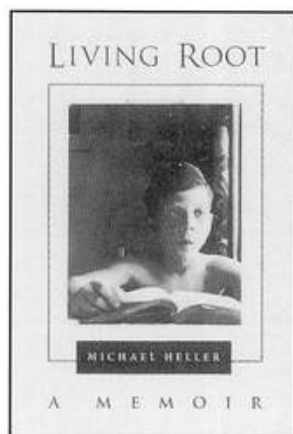
When I asked Lawson about Schulberg's charge that Lawson pressured him to make *What Makes Sammy Run* toe the party line, here is what he had to say:

I've never questioned a writer's right to write what he pleases. But I also have the right to say what I think about it, and I thought *What Makes Sammy Run* was not a great Hollywood novel, not a great proletarian novel and not a great novel. I thought it was a piece of junk. I thought it was then, and I think that now, and I think history has proved me correct.

At the time, Budd told me that I should have added that Orville Prescott, daily critic for the *New York Times*, gave it a good review. I'm sorry I didn't, because had I done so, perhaps Budd would have been spared the embarrassment of resorting to a misplaced epithet left over from the McCarthy era.

VICTOR NAVASKY
New York, NY

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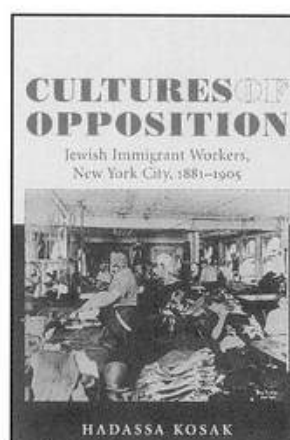
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LETTERS

Intercessory Prayer, Again

To the Editor:

In his reply to Lawrence Bush's letter (May/June 2000), Larry Dossey fails to respond to the salient points of the *Skeptical Inquirer* (March/April 2000) article which Bush uses to call into question Dossey's claims for the benefits of remote intercessory prayer. The article points out that in the 1988 Byrd study on prayer for cardiac patients, the blindness of the study was invalidated because: (1) the major results table was constructed by Byrd alone (rather than by blinded evaluators) using criteria formulated after the data were collected, and (2) the coordinator of the study knew which patients were assigned to the prayed-for and control groups. In the 1999 Harris study on prayer for cardiac patients, also cited by *Skeptical Inquirer*, the major outcome criterion (speedy recovery with no complications) was shown to be consistent with the null hypothesis. Of two other global scores, one was barely significant in favor of the prayed-for group, but the other one failed to replicate the differences found by Byrd. The authors of the *Skeptical Inquirer* article point out that it is statistically unacceptable to pick and choose among outcome variables, selecting those which show a difference in the predicted direction and ignoring those which fail to do so.

Dossey refers to meta-analyses of multiple studies which show trends supporting the efficacy of remote intercessory prayer. However meta-analyses are only as good as the studies on which they are based. In his response to Bush, Dossey refers to reports in *Nature* and other prestigious publications, but the bulk of the studies on which Dossey bases his "case for nonlocality" in *Reinventing Medicine* are reported in journals of parapsychology and psychic phenomena, publications which are not held in high repute by the scientific community for reporting contrary results of experiments, for replicability, or for critical peer review.

If intercessory prayer is as effective as Dossey claims, it could mean millions in savings in health care costs. But we have yet to see a major double-blind study, designed with outcomes specified in advance and peer-reviewed by skeptical scientists. So maybe it's not yet time for NIH to redirect its efforts.

Perhaps Dr. Dossey is onto something that culture-blind science and

medicine refuse to see. Certainly medicine needs to concern itself more with the spiritual needs of patients. Psychogenic factors are extremely important in healing, and, as Dossey points out, knowledge of physics, chemistry, and even neurology can tell us very little about consciousness. But it's a far leap to the conclusion that consciousness exists independent of an intact organism and/or exerts influence at a distance. As Carl Sagan is frequently quoted as saying, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof." I doubt that such proof, Dossey's claim to the contrary, is yet with us.

CHARLES W. ACKER, PH.D.
Whitefield, ME

Larry Dossey responds:

The two studies of distant, intercessory prayer that Dr. Acker mentions—that of Byrd (1988) and Harris (1998)—are hardly perfect and I agree that they should be challenged. In fact, he seems to have missed a strong six-page criticism of the Byrd study in my 1993 book, *Healing Words*. In any fledgling field in science, early studies are often quite clumsy and may resemble little more than stabs in the dark. Over time, the shortcomings are identified and subsequent experiments become increasingly refined. This process will hopefully take place in the field of prayer research.

But it isn't true, as Acker states, that "we have yet to see a major double-blind study, designed with outcomes specified in advance and peer-reviewed by skeptical scientists." An example is the double-blind study by Sicher, Targ, Moore, and Smith, which found positive effects from distant healing in patients with advanced AIDS. This study was conducted at UCSF-California Pacific Medical Center and was published in the peer-reviewed *Western Journal of Medicine* in December 1998. This paper was accompanied by an editorial comment by the skeptical editor of the journal, who specified that the study was being published solely on its scientific merit. This result does not stand alone. At Duke Medical Center, an ongoing double-blind study in intercessory prayer has resulted in a 50 to 100 percent reduction of side effects from angioplasty, a dilating procedure of the

coronary arteries (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, May 1999).

Acker also takes issue with the fact that consciousness-related studies are often published in parapsychology journals, but finds no significance in the fact that some are published in *Nature* and other prestigious science journals. If the phenomenon being investigated is utterly specious, why should any of the studies make the grade of world-class journals? In any case, researchers publish in journals that are cordial to the phenomena they are investigating. This is as true in genetics, physics, and vulcanology as in prayer-and-healing.

Acker is apparently unaware of the evidence suggesting that the standards of parapsychology journals are higher than that of journals in the fields of medicine, biology, psychology, and the hard sciences such as chemistry and physics. In a recent review, British biologist Rupert Sheldrake found that in journals in the physical sciences, papers were blind or double-blind zero percent of the time; in the biological

sciences, 0.8 percent of the time; in the medical sciences, 24.2 percent of the time; in psychology and animal behavior, 4.9 percent of the time; and in parapsychology, 85.2 percent of the time (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, May 1999). The reason for parapsychology's adherence to a higher standard is not difficult to understand. This field has been subjected to such intense criticism over the years that researchers have developed a degree of

methodological rigor that has outdistanced many other fields in science.

Although human studies in intercessory prayer are in their infancy, they are unlikely to go away any time soon. Many scientists believe they may be telling us something important about healing and the nature of consciousness. The NIH has recently funded a study designed to replicate the Sicher and Targ study of distant healing in advanced AIDS. These studies will no doubt continue to be a lightning rod for criticism. That should be encouraged, because this is how a young field grows and matures. But while we continue to criticize the scientific investigation of prayer, let's give the experimenters enough elbow room to do their work and, yes, to make mistakes. Science has never progressed otherwise. □



Spirit Matters

Meaning, Spirit, God and Religion in the Public Square

Michael Lerner

Is There Enough?

After asking, “Can progressives ever open themselves to awe, wonder, and amazement at the universe’s legacy of love” on the cover of our May/June issue, I was powerfully challenged by Cornel West during a public dialogue at the Reimagining Politics Conference in New York City in May. Repeating a truth of the spiritual tradition, I asserted that “there is enough and you are enough.” Maybe there is enough for our material well-being if we use our resources wisely, West concurred, but there is not enough time! The more we human beings rejoice in the universe, the less we can accept the short period we have to develop our own consciousness and enjoy the glories of life.

West is certainly right that death feels like a tragedy to many of us—an unadorned negative element that makes us question whether the universe is really so filled with love. Yet faced with the inevitability of death, the spiritual tradition teaches us how to transcend the standpoint of the isolated ego, end our attachment to our specific consciousness, and begin to see the world from the standpoint of the

totality. One can rage at the dying of the light of one’s own consciousness, one can escape the dilemma of death by positing an afterlife, or one can follow what I call in *Spirit Matters* the path of Emancipatory Spirituality by situating oneself as part of a universal unfolding of meaning as the universe increasingly manifests love and goodness. Seen in this light, our brief moment of consciousness is a necessary prelude to the possibility of the next generation coming to even deeper levels of consciousness by learning from all that we have been able to embody and transmit, including our ability to let go and create the space for others to move beyond the consciousness level that we have been able to attain in our own lives. We become the platform on which love unfolds, develops, and becomes more deeply ingredient in the world. And everyone of us has enough time to transmit that love, because every single act of our lives has the potential to be a manifestation and strengthening of the way we are created in the image of God. To get this and pass it on *is* enough.

The Lifeless Conventions: The Spirit Is Missing

The media is doing its best to create drama in a two-party system whose candidates differ primarily in the details of how best to serve their corporate masters. Having succeeded in rendering American discourse one-dimensional and marginalizing all fundamental criticisms, the media now faces the task of regenerating at least a minimal level of interest. So we get its lame attempts to generate excitement: Will George W. use his presidency to ban abortion? Will Al outlaw guns? No. But the media hopes to ride out such overstated differences through November, rather than raising the issues that the candidates and the media’s corporate owners wish to avoid.

Big “P” Politics is so boring because politicians share this narrow agenda. On the one hand, they need to mobilize their own constituencies, many of which are organized around single-issues. For them, the conventions must reassert established orthodoxies and fire up fear in their partisans that if the other side wins their concerns will be

trampled. On the other hand, they also wish to appeal to a small percentage of “swing voters” who are usually described as moderates; these voters, who will wait until the last moment to decide, are seen as caring more about the personalities of the politicians than about their politics. This year, swing voters are said to be particularly concerned about not continuing the partisanship that dominated the “impeach Clinton” Congress of the past few years. So everyone will be trying to show how nonpartisan and moderate they are. The last thing these big “P” Politics people want is a discourse that actually excites people, challenges the status quo, or has any potential to mobilize anyone who isn’t already mobilized. The rest of us, they hope, will keep on snoozing.

This year, as in past convention years, we at TIKKUN will be joining with others to sponsor a series of spiritually-oriented conversations with delegates, in the hope that at least some will find a politics of meaning more exciting than

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what they find inside the convention hall. Yet our gatherings will also contrast with the gatherings of the traditional Left, which are likely to be dominated by the predictable complaints that too many people have been "left out" of America's economic expansion. The complaint is real—we recognize the continued indifference of the Democratic Party to social justice issues. Yet, a progressive politics that focuses on the rights of those who have been "left out" has not managed to excite very much of the American public. Truth is, not a single progressive entered the Democratic presidential primaries this year, so convinced were they that their voices would not be heard. Progressive politics will remain stuck in oblivion until it finds a way to connect its critique of an undemocratic media and unchecked corporate power with a politics of meaning discourse that can speak to the other even more widely spread reality: that America is a spiritual wasteland whose temples of material prosperity are built to the idols of money and power and do not satisfy the soul.

Tragically, this kind of discourse will be appropriated in the 2000 election by Pat Buchanan. He will tie it, on the one hand and quite appropriately, to a critique of corporate globalization, and on the other hand and quite inappropriately, to his reactionary racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic agenda. This, of course, was precisely the way that the Nazis got power in the 1930s. Until we can build a progressive movement on the foundation of an Emancipatory Spirituality, we are likely to see many decent people responding to



Spirit matters in the fight against the forces of global capital.

the deadness of establishment politics by moving toward the reactionary spirituality of the Buchanans. We have some hope—Ralph Nader, in this issue, shows some signs of listening to a spiritual agenda. Unless he and others move farther in this direction, however, they will not be able to mobilize the American people.

There is one part of the progressive movement that shows more openness to this perspective—the young people who will be out in the streets at both conventions challenging corporate globalization. Many of them have an intuitive sense that their movement needs a spiritual dimension. We will be with them in the streets.

Barak's Self-Imposed Quagmire

The defection of Shas from Barak's governing coalition and the likelihood of further postponements in the peace process will lead people to say that Barak is stuck in a quagmire. What can he do, they ask, if he doesn't have the political backing for a strong deal with the Palestinians? Barak has used that same argument himself—he can't give away too much, he says, or he won't get the backing of the Israeli people.

But this has been a self-created quagmire. Barak never had to take Shas or the settler-oriented National Religious Party into the government. Instead, he could have pieced together a coalition based on those who supported the peace process and the separation of state from religion. He refused, because that would have required accepting the active participation of Arab parties; the "common sense" of Israeli racism is that a government dependent on Israeli Arabs does not have the "legitimacy" to make peace.

Barak had a clear mandate for peace. To grasp that mandate he needed to have the courage to say the following:

1. that he rejected the racist assumption that Arab Israelis are less "real Israelis" than Jewish Israelis;
2. that settlers should accept their future as a minority within a Palestinian state because Israel would not seek to include every settlement within its boundaries (in the past we printed a map, developed by the Israeli Religious Peace party Meymad, that would allow many of the settlements to remain within redesigned Israeli borders yet cede most of the West Bank back to the Palestinian people)
3. that the Old City would remain within Israel under shared administration, but that Arab East Jerusalem would become the capital of a Palestinian state; and
4. that he had witnessed the assassination of Rabin and had no intention of allowing similar acts of treason to be tolerated, including any planned acts of violence aimed at impeding the peace process.

Had Barak taken this kind of clear and unequivocal stand from the start, he would have built considerable popular

PHOTOGRAPH BY AP PHOTO / ITSU INOUE

support. Instead, he engaged in secret negotiations, on the one hand, that the Right was able to represent as "giving away too much," while, on the other hand, he publicly placated the settlers, did little to prepare the Israeli public for significant concessions, and allowed talk on peace to be dominated by his critics.

Instead of developing a discourse of reconciliation that used his Prime ministership to create the foundations for a genuine transfer of land for peace, Barak talked about leaving 150,000 or more settlers in the West Bank, many of them believers that God gave the entire land to the Jewish people and that any Palestinian state is a betrayal of God's will. He adopted the inflexible language of the Right on Jerusalem as "the united, eternal capital of the Jewish people" as though the 200,000 Palestinians who live there could be ignored. He imagined that sounding tough would make people trust him when compromises had to be made.

But when it counted, he wasn't tough—in fact, he showed an unbelievable lack of courage. In preparing for the withdrawal from Lebanon, Barak abandoned the Southern Lebanese Army who had fought at Israel's side, with consequences sure to make Israelis feel less secure. We, who always opposed the invasion and occupation of Lebanon, would still have advocated a slower and more thought-through withdrawal process.

Similarly, Barak's disgraceful willingness to negotiate with Shas rather than to fire the party from his government once they voted "no confidence" sent a terrible signal: this guy is so desperate he will grovel at the feet of his political enemies.

No wonder, then, that Barak now finds himself without the political flexibility to negotiate a settlement that can last. Even if Arafat, reminded of his own age and weakness by the recent death of Mideast tyrant Hafez Assad of Syria, accepts a deal yielding Israel 20 percent or more of the West Bank—a deal certain to perpetuate the struggle in future generations who will see Arafat's sell-out of Palestinian interests as having no binding legitimacy—Barak will face huge resistance from Israelis who just a year ago might have been willing to follow him had he taken bold and decisive steps to reach a final settlement with the Palestinians.

Palestinians have already compromised by accepting just the West Bank and Gaza, by accepting Israel's right to create a Jewish state (with unequal rights for Jews and lesser rights for Palestinians, enshrined in the Law of Return) on the majority of the land of pre-1948. Now it's time for the Israeli people to make a decision. They can only do that if Barak calls for new elections himself—and presents the specifics of an agreement that meets the reasonable expectations of the Palestinian people. Present it, fight for it, and let Israelis decide. Yet Barak and his Meretz allies may be so enamored of their current power that they are unable to hear this simple message: fighting for peace in a principled and open and honest way is actually the best and most effective way to regain trust and retain power. □

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My Unique Pathology

Teachings of Blood

Mordechai Gafni

Mystical master Nachman of Bratzlav tells the following story: A son leaves his home and travels for many years in distant lands. Upon his return he tells his father that he has become a master craftsman. Particularly he has learned to make *menorot*—candelabrum. His father, wanting to demonstrate his son's wisdom and craft to the community, invites all the master craftsmen to see his work. The craftsmen, however, all quietly tell the father that they think the son's work is lacking; indeed each points out a different deficiency in the son's work. Both hurt and disturbed, the father confronts his son with the poor reviews. To which his son replies: "You will notice, father, that each of the criticisms addresses a different part of the lamp. In fact the deficiency that each person saw was a reflection not of the menorah but of themselves—of their own particular emptiness."

Nachman's point is that the true illumination the candelabrum can provide begins with the identification of each person's unique deficiency. To see the light means undergoing a spiritual transformation—what the book of illumination, the Zohar, calls "higher *teshuvah*" (higher repentance). However as a close reading of the Idra Raba reveals, "my light," literally, "my *zohar*," can only be reached through "my darkness." My personal shadow is the path to uncover my personal light.

We were all raised to think the light is the force that stands against the darkness. And, ultimately, we inherited the belief that in the long run good triumphs over bad and light dispels darkness. A famous wisdom text from biblical myth reads, "Wisdom is more powerful than folly, as light is more powerful than darkness."

However, the masters of the Kabbalah, ancient teachers from whom the Baal Shem received wisdom, interpret this text in a novel and radically different way: wisdom is more powerful when it comes "from" folly and light is more powerful when it comes "from" the depth of the darkness. That is, for the Kabbalists, the highest source of light is darkness.

Rebbe Mordechai Gafni serves as Dean of Melitz Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. This column is based on his forthcoming book, Soul Prints, (Pocket Books, 2000). ©2000. All rights reserved.



Mystical philosopher Schneur Zalman of Liadi asserts that this is not only true about light in the universe, but is true about ourselves as well. Our highest light comes from our darkness. This is the light that comes from the shadow.

At this point I want to significantly deepen our understanding of shadow, which was made popular in the West through Jungian psychology. My interest in doing so is not purely conceptual—it is very practical as well. I want to personalize the shadow so that we can begin to see that my personalized shadow is the path to uncover my personalized light. To gain clarity, I am going to refer to the concept of the shadow with a term new to the current discussion—pathology. "Shadow," is not quite the right word, because it doesn't allow us to see the connection between the spiritual and the physical. I introduce "pathology" because of its immediate physical association; tissue pathology refers to something going wrong in the normal functioning of the organism.

In order to understand why physical pathology is important as a complementary image to shadow, I need to introduce a core concept of the Kabbalah: "*Mibisari*. Through my flesh I vision God."

This quote from Job will be the guiding principle of the remainder of this essay. For kabbalistic readers of the Book of Job, this verse means that "through my flesh"—that is through my physical form and its guiding principles—I can understand much about my spiritual/psychological form. The concrete physical plane of reality mirrors and therefore models the spiritual realm. For the mystical reader of the biblical myth, to "vision God" is to understand being, for God and being are one.

Post-Lurianic Kabbalists go even one step further and read this verse with a pronounced emphasis on the word “my.” My flesh means not only my physical form, but the body of my unique life experience. The verse is thus taken to mean, I access the epic of being through the drama of the psyche. And I can only access psyche through my psyche, i.e., my fully unique story. Herman Hesse in the prologue to *Demian* writes, “I have ceased to question stars and books; I have begun to listen to the teachings my blood whispers to me”.

Motivated by the “mibsari—though my flesh” idea, biblical myth constantly draws analogies between the causes and manifestations of psychospiritual sickness and physical illness—that is to say, pathology. The teachings of blood.

One of the most powerful blood teachings is the notion that our spiritual pathologies follow a pattern similar to our physical pathologies. Let’s unpack one image inherent in this teaching of startling relevance.

Our physical organism is fully unique. Each human being has a fully distinctive physical signature. Our immune system, for example, is designed to recognize and destroy any foreign substances—microbes, tumors, bacteria—which seek to violate the uniqueness of our signature. And because the signature of our body is unique, its pathological responses are also unique. No two tumors are the same. For this reason doctors can only diagnose in the most general way, based on statistical probabilities. Statistics however—as my friend Dr. Mark Kirschbaum, a bone marrow researcher at the Wietzman Institute, verified for me—are by definition an incomplete guide as they ignore the radical uniqueness of every body.

Through my flesh I vision God—mibsari. Just as every body has a unique signature, so does every spirit. I have called the signature of the spirit a “soul print.” A soul print is the unique story of the individual. The soul print’s mantra, its call to holy and holistic living, is “Live Your Story.”

Spiritual disease is the expression of a person not living their story, the psychological expression of that person’s violation of the unique patterns of their spirit. When the psyche’s signature is forged, pathological symptoms are not long in appearing. In a word, psychic pathology—our personal shadow—is a result of our failure to realize our particular soul print.

Furthermore, just as any given pathology itself is unique to the physical organism which experiences the disease—no two tumors are alike—it is unique in the psychospiritual realm as well. Specific shadow symptoms—anger, fear, phobias, jealousies, obsessions, lack of certain kinds of boundaries or discipline—reflect the specific nature of the soul print which has been violated. Not which symptoms but how the symptoms show up, in what particular intensity, texture, and frequency, can tell me much about the soul print that is not being expressed.

This idea of such a unique pathology—not just a shadow but a personalized shadow—lies at the heart of the thinking of nineteenth-century mystic Mordechai Lainer of Ishbitz and the school of students who followed him. The following is a brief formulation of his idea of unique pathology which I have woven from his writing and from the pen of his student known as Tzadok the Priest from Lublin.

Everyone knows the place of his particular vulnerability to his darkness—to the attacks of his primal drives ... every person has a unique *chisaron* (pathology or shadow) which inhered in them from the day of their birth ... every person has a unique soul *tikkun* (fixing) to do in this world ... and this fixing is connected to his unique *chisaron* with which he was born.

And it is this place which is the vessel of his potential blessing.

It is with this place that the person must establish *kesher* ... an intimate relationship.

The first key word in the passage is “*chisaron*” which I have translated in the parentheses as “pathology” or “shadow.” The literal translation of “*chisaron*,” however, is some combination of the English words “lack,” “absence,” or “emptiness.” We all are empty in different ways. There is a part of each of us that we would like to fill but that remains empty. In the Bible, the writer Kohelet has already pointed out that there is no saint without his share of pathology. Pathology is something we share in common. It is also true, however, that we are all pathological—as we are all silly—in wholly individual and unique ways.

Spiritual disease at its ultimate source is rooted in our un-lived lives, in the feeling that we do not really exist in the deepest existential resonance of that word. We all have different un-lived stories. I don’t experience pathological symptoms because I haven’t lived *your* story. I experience them because I have not lived *my* story. When the light of my soul print is pushed into the shadows, it festers and reemerges as the heart of darkness.

What is so hopeful and exciting about this idea is that it provides us with a yellow brick road back to our soul print. *Chisaron* as a signature characteristic actually reveals the unique work that the soul is called to do in this world. Moreover, it is critical to note that this *chisaron*, this unique pathology, is not a function of childhood, according to Lainer. On the contrary, he states clearly that every person is born with their unique *chisaron*. We are—according to the Lurianic Kabbalah from which Lainer derives—given parents who help us actualize our soul print. That could mean that they provide the condition of love so necessary for soul print perception or conversely that they are the force against which we must rebel or from which we must flee in order to achieve soul print. Contrary to Alice Miller and a host of orthodox Freudians, Lurianic Kabbalah believes that our soul print and not our parents determine our destiny. And that is a hopeful thought indeed. □

A Call For Freedom

Moctar Teyeb

It's the year 2000. A nearly 800-year-old system of slavery in Mauritania must be abolished.

Slavery is not history. From Bombay to Brazil, at least 27 million people are enslaved around the world, more than ever before. Westerners know about forced prostitution in Thailand and carpet-slave children in Asia, but few know that in my country of Mauritania, black chattel slavery has never ended; hundreds of thousands of slaves live as the inheritable property of their masters. Mauritania is a small nation located on the west coast of Africa, right above Senegal. Of a population of 2.4 million, nearly half are black Muslim slaves. Today, in the year 2000, Mauritania's centuries-old system of slavery remains strong.

Eight centuries ago, my ancestors lived peacefully in their homeland of Africa. Then came the Arab-Berber raids. Suddenly, in the night, under the cover of darkness, Arab-Berber raiding parties from the north descended on our villages. These raiders stormed through on horses and camels. They killed or chased off the men, and took the women and the children away, tied to the backs of their animals. Why women and children? Because they could be controlled and raised to believe that their role as blacks was to serve their new masters. And they could be made into a slave caste. In this way, we became *haratines*—black Muslim slaves who faithfully served our white Arab masters, the *beydannes*. The system of slavery that began with these raids in the twelfth century continues today. On my mother's side, we cannot remember a time when our family was ever free.

Those of you who know the history of the Middle East and North Africa are aware that before the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, there existed for centuries a Saharan slave trade. Timbuktu, for instance, was well known as a stop on the Saharan caravan route. There were three kinds of goods on those caravans: gold, ivory ... and black slaves. As a result

of those caravans, slavery became an accepted institution in the region in which I was born. Slaves were—and still are—the property of masters; they exist to serve the master's every need. Although officially outlawed by an ordinance enacted in 1981, there is little evidence that this measure has ever been enforced. Moreover, the Islamic courts regularly uphold the rights of slave owners. For the Arabs in Mauritania, it is shameful to work with one's hands. So slaves cook, clean, and wash the hands of the masters before they eat. Slaves haul water, herd cattle, and cultivate land. Slaves are also given as gifts or as loans. When the daughter of a master marries, she must move to the house of her husband's family, along with two slaves to serve her and show her noble status.

*The system of slavery
that began with these
raids in the twelfth
century continues today.*

Let me make clear that everyone in Mauritania is Muslim—the masters and the slaves. The *haratine* slaves are faithful Muslims, and are raised to believe that serving their master is their religious duty. Young slaves are told by their owners that because of their impure black skin, their only hope for reward in the

afterlife is being obedient. Many slaves grow up believing this and transmit this myth to their children. In Mauritania, we have a simple saying: "Paradise under your master's foot."

The values and concepts that drive the Mauritanian system of slavery are backed by a twisted version of Islam. The *beydannes* do not allow black *haratines* to learn the Holy Koran because, they say, black slaves are too impure for such a holy book. Only the *beydannes* have the right to learn the Koran, and the hard result is that the slaves are more obedient without knowing the truth of Islam. Masters also deny slaves the right to marry. The masters believe that if *haratines* make their own marriage, they will begin to feel independent. Therefore, even the most fundamental religious (i.e., Islamic) right of marriage is denied them.

This is all in violation of the Holy Koran. Since I escaped from bondage, I have spent many years studying Islamic law, and I know that God is very clear on the issue. Freeing slaves is a high form of charity. As it is written in the Koran: "The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and are used

Moctar Teyeb is the American Coordinator for El Hor, a Mauritanian anti-slavery organization run by former slaves, and serves as the outreach director of the American Anti-Slavery Group, based in Boston.

to free captives and debtors for the cause of Allah, for this is a duty imposed by Allah."

But the beydannes have reversed this concept. When rich masters want to make repentance, they do not "free a neck," as the Koran says. Instead, they give one of their slaves as charity to the poor. So today, you can walk in the capital city of Nouakchot and see blind beggars being led around by their black slaves. Mauritania has many social classes and clans, but all the light-skinned beydannes share the right to enslave blacks.

There are no more slave raids. Everyone has enough slaves, and more are obtained by breeding. In addition, there are no open markets for slaves. Trading is done informally, by word of mouth. In the early 1980s, when some princes in the Gulf countries of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates needed slaves, they imported them from Mauritania. Owners in Mauritania would sell young children to sheiks in the Gulf. Inside Mauritania, some masters hire out their slaves to companies in return for salaries, or rent slaves out to other masters in big cities.

In the late 1970s, I joined El Hor, a Mauritanian anti-slavery group run by former slaves. El Hor means "the Free" (like the Hebrew word for freedom: "herut"). We take our inspiration from runaway African American slaves, like Frederick Douglass, who escaped to become abolitionist leaders and who could not rest until they freed their people. El Hor challenges everyone to visit Mauritania to see how slavery is a part of everyday life, to see how the beydannes in Mauritania consider slavery a religious right they will not give up. You might also look more closely, here in the Mauritanian embassies and consulates in New York and Washington. In these buildings you will find slaves serving the diplomats.

Tragically, our brothers in Islam have never condemned the practice of slavery in Mauritania. They have denied and neglected what is happening to us, even though we haratinees are proud Muslims. Muslim and African leaders must know that slavery in Mauritania is a reality, and should put pressure on the dictatorship in Mauritania to end slavery.

We are also dismayed at the silence from the human rights community. Human rights groups have known about slavery in Mauritania for years, but have yet to launch a concerted effort to address contemporary slavery. There are so many organizations and humanitarian groups dedicated to fighting child abuse, political detentions, and disasters. But these groups have forgotten about one million slaves in Mauritania. Some do not know. Others do not care. Human Rights Watch, for instance, has no Mauritania desk. The human rights community must remember that the fight against slavery over 150 years ago was the first

modern human rights campaign. That fight is no less important today.

Until recently, the U.S. State Department extensively documented slavery in Mauritania. After Mauritania abandoned its support of Saddam Hussein, the State Department rewarded this moderation by citing mere "vestiges" of slavery in its annual human rights reports. In fact, there had been no change whatsoever in Mauritania's official policies on slavery. And despite a 1996 congressional resolution decrying chattel

slavery in Mauritania (HR 4036-3), the current administration continues to engage Mauritania as a moderate Arab state. The price of this rapprochement is my people's freedom. In October, Mauritania and Israel signed a peace treaty, further deepening our plight.

For hundreds of thousands of blacks in Mauritania, slavery is no "vestige," it is a brutal reality. But we slaves have rights; although neither our government nor our religious leaders will admit it, we, like all human beings, have the right to freedom. And we are committed to fighting for our rights. Those of us who have escaped do

two important things. First, we educate slaves back home that bondage is wrong, because knowledge is the path to freedom. Second, we speak out against Mauritanian slavery. El Hor has called for an international conference to take place in Europe or the United States. It is important for leaders and organizations to begin to address slavery in Mauritania. We must break the silence and begin discussion.

As outreach director of the American Anti-Slavery Group, I have spoken to children and adults at schools and at protest marches. I see students starting antislavery campaigns, and I see adults demanding action. I see that the old spark of abolitionism is once again touching the souls of Americans. This gives me hope because I know that when Americans speak out against human rights abuses (as in Kosovo and South Africa, for example), the American government responds.

Freedom from bondage is the most fundamental human right, and America is a proud abolitionist nation. But your work is not over. After 800 years of bondage, one million black Muslim slaves can no longer be ignored. The rights of black children born into slavery must be protected. The rights of mothers who cannot even claim their own children must also be protected. And the rights of men and women who cannot marry must be protected. I know you will stand with me and my people. And so I say to you, "Next year in a Free Mauritania." □

For more information visit the homepage of the American Anti-Slavery Group at <http://www.anti-slavery.com>

Jews and the Black Reparations Campaign

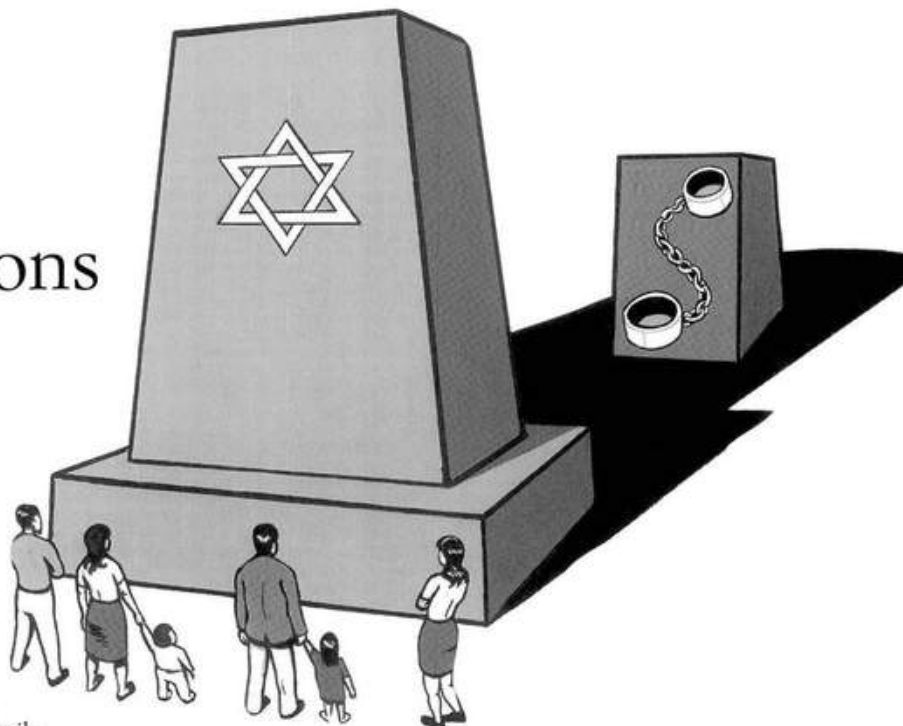
Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro

It took seven years from the end of World War II for Germany to begin making reparations payments to Israel to help with the absorption of one-half million survivors of the Holocaust. The 1952 Luxemburg Agreement brought a total of \$715 million in German money and goods to Israel, and an additional \$107 million to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims for the rehabilitation of Jewish survivors and institutions worldwide.

Some on the political left viewed the Luxemburg Agreement as an insult—\$1,500 per murdered Jew!—and a capitulation to America's postwar recruitment of the Nazi-ridden West German government to the anti-Communist cause. But the fact is that the moral currency of Israel and the Jewish people received a boost from the reparations agreement that has yet to be fully spent. The very concept of the Zionist state as an "affirmative action" for Jews and the recent efforts by survivors and their allies to press claims against corporations, banks, and other beneficiaries of Jewish suffering were given lasting credibility by Germany's payment of reparations.

Here in America, it is now 135 years since the 246-year-long enslavement of Africans and their descendants legally ended—only to be transmogrified by racist systems of law, education, jobs, housing, and culture into another century of oppression. Still, not a penny has been paid in reparations, nor has any agreement been articulated, let alone signed, that would establish America's moral obligation to rehabilitate the African American community. As Randall Robinson writes in his remarkable book, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*: "Solutions must be tailored to the scope of the crime in a way that would make the victim whole. In this case, the psychic and economic injury is enormous, multidimensional, and long-running. Thus must be America's restitution to blacks for the damage done."

Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro are co-authors of *Jews, Money and Social Responsibility*. They can be reached at *The Shefa Fund*, info@shefafund.org. *Torah of Money* is a service mark of *The Shefa Fund*.



In its passion, Robinson's book resembles the prophetic Zionist manifestos of the nineteenth century—writings haunted by bloody pogroms and the degraded quality of life for Jews in Eastern Europe. Robinson, too, is haunted—by the viciousness and insidiousness of American racism for the past 400 years, and by "the long term psychic damage" the black community has suffered. Here in his short book are the details of racism that seem to slip from America's memory on a daily basis: the kidnapping and killing of millions from Africa; the erasure of ancestral memory from African American identity; the debilitating burdens of illiteracy, poverty, and brutality extended over generations; and the begrudging quality of every concession made, every advance permitted. Here, too, is a vision resembling Martin Luther King, Jr.'s of a "black renaissance" that would benefit us all:

Imagine all the liberating insights rising to the surface in the tear-washed foam of this long-suppressed national discussion on slavery, its unjust economic penalty, and its searing social price. Billy [a Black child] could learn now why there is no slavery museum on the Mall, no monument to Harriet Tubman, no memorial for Nat Turner—indeed, why he and everyone he knows are poor.... The catharsis occasioned by a full-scale reparations debate could ... launch us with critical mass numbers into a surge of black self-discovery.... We could disinter a buried history, connect it to another, more recent and mistold, and give it as a healing to the whole of our people, to the whole of America.

As founder of TransAfrica, Robinson was the leading U.S. activist against South African apartheid throughout the 1980s and fundamentally understands the critical nature of coalition-building. In his book, he presents Jewish Holocaust reparations as the touchstone for his own concept

(continued on page 18)

Elián in the Middle

Michael Moore

I have only one criticism of Janet Reno and the raid the INS conducted in Miami the morning before Easter.

The gun wasn't big enough.

I looked at that now-famous photograph of the INS agent with the 9mm automatic in his hand as he demanded that Elián González be turned over, and I thought, "This guy is in a bunker full of crazed kidnappers who believe that Flipper is a member of the Holy Trinity, and all he has to defend himself and the boy is that dinky little gun?"

The media, though, did not ask my question. It took off on its latest witch-hunt. One commentator after another deplored "the use of force." Politicians called the INS agents "storm troopers." Anchormen spoke of the "horror" and "terror" in little Elián's face as he was "snatched" from the arms "of the very fisherman who saved him at sea."

My favorite was Representative Tom DeLay. He said that this was "the first time" in America federal agents had entered a person's home without a warrant (I could hear the howls of Black America when these words were uttered!). Of course, he lied; there was indeed a warrant signed by a judge.

But hey, why get picky about the truth! If it was truth that mattered, then the media would have called the operation a rescue, not a raid. If the politicians were interested in the rule of law that they took an oath to uphold, then they would call the Miami relatives kidnappers instead of heroes.

Let me get this off my chest right now before I go any further. If you hold my six-year old against my will for five months, I can guarantee you I'll be coming at you with more than that guy with the puny gun and a Spanish speaking agent carrying a blanket. Can anyone explain to me why Janet Reno was even negotiating with these criminals? I don't give a damn how close the negotiators were to "a deal" with the kidnappers; when you illegally hold a child who is not yours, *there is no deal in the United States of America.*

I am just as happy as anyone to welcome immigrants from Cuba or any country to America. But apparently a bunch of these right-wing Cuban fanatics did not get a copy of the rulebook when they came ashore, so let me spell it out now for any of them who may be reading this:

- In America, when a parent asks for his child to be returned, no matter how nice a stay the kid had with the



relatives, the child must be returned to the parent.

- If a six-year old says, "I don't wanna go!," that is treated the same as when the six-year old says, "I wanna drink the Clorox!" or "I wanna see what will happen if I poke myself in the eye with this stick!" In America, six-year olds do not call the shots, the parents do.

- If you kidnap a child, you will be arrested and sent to prison for life.

- If you harm or abuse a child in any way, physically or mentally, you will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

- If you keep a child up until all hours of the night making videos mocking the child's father, if you parade the child in front of TV cameras morning, noon, and night instead of sending him to school, if you call yourself the boy's "surrogate mother" when you are, in fact, a wigged-out second cousin, if you are a fisherman who is found in a locked bedroom closet at five in the morning tightly holding a little six-year-old boy who is not yours (and, in some cases, even if he is yours), then we are going to send whomever and whatever we need in to get that boy and try to save what's left of his mental state.

If you think I'm being too harsh, I ask each of you, especially those with children, to pause for a moment and think of who your craziest, creepiest relative is. You know who he or she is. We all have one. That one cousin or step uncle who is always in trouble with the law, who breathes a little too heavy and stands a little too close to you when he talks, the one who can't hold liquor or a job or who thinks the courts have gone too far and are splitting hairs when they start placing adjectives like "date" before the word "rape." Yes, you know exactly who I mean.

Now imagine that your precious little boy, after experiencing the tragedy of losing his mother, has found himself in their hands. And they won't give him back to you. For five months. Meanwhile, you have to watch him suffer at their whims on international TV. You ask every law enforcement agency—including the president himself—for help. But nobody will do anything. In fact, just the opposite

(continued on page 16)

Michael Moore is a filmmaker and satirist of corporate greed. His best known films are *Roger and Me*, about General Motors, and *The Big One*, about Nike's exploitation of child labor and human rights abuses.

mer Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton's suggestion that there be a real nominating convention, not just the organized rally that we now call a convention. The delegates would be members of the House and Senate, governors, and mayors of the largest cities—as well as the people who ran against them the last time. For example, my last opponent was Republican Lynn Martin, a member of the House and later Secretary of Labor. If I were still in the Senate, I would be a delegate to the Democratic convention and she would be at the Republican convention.

The Eagleton theory is that knowledgeable delegates would be more likely to choose candidates whose background and experience in government and politics had really prepared them to lead the country. Foreign policy, for example, is seldom mentioned during the presidential race; the exception to this is trade, but only as it relates to the loss of American jobs. Even that issue is barely in the picture for much of the country. Yet foreign policy takes one-third to one-half of a president's time once he is in office. Particularly because of the United States' position of lonely world leadership, foreign policy should be a major concern in selecting nominees for president. But delegates to the conventions this year in Los Angeles and Philadelphia will be little concerned with the international situation, a reflection of the attitudes of the people "back home" who selected them as delegates.

Unfortunately the Eagleton proposal has almost no chance of happening. It is a sound idea, but like many sound ideas, it would be subject to the criticism that we "are taking away from the American people their chance to select the presidential candidate." In fact, whether Eagleton delegates were elected public officials or nominated yet unsuccessful candidates, they would represent the choice of the voters of one political party in a city or a district or a state. The only drawback I see to the Eagleton proposal—besides the fact that it has almost no chance—is that it might attract purists who would not support the two small states idea as a good way to begin improving the process.

With or without changes in the nominating process, solidifying the two small states concept will require a few bold champions in the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee, and in Congress. When the *New York Times* ran an article on this idea, one of those expressing enthusiastic support was Republican Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, a first-term member with above-average courage. There are also Democrats who would join him in efforts to push the two political parties in this direction.

How would the political parties do it?

One way would be for the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee to each appoint a committee of five and have the two committees work together to develop such a plan. Those representing larger states might well oppose the idea on narrow self-interest, while those whose states would benefit might support it for

no more noble reasons. But I believe enough people of conscience see the corrosion that is occurring in our democracy because of the influence of money on presidential primaries and congressional elections and would support changes.

Cynics will argue that even if we did change the way we conduct the primaries, people would find a way to use their money to influence the outcome. Eventually that would probably be true. My observation, over many decades, is that after ten or fifteen years every governmental reform needs to be reformed; abusers tend to find ways to manipulate the law. For example, the public funding of presidential elections worked well for several elections, but now it needs to be reformed, not only with the proposals mentioned here, but with other changes as well, changes that would prevent any candidate loaded with money from simply buying a nomination.

We should keep the two small states primaries as early testing grounds. All of us, especially the economically deprived part of our citizenry, need the protection and opportunities that the federal government can provide against "the big money boys." Small states like Iowa and New Hampshire provide that buffer for the citizens of California, New York, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and other heavily populated states.

We need less dominance of the process by the moneyed and more attention to problems non-moneyed people face. Having two small states precede the parade of the other states inches us in that direction. Moving to regional or national primaries would just be a gift to the already too powerful special interests, and another step away from helping those in our society who have real needs and who, too often, feel voiceless. □

ELIÁN IN THE MIDDLE (continued from page 13)

happens. The mayor of the city where your criminal relatives live announces that, not only will he do nothing to return the boy to you, he will not allow his police force to protect any other agency that may go in to rescue him. Then every politician from one of the two political parties takes the side of your kidnapping relatives. Finally, both candidates for president come out and say the boy should stay and not go back to you ... yet.

Tell me, honestly, how would any of you keep your sanity through all this?

You wouldn't. I wouldn't. How on earth did Juan Miguel Gonzáles?

It is time to stop letting a bunch of right-wing lunatics in south Florida control American foreign policy in this hemisphere. It is time to end the embargo against Cuba. It is time to normalize relations. It is time to get over ourselves—Castro beat us; we tried for decades to off him, couldn't do it, he's still there, big deal. I do not want another dime of my tax money spent on pretending he's some big, bad bogeyman.

The whole world, my friends, is laughing at us. □

Small States, High Stakes

Primary Considerations

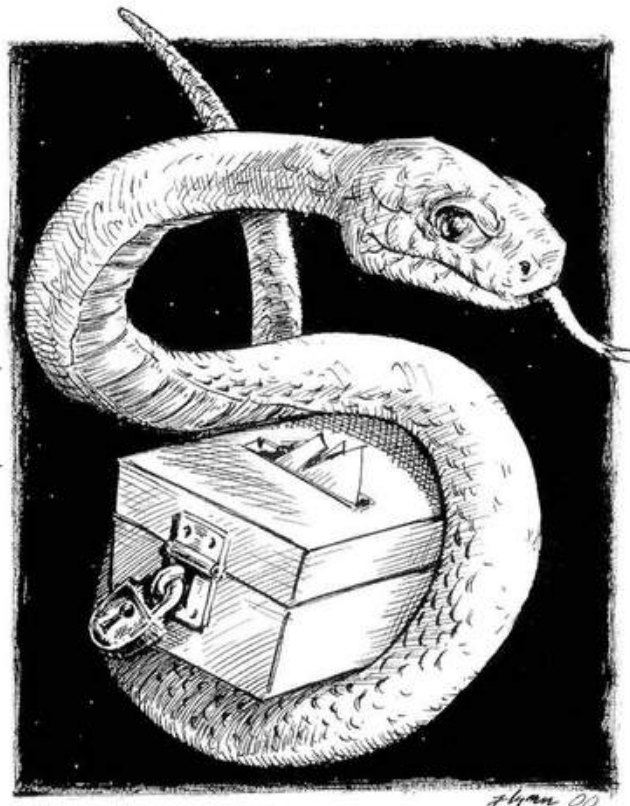
Paul Simon

There are few issues that have equal appeal to people in both political parties or attract equal antagonism, but one that does fall in that category is how we conduct our presidential primaries. There is substantial sentiment that we should have regional primaries or a national primary rather than giving so much weight to Iowa and New Hampshire. Although this idea has superficial appeal to all of us in the other forty-eight states, the reality is that regional primaries or a national one would increase the dominance of money and bring other problems.

One evolving alternative to the proposals for regional or national primaries is called the "Delaware Plan," in which the ten states with the smallest populations (Delaware being one of them) would hold their primaries first. The next ten in population would follow a week later, and the process would continue until all fifty states were covered, leaving the final decision in the hands of the ten most populous states. This suggestion is only a modest improvement over simply having regional or national primaries. To be forced to face an initial primary day that takes you from Delaware to Wyoming, reaching out to people in ten states, would require considerable financing—and since the type of candidate time allotment that occurs in Iowa and New Hampshire would not be possible, we would be back to taking questions from reporters at airport press conferences. And back to big money.

When people argue that Iowa and New Hampshire are not representative of the nation, they have a valid point. Nationally about 12 percent of our population is African American; in Iowa it is 2 percent and in New Hampshire less than one percent. Latinos comprise 11.6 percent of our nation's population; in Iowa it is 2 percent and in New Hampshire it is 1.5 percent. But many concerns are shared across racial lines, issues such as health care, employment, crime, and access to education. Iowa and New Hampshire force candidates to go into homes and talk to people who cannot pay a hospital bill or who cannot get a job because of a slight disability. New Hampshire and Iowa require at

Paul Simon, former senator from Illinois, is the director of the Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, (www.siu.edu/~ppi/).



least a little retail politics, something more than the sophisticated thirty-second commercial, something more than simply answering questions from reporters at press conferences or carefully structured "spontaneous" visits to a school or hospital or backyard barbecue at someone's home.

A regional or national primary would be nine-tenths television commercials and one-tenth airport press conferences or carefully staged events. Candidates and their managers know that if the would-be presidential nominee shows up at a bowling alley to roll a few balls, all the cameras will be there. Staff aides arrange for "the right people" to be using the other lanes so that when the camera switches from the candidate to comments from other bowlers, laudatory comments about their candidate will emerge and make the evening news. Of course those TV commercials and staged events require money; whoever has the most of it will probably win, unless you start out from ground zero politically as Steve Forbes did. Massive primaries would compound the systemic money abuses that already plague us.

TIKKUN readers with unusually good memories may recall that I was part of the 1988 fray for the Democratic presidential nomination. I entered somewhat late, having endorsed Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas who decided not to run. While the other hopefuls had crisscrossed Iowa many times, and spent considerable time there, I had not done that. Nor did I have the financing of some of the seven candidates—dubbed "the seven dwarfs" by the media—but I came in a close second on caucus night. NBC later stated that I perhaps did win. I doubt that, but had I won in Iowa I believe I would have been the Democratic nominee. Congressman Dick Gephardt of Missouri carried Iowa, but was not as equipped to run in the rest of the nation. Governor Michael Dukakis, who came in third in Iowa, won New Hampshire decisively

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES FLYNN

and went on to secure the nomination. Since the emergence of Iowa and New Hampshire in the process, neither party has nominated anyone who did not carry one of these two states. The point is: even without heavy financing I had a chance to win, thanks to the power of Iowa. In a regional or national primary I would not have had a chance. My voting record offended the defense industry, the insurance companies, and many other major political contributors.

In our most recent primaries Senator John McCain, badly outspent by Governor George W. Bush, nevertheless won in New Hampshire by nearly 19 percentage points. That thrust him onto the national scene dramatically. Had a few things changed slightly, John McCain would have been the Republican nominee for president.

I am not wedded to Iowa and New Hampshire being the initial states. For more racial balance you could pick New Mexico and Arkansas, or Delaware and West Virginia. Or give Native Americans a chance and have it in South Dakota and Montana one year, or Arizona and North Dakota. A bipartisan group of Democrats and Republicans could work this out, probably leaving the arrangement as it is for Iowa and New Hampshire for the year 2004, but changing the first primaries to a series of agreed upon small states for succeeding elections.

The reasons for keeping two small states to guide the rest of us are more than financial. Every candidate for the presidential nomination goes through the first weeks of a candidacy developing "the campaign speech," fine-tuning what appeals to an audience. Those words get repeated over and over and over again, with a paragraph or two added about the Port of New Orleans or wildlife in Maine or whatever the subject of local interest might be. It works, but the candidate wearies of the constant repetition and reporters who follow the candidate day after day can repeat the speech almost word for word. They have no story, so when the candidate goes up or down three points in a poll, the press seizes on that, and the next day the media carries the non-story of a slight shift in the polls and the candidate's response to it.

However, when the candidate goes into that Iowa or New Hampshire living room, his or her listeners are unconcerned about the polls. They want to know what the candidate will do about health care or water pollution or educational needs. Am I suggesting that ordinary citizens ask better questions than the reporters who are with the candidate constantly? Yes, because the questions often arise from the sort of personal involvement that increases the intensity of the inquiry. A reporter may accept a vague response to a question about health care, but the father of a brain-injured child will not be satisfied with an answer that fails to deal concretely with his concerns.

It's not just the primary process that needs to be changed. Today, whoever wins the primaries wins the nomination. Of the many proposed variations on the presidential nomination selection process, the most creative and wisest is for-

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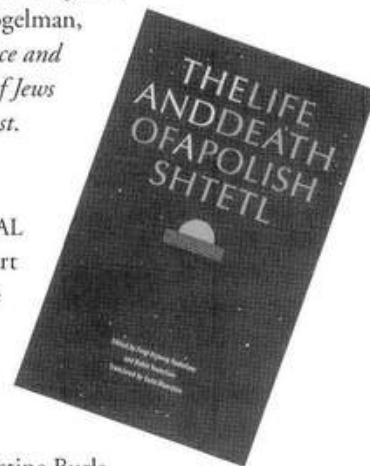
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An International Nonviolent Peace Force for the New Millennium

Mel Duncan and David Hartsough

The new millennium finds us at a significant crossroads. Will we see an incessant stream of devastating armed conflicts and just as devastating sanctions, or will we find an alternative more worthy of human ingenuity and compassion?

Over the last twenty years, a remarkable development in international peacemaking has been bidding fair to give that question an optimistic answer. Beneath the notice of the world media, modest-sized non-governmental organizations (NGO) and ad-hoc coalitions like Peace Brigades International, Balkan Peace Teams, Witness for Peace, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Peaceworkers, and dozens more have been fielding "peace teams" that offer "protective accompaniment" to threatened persons and that otherwise interfere with the war process through nonviolent intervention.

When the U.S.-backed Contras were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, operating from bases in Honduras to attack Nicaraguan fields and villages, a North American-based organization called Witness for Peace began sending delegations to document the "low intensity conflict." Over the next seven years, hundreds of international volunteers stayed in Nicaraguan villages, picking cotton and coffee and helping to rebuild the war-damaged infrastructure. And they soon found they were doing something else they hadn't dreamt of: no Nicaraguan village was ever attacked by the Contras while the internationals were present. Protective accompaniment was born.

Around this time, in 1985, Guatemalan women from the newly-formed Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (or GAM, "Mutual Support Group") began to be systematically assassinated by the Guatemalan paramilitary. At a loss, they called Peace Brigades International (PBI), which provided round-the-clock, one-on-one accompaniment for the besieged women. The assassinations stopped. GAM leader Nineth de Garcia told the *New York Times*, "Thanks to their presence I am

alive. That is an indisputable truth." In this case again, more was involved than the saving of some precious lives: much of Guatemalan civil society had been wiped out by the military, leaving most citizens too terrified to act and with no visible means of reversing the chaos. During the next four years, as PBI provided unarmed bodyguards for the GAM leadership, the courageous women were able to carry out

*"Thanks to their presence I am
alive. That is an indisputable truth."*

their work, thus creating an opening for other citizens' groups to emerge and begin rebuilding the country's democratic institutions. That there is a peace process in Guatemala today must be credited in part to these women—and to a handful of unsung international volunteers who cheerfully shared their destiny. (There may be more truth than we realize to the Torah's dictum: "He who saves a life; it is as though he saved the entire people"!)

Long-term presence like this has proven to be the most desirable form of action, but there are always going to be conflicts that flare up suddenly and cry for a "rapid response"—a rapid, *compassionate* response. On the Philippine island of Negros in 1989, over 500 villagers who had taken refuge in a church hall were being threatened by death squads when Bishop Antonio Fortich (who had heard about PBI and Witness for Peace) called on worldwide religious leaders for help. Twenty-five representatives were there in the church hall within twenty-four hours, declaring that they, too, would undergo anything done to the refugees and the world would know of it. That threat fizzled.

But such quick responses have been the exception. As we know too well, the peace movement has lacked a credible, coherent, and comprehensive response to, for example, the brutal aggression of Slobodan Milosevic throughout the last decade. Some international activists did, to be sure, stand with the people of the Balkans in nonviolent solidarity, but it



Mel Duncan is the cofounder of the Minnesota Jobs with Peace Campaign and the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action. David Hartsough is the executive director of Peaceworkers.

MAKING PEACE

was too little, too late, and too ignored by the world media. As the *Nation* editorialized in April of 1999, "This crisis creates a profound dilemma for principled anti-militarists who do not want to turn a blind eye to ethnic cleansing but do not embrace the NATO air war." Such a dilemma was preventable. Kosovar Albanian President Ibrahim Rugova had been asking for international support as early as 1990, to no avail; and many believe (including this article's co-author, David Hartsough, who led a contingent there in 1998) that a significant international presence could have played a major role in averting the violence that marred the end of the decade. How? By providing accompaniment, moral support, training, and capacity-building for nonviolent and democratic institutions, and in the extreme, interposition. Nonviolent activists could also have organized international support and media attention for the local nonviolent movement (which was beginning to wrest concessions from Belgrade) and done general education on the possibilities for peaceful resolution.

This opportunity we missed; but there is now hope that we can make some kind of international peace force a reality in our lifetimes. Effective examples of this type of third-party nonviolent intervention have, as we've seen, grown dramatically in the last twenty years: Peace teams have "seen action" in Colombia, Guatemala, the Balkans, the United States, Israel-Palestine, Mexico, and Nicaragua, to name a few battlegrounds. Most of these groups are undertaking small-scale, highly specialized activities, but in each case they are an active presence, reducing levels of violence and supporting local peacemakers. They are saving lives, creating a space for civil society—and creating the invaluable knowledge and experiential base for more sophisticated nonviolent peacemaking. As a result of their efforts, the world now has a cadre of experienced nonviolent peace-workers, qualified trainers, and a unique set of organizational techniques on which to draw. Funders have not been slow to express an interest in this daring experiment; and we should not forget that by now ordinary people in hundreds of thousands have demonstrated their willingness to resist repressive regimes nonviolently in this same, violence-torn era.

Last spring, a proposal to create an international, multi-ethnic standing peace force trained in nonviolent strategies that could be deployed to actually or potentially violent areas was drafted at the Hague Appeal for Peace, a meeting that drew over 9,000 activists from 100 countries. At that historic meeting, the authors of this article, who had been working independently on the idea, took on the job of circulating the proposal, which has in one short year been reviewed, discussed, and critiqued by thousands of nonviolent activists, scholars, and military veterans from around the world.

We have recently entered a new stage of organizing that includes the formation of an interim steering committee composed of one member with extensive business experience, the active commitment of 140 experienced advisers from throughout the world, and a growing list of endorsers.

Those endorsers include Nobel peace-prize laureates His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, Máiread Maguire of Northern Ireland, and Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor. In May the Peoples Millennium Forum at the United Nations included peace force in their formal recommendations.

An international peace force would represent what many people across the political spectrum feel is our only hope for an alternative to increasingly dangerous large-scale military interventions. Building on the important peace teamwork already happening throughout the world, this project would bring peacemaking activity to a dramatic new level. Effective interventions have sometimes been carried out with fewer than a dozen hastily trained volunteers. What could we not do with, say, two hundred people committed to two years of training and active nonviolent engagement, with thousands of supporters and an effective organization at their backs?

When Mahatma Gandhi fell to an assassin's bullets on January 30, 1948, he was about to go to what would have been a historic meeting to establish a nonviolent *shanti sena*, or "peace army" on a grand scale. That dream did not die with him. □

For further information on the latest developments with this proposal, or to get involved in making an international peace force a reality, contact Mel Duncan at MnDuncan@aol.com or Peaceworkers@igc.org, (415) 751-0302.

Jews and Black Reparations (continued from page 12)

of reparations for black community-building—and as the precedent for all successful reparation/restitution measures of recent history, including those directed at Japanese American World War II internees, black race-riot victims, and Native American massacre victims. Implicitly, Robinson is asking the Jewish community for the solidarity that we are uniquely qualified to give:

- Uniquely qualified because, as late immigrants to the United States, we have a somewhat less guilt-ridden history vis-à-vis black oppression, thus less of an instinct to shove away calls to conscience with reactionary anger.

- Because we know first-hand the renaissance of Jewish vitality that worldwide historical reckoning with the Holocaust has engendered.

- Because our religious tradition commands us not to "stand idly by your brother's blood" (Leviticus 19:16), and to grant the freed slave "from your flocks, and your granary and your wine press, with which the Lord your God has blessed you" (Deuteronomy 15:14).

- Because we have tremendous expertise in the kind of community development and institution building needed to set things right.

Randall Robinson's book is a piece of Torah. It deserves study—and response—by American Jewish leaders. □

Can Zionism be Reconciled with Justice for the Palestinians?

Jerome Slater

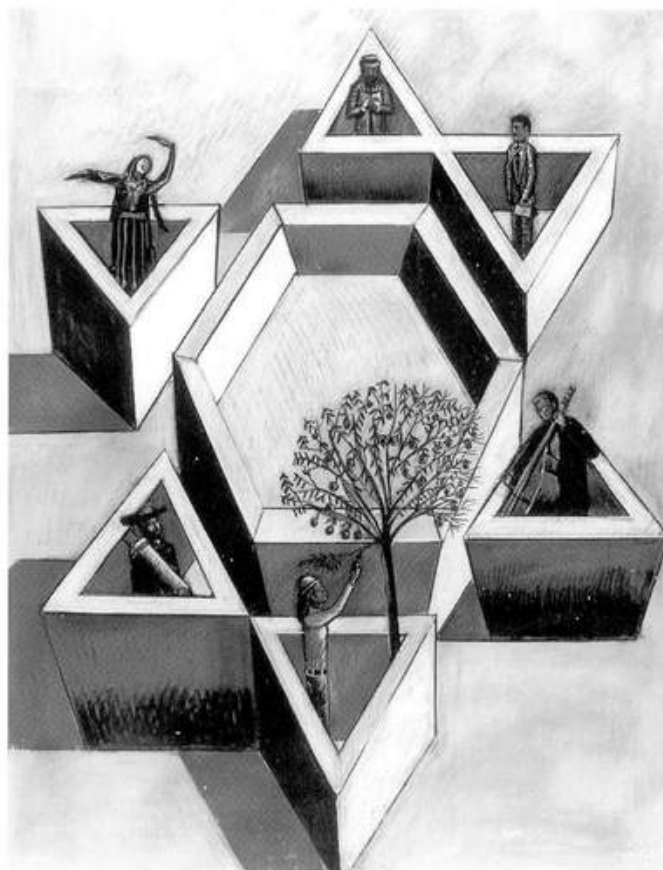
Introduction

A growing number of liberal Israelis and American Jews are being drawn toward "postzionism," the view that Zionism has served its historical function and, indeed, is an unbridgeable obstacle to a just settlement with the Palestinians. This view, however, obscures a tragic dilemma. Certainly, no respectable analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can deny that there is an inherent conflict between Zionism and Palestinian rights, and that the Israeli success story has come at the expense of the Palestinian people. On the other hand, it is far too soon to conclude that the historical conditions that created Zionism—murderous anti-Semitism—have permanently disappeared from the world scene.

In this essay I will argue that modern Zionism *can* be reconciled with reasonable justice for the Palestinians, but only if we discard Zionist mythology, especially the argument that political sovereignty over Palestine belongs, eternally and rightfully, to the Jewish people and only to the Jewish people. The best argument—and the only one necessary—for modern Zionism is the existence of the contemporary Israeli state itself.

By definition, dilemmas admit of no definitive solution. Thus, there can be no perfect justice for the Palestinians, certainly in practice but also in principle: perfect justice for the Palestinians would create injustice for the Israelis, perhaps even, in a sense, to world Jewry. But dilemmas do allow for creative compromises, the inevitably painful consequences of which can be mitigated and distributed equitably.

I will argue that most of the compromises today must be made by the Israelis, both because they were the perpetrators of injustice to the Palestinians and because the Palestinians have already made most of the major compromises. By now, almost everyone understands the principles



by which an imperfect but reasonable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma can be reached. Whether Barak is the right man for the job is another matter.

I. The Zionist Arguments

The first step toward a solution must be to demythologize Zionism by sorting out bad arguments from good ones. For one thing, an accurate account of Zionism is necessary if we are truly to understand the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Second, such an accurate account is morally required because some—though not all—of the Zionist arguments are based on "principles" that cannot withstand close logical or moral analysis. But most importantly, it is the continuing failure of most Israelis—evidently including Barak—to distinguish serious history from Zionist ideology that largely accounts for Israeli rigidity, self-righteousness, moral failures, and blindness to the probable consequences to their own best interests.

A good beginning would be to separate the original Zionist argument for the necessity of a Jewish state from the argument that such a state had to be in Palestine. When the Jewish nationalist movement we now call Zionism emerged in Europe in the early twentieth century, its core belief was that the Jewish people had both an overwhelming need for, and a moral right to, a nation-state of their own. Although the twentieth century has made it abundantly clear that nationalism often has terrible consequences, nationalism can also serve as a liberating and empowering force. In light of the persecution of the Jewish people throughout history,

CURRENT DEBATE

it is hard to imagine that any other people has had a more powerful case for possession of a state of their own.

Where that state should be located, however, was a different matter. The terrible paradox of Zionism is that while the arguments for a Jewish state were so strong as to be nearly self-evident, most of the arguments for the right to create that state in Palestine were weak. This is not to say that there was no basis at all for the Jewish claim to sovereignty over Palestine. My argument, rather, is that this claim could not be reconciled with Palestinian rights and claims, which were much more persuasive than the Jewish ones.

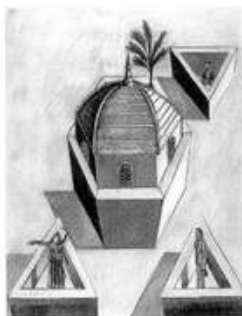
The founder of the Zionist political movement, Theodore Herzl, initially considered the question of where the Jewish state should be located as open, a practical issue rather than an ideological or religious one. Thus, for awhile the Zionists canvassed a number of possibilities. However, the search for alternatives to Palestine was quickly abandoned. The turning point—and the origin of the Palestinian-Israeli and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict—came at the Zionist Congress of 1903, which decisively condemned any effort to create the Jewish state in any place but biblical Palestine.

To be sure, even if Herzl's attitude had prevailed, it was by no means certain that a Jewish state could have been created elsewhere—and even if it could have been, it might simply have transferred the problem of the conflict between Zionism and the new state's indigenous inhabitants to some other locale (for example, east Africa). Nonetheless, the search for a better solution was abandoned prematurely. Most importantly, even if alternatives to Palestine ultimately had proven to be unfeasible, the search for them would have required Zionists to dissociate Jewish nationalism from biblical theology, and that would have made the need for a just compromise with the Palestinians evident from the start.

From the nineteenth century to the present, Zionists have made a number of arguments for exclusive Jewish political rights in Palestine including biblical history, ancient territorial rights, the Balfour Declaration, and the Holocaust, among others. Let us examine their validity.

Biblical History

Contrary to Zionist mythology, there has never been a single Jewish homeland in Palestine from which the Jews were expelled by the Romans. Historical scholarship calls this into question in every respect. First, long before the Roman conquest of Palestine there were large Jewish communities in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and other places throughout the Mediterranean basin. Second, it is doubtful that the Romans engaged in a wholesale expulsion of the Jewish people from Palestine after the suppression of the Jewish rebellion of 66–70 CE. Rather,



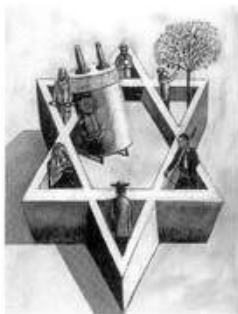
most Palestinian Jews remained in Palestine through the period of the Roman Empire, but over time the majority became Christians—or later, Muslims—leaving only a small group which preserved its Jewish identity. Finally, the majority of the Jewish people who have lived throughout the world in the last two thousand years do not think of themselves as a “Diaspora” longing to “return” to Palestine.

In the Zionist canon, the Jewish people have an eternal right to Palestine by virtue both of God's will and Jewish settlement of the land. According to the Torah, God promised the land of Palestine to Abraham and his successors. The promise was then reaffirmed in the covenant between God and Moses, and implemented when Moses led the Jews out of Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land, then known as the land of Canaan. Led by Joshua, the Jews conquered the Canaanites, following which David and his son Solomon established a kingdom in Palestine, establishing Jewish sovereignty over the area that lasted until the Roman conquest in 70 CE.

Modern biblical and archaeological scholarship has challenged the historical accuracy of the Torah account on a number of grounds, concluding that it must be regarded largely as theology and tradition rather than genuine history. Many modern scholars argue that there is no archaeological or other evidence that Abraham and Moses even existed, nor evidence in support of the Book of Exodus story of a Jewish exodus from Egypt into Canaan. A number of recent scholars have even questioned whether David and Solomon were true historical figures rather than glorious mythic ones; more importantly, whether or not they existed, scholars seriously dispute whether they established an extensive Jewish kingdom, ruled from Jerusalem, over most of Palestine. (The most authoritative recent summary of this debate is the special edition on “The Search for History in the Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2000.)

To be sure, archaeological evidence has definitively established that a Jewish community emerged in Canaan about the twelfth century BCE. However, little else of the biblical account of the founding of this community is supported by archaeological or any other kind of historical evidence. Philip Davies, one of the leading contemporary biblical scholars, summarizes the modern view: “The people we may now identify as historical Israel are generally agreed to have emerged at about 1200 BCE and to have been indigenous to Palestine. Their material culture is generally indistinguishable from that of the surrounding population. These people did not descend from a single ancestor who came from outside the land; they did not escape from Egypt, nor did they enter the land with a religion received during a wilderness trek” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2000).

It is an undeniable fact, of course, that there has been some kind of unbroken Jewish presence in Palestine for some thirty centuries; nor can it be denied that many Jews—though hardly most—have genuine religious or emotional ties to Palestine, especially to Jerusalem. However, Christians, Muslims in general, and the Palestinian Arabs in particular also have strong historical connections, claims, and ties of religion and sentiment. That being the case, the key issue remains: on what basis should the Zionist claim of ancient and eternal rights be given priority over all others?



Ancient Territorial Rights

In principle, the claim of territorial rights is separable from that of religious rights. As Michael Lerner has argued, the argument for Jewish priority in Palestine does not have to rest on biblical history or the belief that God promised Palestine to the Jews, his Chosen People, for one can construct a Zionist case for ancient rights to Palestine on purely secular grounds.

While this argument is correct in principle, in fact few secular Jews claim to be devoted to the ancient land of Palestine. Even so, for analytic purposes let us examine the territorial argument on its merits. For the sake of argument let us assume that those modern scholars who challenge the stories of Abraham, Moses, the exodus from Egypt, the Jewish conquest of Palestine, and the Roman expulsion of the Jews are wrong. Assume, then, that history supports the Zionist argument that the Jewish people lived primarily in the ancient land of Palestine for many centuries, over which they established political sovereignty, losing their homeland only because they were forcibly driven from it. Would that establish a valid *modern*—i.e., eternal—claim to the land of Palestine?

Most contemporary Zionists accept that it would. Moreover, many argue (explicitly or implicitly) that this is not an instance of special pleading for the Jews but rather is based on universally applicable principles: a land conquered by force is rightfully and eternally the land of the “original” inhabitants, no matter how many other peoples have been a majority in that land for no matter how long, so long as the previous inhabitants are still a distinguishable people with a continuous memory of the past, embedded in its texts and stories, who continue to be devoted to their original homeland.

There are a number of problems with this argument. First, most Jews today—certainly in Israel—are secular and have no particular devotion to the ancient land of Palestine, whether based on the Bible or territorial rights. Second, the argument that an ancient claim to a land has precedence over very long periods of a different reality—in Palestine, eight centuries of Christianity followed by thirteen centuries of an overwhelming Islamic majority—is

accepted in no other place in the world.

Palestine has been repeatedly conquered by outside invaders since ancient history: by Assyria, Babylonia, Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, the Crusaders, the Arabs, the Ottoman Empire—indeed, if the Bible is to be the historical source, by the Jews themselves! On each occasion, the previous inhabitants of the land were killed, driven into exile, or subjugated by new rulers, who then held sway for centuries. Who, then, are the “rightful” claimants? In the absence of a religious claim (“the Promised Land”) accepted by everyone, including those of different nationalities and religions, the stopping of the clock as it marches backward in time to twenty centuries ago, neither earlier nor later, must be arbitrary and self-serving.

Put differently, by what objective criteria are the claims of one set of victims—the Jews supposedly driven out by the Romans two thousand years ago—privileged over all other such claims? If ancient victimization is the criterion, then the descendants of the Canaanites—perhaps the Syrians?—must have priority over the descendants of the Jews. On the other hand, if recent victimization is the criterion, then all victims of conquest after the Roman expulsion have priority over the Jews.

There is scarcely any place in the world that has not at one time been conquered, subjugated, and populated by previously external forces. Thus, a kind of common sense statute of limitations on land claims by right of previous inhabitation has evolved. That is as it must be, for in the absence of such a tacit understanding there would be no stability and no principled objection to endless wars of restitution. In the end, the only law would be “might makes right.”

Of course, ascertaining the point at which the passage of time has nullified the moral or legal validity of previous land claims can not be precise, and certainly there are hard cases. The Zionist claim, however, is not one of them.

A morally plausible range for the metaphorical statute of limitations might be as follows:

The passage of a few months or years is not enough to wipe out past rights. Thus, no unbiased observer challenges the moral right of the Bosnians, the Croatians, and the Kosovar Albanians to reverse Serbian ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia—even though such a reversal had to be undertaken by force, and meant the dispossession of Serbs who took over abandoned homes and villages.

Fifty years or so creates a complex problem, both in principle and practice. Thus, the question of whether the Palestinians have the right to return to their homes and villages in what is now Israel is one of the most vexing issues in the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A hundred and fifty years is too long. For example, while there is no doubt that European Americans in the nineteenth century illegitimately and forcibly conquered much of what became the United States from Mexico and the Native

Americans, it does not follow that Mexico could legitimately reclaim Texas or that today's Native Americans have even the theoretical moral right to reconquer the West, even though they clearly meet all the criteria suggested by defenders of the Zionist claim to Palestine: that is, they were deprived of their land by force, they still exist as a people, and the historical memories of and devotion to this lost land have been passed on by spoken and written word from generation to generation.

Indeed, the Native American claim to their lost land must be regarded as stronger than the Zionist one because the passage of time is so much less. Yet how many American supporters of the Zionist claim to Palestine would be willing to give up their homes and cities to descendants of the original Native Americans who were driven out a mere century and a half ago?

In the absence of such a voluntary exodus of the present inhabitants, then, full remediation of the Native American claims could be done only by the use of force; even supposing that to be practicable, after one hundred and fifty years it would not be morally justifiable. Thus, while there can be little doubt that Native Americans are morally owed some kind of restitution, it must be well short of the restoration of the status quo ante.

If all this is persuasive, then a territorial claim based on previous inhabitation two thousand years ago—especially one that was resisted by the contemporary indigenous people and thus could be realized only by armed force—would appear on its face to be especially unconvincing.

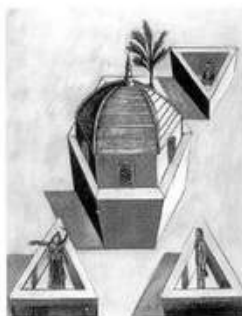
Yet, it may fairly be asked, if the "ancient territory" argument is so unpersuasive, why has so much of the non-Jewish world, especially in the West, accepted it? In part the explanation is that Christians typically have accepted much of the Bible's "historical" accounts, even when they reject the theology. More generally, Westerners have tended to dismiss the rights, claims, and even the history of non-Westerners in general, and of Muslim Arabs in particular, as inferior to those of Westerners, including the Jews.

Thus, despite its unthinking acceptance by much of the West, the argument for eternal Jewish rights in Palestine, based either on biblical history or ancient inhabitation, is weak, and its rejection by the Palestinians and the Arab world is not only understandable, it is justified.

Twentieth-Century History

Not all the Zionist arguments, of course, are based on biblical or ancient history. There are also several arguments deriving from the twentieth century, some more convincing than others.

THE BALFOUR DECLARATION. The first such argument holds that the Jews gained a modern right to establish a state in Palestine by virtue of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the Declaration's subsequent incorporation into



the League of Nations' Mandate to Britain. But there are two major problems with this argument. The first is that the Balfour Declaration was deliberately vague and ambiguous: it did not in fact call for a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine, but only a "national home for the Jewish people." The British commitment to work toward this end was further qualified, for the Declaration also said that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

More importantly, the Arabs had been promised political independence in Palestine and other areas captured from the Ottoman Empire in World War I, and the Balfour Declaration was inconsistent with this promise. Indeed, the Declaration denied them the basic democratic right of the majority to exercise political sovereignty in their country. To be sure, the British were not motivated simply by their colonialist interest in placing a Western outpost in the Middle East, for they and other Westerners were also genuinely sympathetic to the plight of European Jewry. Whatever their motives, however, neither the British nor the League of Nations—basically a club of the leading colonial powers of the day—had the right to dispose of Palestine against the wishes of the indigenous majority (about 650,000 Arabs compared to 50,000 Jews).

THE HOLOCAUST. Unlike the previous arguments examined here, the fact of the Holocaust cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in legitimizing the creation of Israel. To be sure, the matter is complex: the conflict between the Jews and Palestinians long preceded Nazi Germany, and in any case the Palestinians were in no way responsible for the Holocaust or, for that matter, for the earlier history of murderous European anti-Semitism that produced Zionism. As the Palestinians always ask: Why should we be made to pay for evils we did not commit?

On the other hand, the Holocaust made the case for the creation of a Jewish state and a haven for the victims of anti-Semitism not only irrefutable but urgent. By the late 1930s the die was cast; it was far too late to consider alternatives to Palestine. In that context, the Palestinian plea of innocence lost much—though not all—of its moral force. The answer to the "why should we pay" question was this: it had become a tragic necessity, for the alternative, in terms of the human consequences, was worse.

THE UNITED NATIONS PARTITION. By the late 1930s, then, the only morally or practically acceptable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was compromise, or partition. The UN partition plan of 1947 had a true moral legitimacy that the League of Nations Mandate to Britain lacked, both because it was based on the recognition that by 1947 a new human reality in Palestine had emerged—however problematic its origins—and because it was overwhelmingly supported by the world community and thus

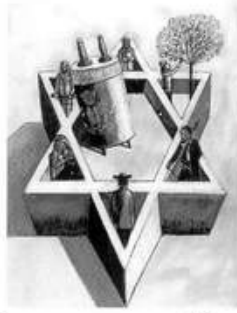
could not be regarded simply as a colonialist imposition. In effect, as Michael Lerner has argued, the world community, acting through the United Nations, justifiably had designated part of Palestine to the Jews in order to rectify the long history of global anti-Semitism, including Arab as well as Western anti-Semitism. While some injustice to the Palestinian Arabs was unavoidable, the moral benefits of a compromise—provided both sides were genuinely willing to compromise—substantially outweighed the costs.

WE WERE WILLING TO COMPROMISE, THEY WEREN'T. In the Zionist mythology—still widely accepted by the rest of the world—the Jews were prepared to accept this UN compromise, but the adamant refusal of the Palestinians to do so led to war. Moreover, the standard argument holds, the war forced by Palestinian intransigence also legitimized the post-1948 Israeli territorial expansion that went considerably beyond the original UN partition plan.

There are several problems, however, with this argument. To begin with, even if it were the case that the Zionists were ready for compromise but the Palestinians weren't, the issue would be morally complicated; whatever the larger justification, it is not irrelevant that it was the Palestinians who lost land they had occupied for centuries. To be sure, the Palestinian unwillingness to accept the UN-required compromise in practice turned out to be a terrible mistake in terms of their own interests, but that is a different issue.

Furthermore, it is not the case that there was a monolithic Palestinian refusal to compromise. As several of the Israeli new historians have demonstrated, the failure of the Palestinian revolt of the 1930s and the determination of the British and later the United Nations to enforce a compromise in Palestine resulted in greater moderation and realism among many Palestinians. By the mid-1940s, many had come to the realization that partition and the creation of a Jewish state in part of Palestine was unavoidable. As a result, there were many Palestinian proposals for a compromise settlement; they came to naught because of the Zionist determination, as Simha Flapan puts it in *Zionism and the Palestinians*, "to achieve full sovereignty [in all Palestine] at whatever cost." Flapan, the National Secretary of Israel's MAPAM Party from 1954 to 1981, and a noted scholar, writer, and peace activist, later writes in *The Birth of Israel*: "The Israeli myth that the Palestinian leaders were uniformly uncompromising is accompanied by the claim, equally erroneous, that ... the masses of Palestinians eagerly embraced war with the Jewish state.... The evidence [against this] is so overwhelming that the question arises how the myth of a Palestinian jihad against the Jews could survive so long." Other Israeli new historians have confirmed Flapan's historical account.

Most importantly of all, the Palestinians did not believe, and were *right* not to believe, that Ben-Gurion and the



other leading Zionists would be satisfied with, or abide by, a compromise. They feared, in other words, that the Zionist "acceptance" of the UN plan was disingenuous, that the Zionist leaders were adamantly bent on expanding a Jewish state to include all of biblical Palestine, and that they would simply use a partition compromise as the base from which to expand later.

That was indeed the case. The evidence is clear that Ben-Gurion agreed to the UN plan as a necessary tactical step that would later be reversed. In 1937, with some kind of partition on the horizon, Ben-Gurion wrote his son: "A partial Jewish state is not the end, but only the beginning. The establishment of such a Jewish state will serve as a means in our historical efforts to redeem the country in its entirety.... We shall organize a modern defense force ... and then I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbors or by some other means.... We will expel the Arabs and take their places ... with the force at our disposal" (cited by Michael Bar-Zohar in *Facing a Cruel Mirror*). A year later, Ben-Gurion told a Zionist meeting: "I favor partition of the country because when we become a strong power after the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and spread throughout all of Palestine" (cited by Benny Morris in *The Birth Of The Palestinian Refugee Problem*).

After 1947 Ben-Gurion acted on this philosophy. Indeed, he would have gone much further if he could have gotten away with it, for the documentation makes it abundantly clear that for him, for Chaim Weizman, for Ben-Gurion's protégé Moshe Dayan, and for many other Zionist leaders, "Palestine" included all of Jerusalem, all of the West Bank, a substantial part of the East Bank or western Jordan at least to Amman, southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights and other parts of southern Syria, the Gaza strip, and part of the Sinai peninsula.

It was with this in mind, then, that the Zionist leaders agreed to the UN partition plan. Moreover, they ignored other parts of the plan that they disliked, notably the internationalization of Jerusalem and the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state on the West Bank, tacitly acquiescing in the takeover of the area by King Abdullah of Transjordan. Temporary Hashemite control of the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem was regarded by Ben-Gurion as better than either internationalization or the creation of a Palestinian state; later, when Israel became stronger, an opportunity might present itself for an Israeli takeover of "Judea and Samaria."

Finally, even if it had been true that in 1948 the Palestinians, and only the Palestinians, refused all compromise, it is hard to see why that would be a good argument for subsequent Israeli intransigence. Today—indeed, probably since the late 1970s—a majority of the Palestinians and their leaders accept partition or a two-state solution, which retains

the same compelling moral and practical logic that has led nearly every outsider of good will to recommend it for over seventy-five years.

II. Modern Zionism and the Palestinians

I have argued that, with the partial exception of the Holocaust argument, the pre-partition Zionist arguments for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine are unpersuasive. Once Israel came into being, however, matters changed—decisively, irrefutably, and irrevocably. Since 1948 the only argument necessary to the Zionist case is the *existential* one: new human realities have been created, Israel exists, and it has a right to live. It would be far better, and far more conducive to the creation of a genuine peace with the Palestinians and the entire Arab world, if Israel simply rested its case there.

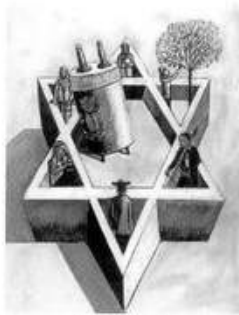
In short, the Israelis can pave the way for a settlement by jettisoning Zionist mythology, a mythology that has had devastating consequences for Israel as well as for the Palestinians.

Many fear that an abandonment of the weak parts of the Zionist argument would be dangerous because it would “delegitimize” the state of Israel today. The contrary is the case: the existential argument is so obviously compelling and unanswerable that an Israeli acknowledgment of past injustices and its acceptance, at long last, of a genuine and fair compromise would have the consequence of *legitimizing* the Israeli state, even among all but the most fanatical Palestinians and Arab leaders. And an Israeli willingness to face their history, free of the distortions and myths that have blinded them, is a psychological prerequisite—perhaps for both sides—for the establishment of peace.

As I have earlier argued (TIKKUN November/December 1999), a just and stable settlement must be based upon the creation of a largely demilitarized but viable Palestinian state in almost all of Gaza and the West Bank, a fair sharing of scarce water and joint efforts to develop new sources, some form of divided or shared sovereignty over Jerusalem, and a practical solution to the refugee problem.

The official Palestinian position is that the Palestinian refugees from 1948 and 1967 must be allowed to return to their former homes and villages in what now comprises Israel. Their position is understandable, for there no longer is any reasonable doubt that many, probably most, of the Palestinian refugees did not voluntarily “flee” the country but rather were deliberately driven out by Israeli psychological warfare, economic pressures, outright terrorism, or direct expulsion by the victorious Israeli armies.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to distinguish between the abstract right of return and the practical possibilities of implementing that right, between an unattainable perfect justice and an attainable imperfect justice. Too much time has passed, too many new realities have been created, for



this tragedy to be reversed. There is not the slightest chance that any but a tiny minority of Israelis would accept the literal return of the refugees and the de facto creation of a binational state. Moreover, the return of three and a half million Palestinians would likely worsen rather than solve the problem of Jewish-Arab violence, for it is hard to imagine that two peoples who

have been at war with each other for so long could suddenly live in peace and harmony within the confines of the same small state. Indeed, there seem to be no contemporary precedents or models for such peaceful coexistence, and plenty of counterexamples: Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and more.

Practicalities aside, even the moral case is not straightforward, for the return of so many refugees would inevitably mean the displacement of many Jews, itself an injustice in light of the time that has passed and the fact that most contemporary Israelis had nothing to do with the Palestinian expulsions in 1948 or even with those of 1967. As I have argued, the passage of time not only creates new practical realities, it also creates new or at least more complex moral realities. This is not a matter of “might makes right;” rather, what began as might may evolve into right, or at least rights.

Finally, even if a binational Israel could somehow be made to work, it would undermine the very *raison d'être* for Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state: the need for the Jewish people to control their own destiny and to provide a refuge for persecuted Jews anywhere in the world. It is remarkably ahistorical to argue that Zionism is no longer necessary, or that the true haven for Jews today is in America and elsewhere in the enlightened West. In light of 2,000 years of devastating anti-Semitism, often breaking out in countries in which the Jews had lived in peace and prosperity for centuries, it is—to say the least—premature to declare we have reached the era of postzionism.

In short, while the creation of a binational democratic state is an ideal worth preserving, its realization could only come after many decades of real peace, mutual Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and goodwill, and compelling evidence that a Jewish state is no longer needed. In the meantime, it would be helpful if Palestinian intellectuals would stop insisting that Zionism is a form of racism. “Racism” carries the connotation of superiority; no doubt many Zionists believed the Palestinians to be inferior, but at its core Zionism is not based on the notion that the Jews are superior to the Arabs or to anyone else, but rather on the fact that history has only too clearly demonstrated the need for a state in which Jews control their own destiny.

For all of these reasons, the solution to the Palestinian problem must be the return of some small numbers of refugees to Israel (for example, those with remaining strong family ties in what is now Israel), but the resettlement of all the others who wish to exercise their “right of return” to

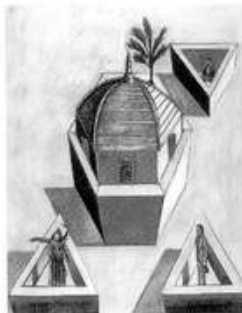
the new state of Palestine, with generous economic compensation from Israel and development assistance from the wealthy states of the international community. Fortunately, there is no doubt that the Palestinian leadership fully understands that if the maximal Palestinian demands were non-negotiable, there would be a zero percent chance of a settlement. It is clear, therefore, that most of the Palestinian political and intellectual elites will accept a fair compromise, especially if Israel acknowledges its role in creating the refugee problem—something that Barak is still flatly refusing to consider.

III. The Prognosis

Despite Barak's election as the peace candidate, there is a substantial chance that his policies will result in yet another in a long line of lost opportunities for peace. Although some attribute Barak's disappointing performance to his excessive caution and style of leadership, the more fundamental problem is his hard line views, which at the deepest level are a consequence of ideology. "Security" issues alone do not drive Barak's policies; he is still under the grip of Zionist mythology. Take these examples: his insistence on the myth of a unified Jerusalem under exclusively Jewish sovereignty, his support of Jewish settlements in the heart of Palestinian areas that clearly are security liabilities rather than assets (in April of this year, Barak stunned many of his former supporters when he sent his "warm personal congratulations" to the most violent and fanatical of the Jewish settlers in Hebron), his continuing references to the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria," and his adamant insistence that Israel "cannot accept moral, legal, or other responsibility for the Palestinian refugees."

As of this writing, it is not yet clear how far Barak is prepared to go to reach a settlement with the Palestinians. Until quite recently it appeared that his position was not very different from that of Benjamin Netanyahu, for his proposals and actions seemed designed to ensure that a Palestinian state would amount to little more than a series of fragmented population centers in Gaza and the West Bank—in effect, bantustans that would be substantially surrounded and cut off from each other by Jewish settlements, Israeli military bases, and a rapidly expanding network of Israeli-controlled roads.

Even more importantly, Barak is determined to deny the Palestinians a capital in East Jerusalem, and is seeking to force them to settle for Abu Dis, a tiny Palestinian village outside even of "Greater Jerusalem." (Haim Ramon, Barak's closest Cabinet advisor on Jerusalem, has recently said that if Abu Dis and other nearby Palestinian villages were part of Jerusalem, they wouldn't be offered to Arafat. As he tellingly told an interviewer in *Ha'aretz* on May 2, 2000, "We annexed in 1967 everything we thought was Jerusalem, even a little more than that.") Finally, the underground



freshwater aquifers in the West Bank will remain in Israel's hands. In short, the Palestinian "state" will be neither politically nor economically viable—Netanyahu, Sharon, and the Likud could have asked for little more.

Barak's initial diplomatic strategy was to convince the Palestinians to agree to the principle of peace and the creation of a Palestinian state, while postponing for later "negotiations" the most difficult issues of water, Jerusalem, and final boundaries. However, the Palestinian Authority has rejected this approach, for it is disingenuous on its face: Barak, like nearly all of his predecessors, has been busily "creating facts on the ground"—expanded Jewish control over "Greater Jerusalem," expanded settlements and Israeli-controlled roads and military outposts throughout the West Bank, and more—in order to preempt the future and maintain the status quo. (According to *Ha'aretz*, in the last five months Barak has authorized the expansion of the settlements at a pace exceeding both the Shamir and Netanyahu Likud governments.)

It is clear that Barak would simply prefer to rely on Israeli power, offering what he wishes to offer on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, and counting on the Palestinian leadership to conclude that the more time passes, the harder it will become for the Palestinians to gain justice and a viable state. Even setting aside the moral issue, this approach will not work. Arafat is unlikely to accept such power plays, and if he did there would probably be a Palestinian explosion of rage and despair, directed against the Palestinian leadership as well as against Israel.

There are some indications that because of Palestinian and external pressures, Barak may be forced to accept at least some compromises going beyond his current stance—for example, he may agree to eventually turn over about 80 percent rather than just 50–60 percent of the West Bank to the forthcoming Palestinian state. Even so, the question then will be not only whether the compromises will be sufficient to meet legitimate Palestinian demands, but whether Barak will be either willing or capable of providing the kind of leadership that can convince the Israeli public to accept the necessary ideological, psychological, and political changes.

A good beginning would be for Barak to stop repeating all the tired clichés of the past: "this is not Benelux," "Israel is a villa in the middle of a jungle," "we live in a bad neighborhood," etc. First of all, Israel's policies are part of the neighborhood's problems, not a solution to them. Even worse, Barak and the Israeli right wing do not seem to understand the true implications of their slogans. Just what do they think will be the outcome of Israeli intransigence and provocations in a neighborhood including growing Palestinian desperation, rising Arab Islamic fundamentalist fanaticism, and the inexorable, irreversible spread of weapons of mass destruction? □

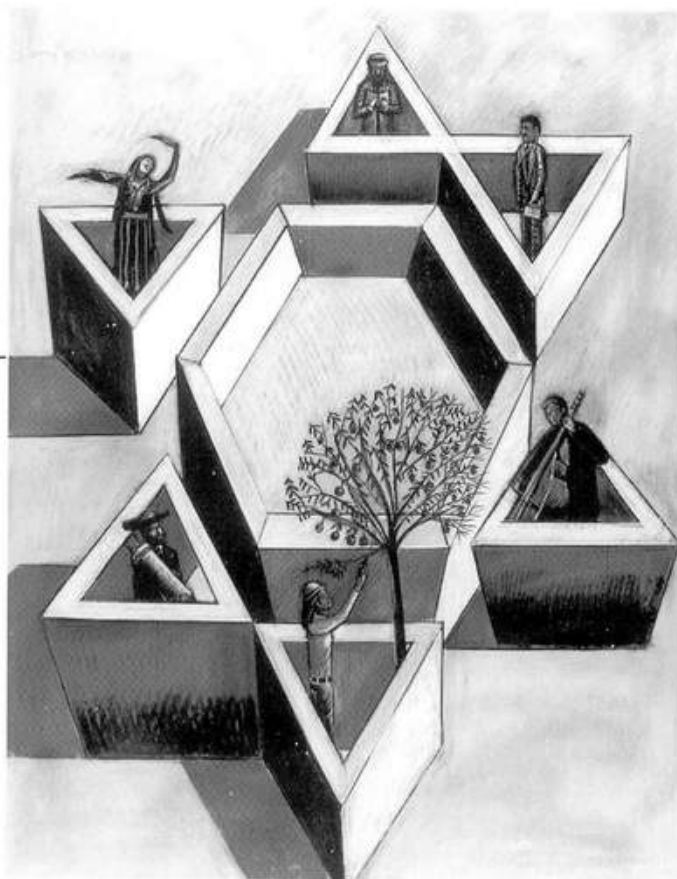
No to Slater's Path to Reconciliation

Michael Lerner

Although I often disagree with the articles we select for publication in TIKKUN, I don't usually point out which ones they are and why I disagree with them. In general, we urge our readers to understand that articles in the magazine do not necessarily reflect the position of the magazine itself, which is articulated in our editorials. But in this case, there is such great potential for enemies of the peace process to quote Jerome Slater out of context as a way to delegitimize the entire TIKKUN enterprise that I decided to respond directly. —ML

We at TIKKUN have always been passionate advocates of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis—both because we believe that such reconciliation is in the best interests of the Jewish people and because we believe that it is mandated by the highest principles of Judaism. We have consistently maintained, to the consternation of those elements in the peace movement who call for “separation” in order to be “rid” of the Palestinian people, that we need a whole new attitude of loving and caring toward our brothers and sisters who are Palestinians. In our view, every single human being on this planet is equally created in the image of God and equally beloved of God. We hold to a Judaism that has renounced the distorting “we are better” attitude our people adopted during the thousands of years when we were a persecuted and demeaned minority always told by the dominant culture that “we were worse.” Because we don’t believe “we are better,” we’ve made ourselves a bit of a problem to the Jewish establishment, which continues to teach and think that Jews are “better” than others.

Slater’s piece is a useful counter to some who have taken that supposition of betterness and applied it to the history of Zionism. Much of the writing published in this magazine has tended to show that Israel is not any different than any other national state; like so many others, its foundations are morally tainted and not pure. For example, in a now-famous article, “new historian” Benny Morris explained to TIKKUN readers how the Israeli army did in fact expel by force tens of thousands of Palestinians whom Zionist myth had taught us were simply fleeing at the instruction of their Arab leaders.



Many of us who seek to build reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis realize that there must be a new intellectual foundation for the Israeli state, a new understanding of history, and a new form of discourse. In my view, the central aspect of that discourse must be a recognition that we are presented with two peoples who are equally entitled and equally in error. If both sides can acknowledge that, not just superficially, but in their deepest thinking about their own situation, we have the foundation for peace. With that foundation in place, we will be able to move to the next stage, requiring the Jewish people to recognize that it is our responsibility to take the most decisive steps to rectify the current situation, not because we are more wrong, but because we are more powerful.

Hard to believe as it is for us Jews, a people who have turned our historical legacy of powerlessness into a moral entitlement which we’ve used to get our own way for the past fifty years (we were the originators of “political correctness”), the reality is that Israel has one of the most powerful armies in the world and is using it to occupy another people—a people who have no army and whose limited autonomy in connected parts of the West Bank and Gaza is more symbolic than real. After thirty-three years of military occupation, it’s time for Israel to end its occupation, dismantle its settlements or tell the settlers they must live as law-abiding citizens in a Palestinian state, and simply withdraw from the West Bank.

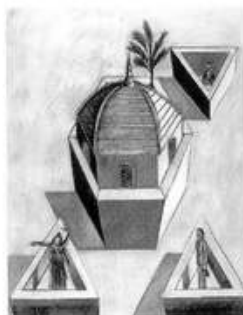
For this new understanding to occur, it must be based on a new story, shared by both Israelis and Palestinians, of

what actually happened in the past. That story must be even-handed and compassionate. It cannot require us to distort or forget the history of our own oppression, including oppression by Islamic forces and by pro-Nazi Palestinian leaders. To rectify Zionist distortions we don't have to succumb to anti-Zionist distortions.

The possibility of Jews forgetting their past in an attempt to forge a new future is not just a matter of academic concern. Over the years I've become convinced that one of the main reasons the peace movement has been so unsuccessful in Israel is its refusal to frame its case in terms of the language and values of the Jewish historical, cultural, and religious experience. One of TIKKUN's primary editorial missions has been to show that it is our own Jewish values that are trampled upon and lost when Jews become powerful themselves and insensitive to the powerless. It was this kind of behavior that the ancient prophets railed against, and it is with the language of the Bible that we can formulate the most radical critique of the ways that Zionism has gone astray.

But Jerome Slater follows the path of the secular Israeli minority, denying legitimacy to the culture, history, and religion of the Jewish people; he even goes so far as to question whether Jews ever had any legitimate claim to the Land of Israel apart from what he then construes as the totally illegitimate land-grab performed under the aegis of twentieth-century Zionism. The picture of Israeli history that Slater draws is of a group of Europeans who, for no apparent reason, grabbed the land of Palestine from the Palestinians and who now must be accepted as occupants of the land only because they have established facts on the ground.

To accomplish this delegitimation, Slater must deny the entire history of Jews in the Land of Israel, something he accomplishes with a sleight of hand. Citing historians' doubts about the Torah story of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua in the twelfth century BCE, and their doubts about the reality of King David or King Solomon's rule in the eighth century BCE, Slater jumps to questions about whether the Jews were really expelled by the Romans after the destruction of the Temple or rather had already left voluntarily. But no serious scholar questions that Jews lived as a people with their Temple and religious cult intact in the land that the Greeks and Romans imperialized between the fourth century BCE and the second century CE. Though more Jews may have lived in the Diaspora by that time than in Israel, those who did saw themselves as fundamentally connected to the Land of Israel; most sent a yearly tax to the Temple as an indication of their loyalty to it and to the Jewish religion which was centered in Jerusalem.



An independent sovereign Jewish state existed through much of this period, only to be obliterated first by Greek and then by Roman imperialism. Yet in rebellion after rebellion the Jews showed themselves to be the most powerful anti-imperialist force of the Roman empire until Roman armies finally burnt the Temple to the ground, and, in response to the Bar Kochba rebellion in 132–135 CE, wiped out hundreds of thousands of Jews and so heavily repressed the practice of Judaism in Israel that most Jews found it necessary to leave. It has been the contention of Jews ever since that might does not make right. That's why we continued to retain our claim on the Land of Israel even when political power outside our control made it impossible to return.

The picture of Israeli history that Slater draws is of a group of Europeans who, for no apparent reason, grabbed the land of Palestine.

Jews refused to accept Roman imperialism as the ultimate arbiter of reality, and for the next 1,800 years built our religion on the revolutionary supposition that the way things are at any given moment in history is not the only way they can be—because there is in the universe a Force of Healing and Transformation (YHVH or, in English, God) which makes possible the transformation of the world from “that which is” to “that which ought to be.” So, these Jewish exiles taught their ancient language and stories, read the holy books that had been created in the

Land of Israel, and prayed at every single meal that Jerusalem would be rebuilt with God's compassion.

Slater thinks that the claim to an ancient homeland diminishes with time. But the Jewish claim is, in my view, as powerful as the Jews' uninterrupted historical memory. To allow the claim to one's land to be obliterated by Roman imperialism is to assert that historical might makes right as long as the imperialist and successor regimes can maintain the upper hand. Counter to that view, I believe that the Jewish claim to Palestine (*sic*, because the very name is a symbol of Roman imperialism's claim to the right to impose its name in honor of its ally the Philistines) cannot be invalidated by the succession of Roman, Islamic, and Ottoman rule. For 1,800 years a historical community of hundreds of thousands, and, eventually, millions of Jews sang and prayed of this land—and their claim has not diminished one whit.

I would hold this equally for any people anywhere who has maintained a community of hope about returning to its ancient lands. For that reason, I continue to believe that American Indians have a very serious claim to sections of North America where they previously lived, and I would hold the same for any other group which maintains a continuous historical memory and a cultural identity based on its claims to a given Land.

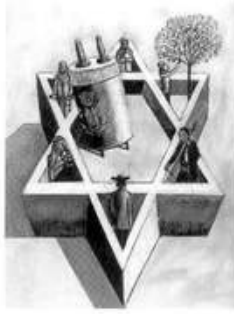
For the same reason, I absolutely recognize as legitimate the claim of the Palestinian people to return to their land. They are recent victims of expulsion by the State of Israel, and the fact that it happened some fifty-three years ago doesn't persuade me that their claims are no longer valid.

And this leads to the obvious point that flows from my analysis: that more than one people can have a legitimate claim to the same land. Such is the messiness of history that there have been many victims and many expropriators, and, as in the case of the Jewish people, the victims can later become victimizers as they seek to overcome their previous victimhood. Slater seems to be playing the same game that Palestinians have played for the past century—to deny the legitimacy of Jewish claims to the land in order to highlight the legitimacy of Palestinian claims. But this is a move that is guaranteed to produce greater inflexibility among the Jewish people, and thus to diminish the chances of the Palestinians for real and lasting settlement and reconciliation with the Jewish people.

A far more appropriate approach would be to urge both sides to recognize the legitimacy of the others' claims. It is only on such a basis that the two peoples are ever likely to be able to move forward to see the tragic reality of their situation: two peoples who have suffered oppression and pain, sometimes at the hands of each others' ancestors, are now in conflict over a single piece of land, and the task is to accept each others' legitimacy and go forward in deciding how to most compassionately divide the land.

If we do not go that path, but instead insist on determining whose rights are more legitimate, we will also have to listen to the voices of Mizrahi or Sephardic Jews who have become the largest antireconciliation force in the Israeli electorate. Those Jews, who fled from Arab countries, tell a story of oppression by their Arab and Islamic hosts which has direct relevance when one realizes that for most of the past hundred years in which Palestinians have been shaping their own identity as a separate national entity they have simultaneously asserted their existence as part of the Arab and Islamic worlds. It is not primarily Holocaust-fleeing Jews who today oppose Palestinian claims, but Arab-fleeing Jews.

I don't think we should be trying to establish legitimacy by some logic of "who suffered most and who was most at fault." Once we get into that kind of discourse, though, Holocaust issues do emerge. It is not totally irrelevant to point to the Palestinian leadership's embrace of the Nazis in the period 1936–45, nor is it irrelevant to note that when our people were desperately trying to find refuge from the genocide of Europe the Palestinians used their political clout as part of the Arab world to pressure the British into refusing Jews this possible port of escape. Don't expect the Jewish people to forget so quickly that when we were fleeing for our lives, the Palestinian leadership couldn't imagine sharing the land of Palestine with us, thus shutting a gate through which



hundreds of thousands of people might have fled to safety instead of perishing in the death camps of Europe.

In light of the Holocaust, the 1947 decision of the United Nations to create a Jewish state in Palestine must be understood as the first instance of global affirmative action. Just as I support the right of the U.S. government to override the interests of various segregationists, and just as I support affirmative action even when it sometimes works against the interests of some white men who were not themselves the people who victimized past generations of African Americans or women, so I support the decision of the United Nations to create a Jewish state in Palestine even though it certainly hurt the interests of many Palestinians. As I put it in my discussion of Israel in *Jewish Renewal*, we jumped from the burning buildings of Europe and landed, unintentionally, on the backs of the Palestinian people. We had no choice but to jump, and the Palestinian people might have done more to make that jump safer and less hurtful. But in the final analysis, we must accept all these facts: that we jumped out of desperation, that we unintentionally hurt the Palestinians, and that we need to rectify the damage.

Slater looks at contemporary religious groups among the Jewish people and sees that many of them are fanatics who oppose any compromise on the Land. But this distortion is at least in part a historical product of the twentieth century, not an inevitable outgrowth of Judaism itself. The religious communities were, at the beginning of the twentieth century, deeply suspicious of Zionism. It was the combination of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and Arab intransigence on the other, plus the rise of anti-Semitism in Arab lands against their own domestic Jewish population, that led to the change of attitudes among religious Jews and their adoption of (in my view, deeply distorted) ultranationalist positions.

It has been my contention that a return to prophetic Judaism and a renewal of the deepest truths of Jewish history would lead us to treat the Palestinian people as our brothers and sisters. In *Jewish Renewal* I show that there are two voices in Torah, one that represents the history of pain and oppression and identifies that with the voice of God (and which then justifies the infliction of pain on others and glorifies the brutal and genocidal conquest of the Land of Israel) and another voice which, in my view, is the voice of God, and which makes it clear that no claim to land has any ultimacy because all the land of the earth belongs to God. From a Torah perspective, all ownership is illegitimate except when it is exercised in accord with the loving and compassionate energies of the sacred. The Jewish Renewal I've been involved in shaping, both in my synagogue Beyt Tikkun and in these pages, seeks a Judaism that critiques all forms of nationalism and all forms of chauvinism, including Jewish nationalism and Jewish chauvinism. It looks to a future in

(continued on page 50)

CURRENT DEBATE

No to Slater's Path *(continued from page 29)*

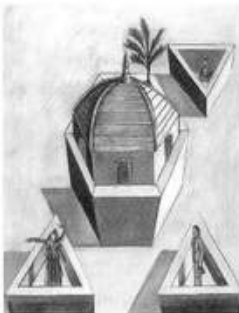
which all peoples will worship God together, each in their own way, and none will be afraid and none will be hurtful or destructive to anyone else. It is this which was anticipated in the Torah injunction: "Thou shalt love the stranger."

If this renewal voice of Judaism goes largely unpublicized in the contemporary world, even though it flourishes among many Jews, it is in no small part because secular Jews, particularly secular Israelis, have insisted that "the real Jews" are those who are nationalists or fundamentalist fanatics, and that the variants of Judaism like Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Renewal are all illegitimate hybrids. How convenient that the only real Judaism is the one they hate—they then can dismiss Jewish religion as a totally misguided enterprise.

But in so doing, they have created a reality in which most Israelis feel they have to choose between a nationalistic and oppressive, albeit meaning-drenched religious worldview on the one hand, and on the other a secularism which seeks salvation in finding a place for Israel in the globalized marketplace. Given that choice, many Israelis start to sympathize with the ultrareligious, because they are not willing to follow the path of the secular toward the worship of money and consumer goods. Or, more accurately, many Israelis find this same internal division within their own souls between the part of them which thinks that maybe they could "make it" and become the beneficiaries of the world capitalist marketplace and the part of them that feels that the only real reason to remain Jews and live in Israel is to carry on the historical legacy of Judaism—and that it is only within such a framework that they can find meaning.

From my standpoint, the task of Jewish progressives is to show how, precisely from the foundation of Judaism, one can arrive at a compassionate attitude toward the Palestinian people and a universalistic notion of our relationship to God. I agree with many of Slater's conclusions about what is needed now, including the creation of a Palestinian state within which the right of return of Palestinians can be exercised meaningfully only if that state gets massive economic assistance from Israel and from the developed world. Such assistance is unlikely until Jews acknowledge our role in creating the Palestinian refugee problem and reject Barak's compromises with Israeli West Bank settlers and his outrageous insistence that Israel "cannot accept moral, legal or other responsibility for the Palestinians refugees."

If Barak insists on repeating the rhetoric of Netanyahu, he should be treated as an obstacle to the peace process, and we should do all we can to facilitate massive political and economic pressure on the State of Israel to change its current policies. But such pressure will not work until there is a change of attitude among the Jewish people themselves, and that can only happen when the peaceniks are able to articulate our perspective in terms that resonate with the



Jewish religious and national experience rather than seeming to negate it.

Slater's attempt to delegitimize the claim of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel thus goes in exactly the wrong direction. What is needed, instead, is a language that is compassionate toward both the Jewish and the Palestinian experience, insists on the legitimacy of both, and builds from within the best of both traditions the basis for a more fundamental reconciliation. Such a foundation is the indispensable step to move both parties from their narrow political maneuvering to a reconciliation of the heart which is the only way our two peoples can hope to find peace. Barak has been a disastrous leader not only because of the specific policy moves he is making, but because his rhetoric strengthens the rhetoric of those who oppose peace.

There are some politicians who will tell you, "We don't need their hearts. Once Israeli leadership decides to make peace and moves effectively to do that, people will follow." But the truth in this case is that people voted for someone whom they believed to be a peacemaker in the tradition of Rabin, and instead they found themselves with a leader who was as indecisive as Peres and previous Labor party bigshots. Had Barak acted decisively after the election to challenge racism toward Israeli Arabs (by insisting that the Arab parties be part of his coalition, instead of excluding them); to implement the Oslo accord second stage withdrawals; to halt all West Bank construction (telling settlers that they should either move back to within the pre-1967 "green lines" borders or be prepared to live as law-abiding citizens of a Palestinian state); to end all demolitions of Palestinian houses; and to release prisoners who were being held without trial—perhaps with that kind of decisive action, coming swiftly and unequivocally, he might not have needed any new confidence-building measures. But by instead allowing the Lebanon situation and negotiations with Syria to become the central story, Barak squandered the momentum and mandate he got from the elections. Under these circumstances, the most important thing he could do now would be to encourage a fundamental change of consciousness among Israelis, so that they could begin to feel that it was their patriotic duty to personally establish a different kind of relationship with Arab Israelis and Palestinians.

It is this reconciliation of the heart that is impeded when people insist on telling the story in such a way that one side must be right and the other wrong. From my reading of Torah and Jewish tradition, it is only when both sides transcend the need to make the other wrong, and instead approach each other with compassion and forgiveness, that we can overcome the destructive nationalisms of the past and begin to build a world based on a deep recognition of the unity of all humans and our place within the Unity of All Being. □

The Revolving Room

Mimi Schwartz

We are sitting in the San Francisco Hyatt, high up, surrounded by glass in a revolving restaurant. The Golden Gate Bridge looms a majestic red before us, but we are talking about my father's village 7,000 miles away. I found an article about it, translated from German, in an old folder of my father's, and knew he'd written it even though he died twenty years ago. That's what amazed me, as I tell my colleague Angie over lunch. "No byline, but as soon as I read about everyone saving goose liver to sell in the big city I knew. Something about the voice ..."

"What's the name of the village?" Angie asks, stopping my segue into the paper on voice and subtexts I'll be presenting tomorrow.

"Oh, it's just a tiny place—near Stuttgart. No place anyone has heard of."

Certainly not a California girl like Angie Watson, with her straight, thick blond hair I'd always wanted, intense blue eyes, and a figure that must have ruled the surfers of Malibu Beach in younger days. We'd met at this conference on literature and language years before, found out we used the same reading glasses—I'd forgotten mine and used hers to give my paper—and that we both drank only decaf because of scares with breast cancer in the same year. We'd been meeting for lunch here ever since, drawn by small surprises among one big difference: Jewish New Jersey and California WASP.

"So what's the name?" she says again. "Of the village?"

"Oh, Rindheim, near a place called Horb," I say impatiently, wanting to get back to subtexts. Angie always has good ideas.

"Ah, Horb! In the Schwarzwald!" Her enamel hoop earrings bob with delight, as their lemon yellow centers, matched to her suit, catch the light. "I know it well."

"My God, how?" I'd never met anyone not directly or indirectly related to me who had ever heard of this tiny, rural valley south of Stuttgart where my father's family had

lived for generations, trading cattle.

"My mother's family comes from Ilhingen. We'd visit every summer when I was little and walk all over the hills there. I remember a *gasthaus* near Horb where we'd go for *spatzel*, my favorite!"

"Don't laugh," I laugh nervously, "but my Aunt Hilda's family owned a *gasthaus*."

"No!"

*I still can't believe she's
not the All-American
Girl, the Doris Day type.*

"And she made great *spatzel*." She leans forward, and I lean back, amazed. "You're from Germany?" After years of dodging refugee relatives who pinched my cheeks in Queens, New York, I can usually spot an accent a mile away. Could she be Jewish with that straight blond hair? "You have no accent."

She laughs. "If you arrive in Los Angeles in 1946, and are in the second grade, you get rid of your accent as fast as possible, believe me."

I still can't believe she's not the All-American Girl, the Doris Day type who, in my high school, always became cheerleader and prom queen and got the All-American Varsity Boy. When she sent me a postcard before the conference saying, "How about lunch this year?" I called right away. Sure.

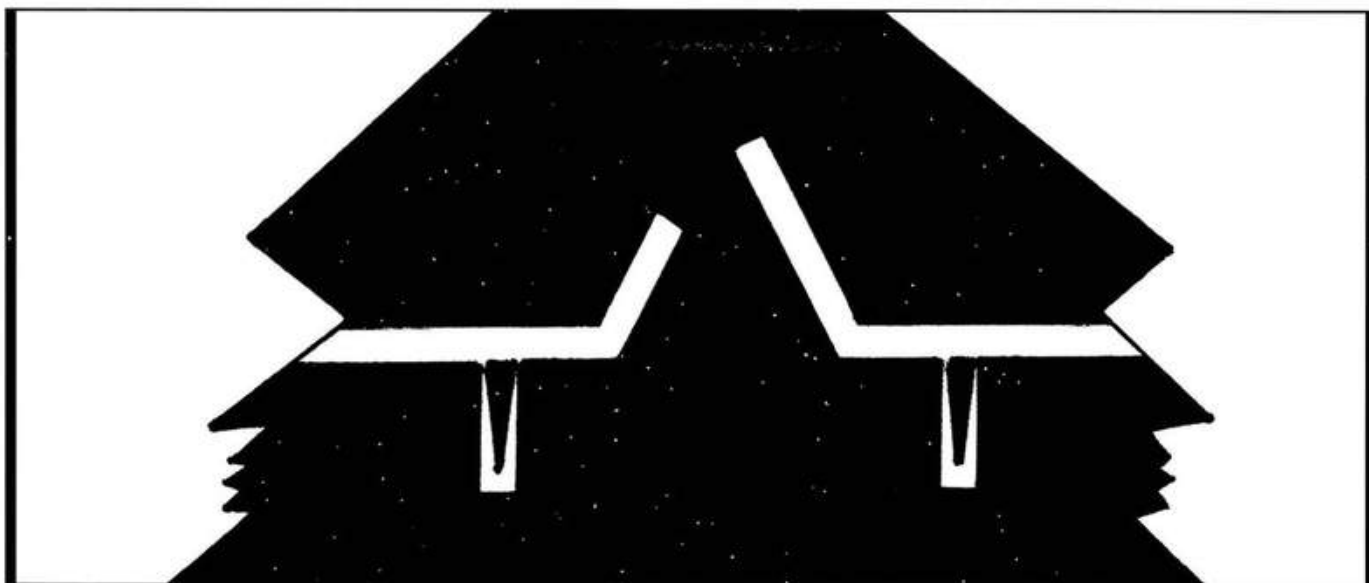
If she came in 1946, she must be Jewish, even with that hair. Was she in a concentration camp? I look for numbers on her arm, but Angie is wearing long sleeves.

"My sister came when she was six," I say, and tell her how the neighborhood kids used to call her "*kraut*" until she brought all her paper dolls onto the front stoop and gave the leader two of them. "That bought her more time to learn English."

I pause, hoping she'll start her story, but she smiles like a therapist, encouraging me on. I tell her how my family left Germany early, in 1935, and how they had to wait in Switzerland to get a visa to America, and how they sailed on the Dutch ship, Van Dam, and settled in a row house in Queens, New York, with twenty other relatives, the women all knitting hats and baby booties for money while the men tried starting a business in a strange land.

Alcatraz has drifted into view like a floating fortress, and the Golden Gate has almost disappeared, so slowly I didn't notice. "I am sorry your family had to leave Germany," she

Mimi Schwartz's work has appeared in the New York Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Creative Nonfiction, and The Fourth Genre, among others. This story is part of a memoir/history in progress called Good People, Bad Times.



says. "But they were the lucky ones, were they not?"

Yes, now I hear something, maybe a rhythm or word inversion not quite right. I do that too if I'm not careful, the echoes of my parents' hard-learned English. I nod. "Yes, very lucky."

The waiter asks about coffee and dessert. We say "decaf" at the same time, reject dessert, and look out the window for awhile. Alcatraz recedes and a giant clock appears, like a stern face. She asks me when I'm speaking, who I heard speak, and where I got my sweater. "I love that blue. It suits you." I tell her my mother knit it, that she's the knitter for the family, and my grandmother was the seamstress, so I do neither. I laugh. She does not.

"I wish I had something from my mother ..." Angie's strong, clipped voice has become a whisper. "I have nothing—no letters, not even a photo of her. The bombs destroyed everything in our house."

"They bombed your house? Where were you?" Now I imagine her hiding in a false farmhouse closet like my friend's Dutch cousin, or escaping across wild mountains to Portugal or Palestine.

"We were living in a small village, not unlike your father's. My father sent us there from Munich to be safe, but the Allies found us. They bombed our house, the only one bombed in the whole village. My sisters and I were in school, but my mother was killed." She takes a deep breath. "It was a week before the end of the war."

I mumble "I'm sorry," thinking, my God, she's a real German, the enemy—and I, who still buy nothing German (except for my Krups coffee maker), am talking about the past with her, whose family was probably for Hitler. She probably still speaks German behind closed doors.

"They bombed us on purpose," Angie's voice has sharpened. "They wanted to punish my father."

"Who did?"

She takes a long sip of coffee, and I am trying to remem-

ber how she voted on Proposition 13 and bilingual education. "The Allies. My father designed the bombs used in the *Blitzkrieg*. The British, especially, wanted him dead."

Now I see Teutonic lines around a tight mouth and imagine a child in thick, blond braids, waving Nazi flags and singing Nazi songs in Hitler parades. I resist the image, trying to see someone who lost her mother senselessly, while I still have mine knitting sweaters like the one I have on. "You can't know for sure they were after your family. How could they single you out in a rented house?" I say evenly, thinking, this is not rational.

The sun has just come out, making the bay sparkle. "I saw the plane. It dropped away from its squadron, swooping down. I was in the schoolyard. The sky was clear blue, only one small cloud ... I still hear that bomb." She looks smaller somehow, like that child. "A farmer's wife took me to her house and told me that my mother had gone to Munich, and I believed her. Why should I not? Three days later she took me to a gravestone and I read my mother's name, so I knew. We walked back past my house, but there was nothing, only a charred pile by the roadside, and the woman said, 'Don't stop. And don't cry!'"

Angie straightens up, as if she still hears that voice. Behave. Be strong. A good German girl. She shrugs. "But life goes on, does it not?" We look out the window at the all-glass pyramid shimmering like ice on our right.

The waiter pours more coffee. I sip, but have trouble swallowing. So what if she was six or seven? So what if she lost her mother while mine is fine in Manhattan? I think of how my colleague Helga's mother at least hid someone—a Jew or was it a resister?—and got caught. Helga, the only other German German I've talked to about the Holocaust, spent the last year of the war in a Berlin jail with her mother.

"Did you know any Jews?" I ask Angie, casually I hope. I don't want to sound accusing. After all, the past is not her fault.

PERSONAL STORY

"There were no Jews in our village," she says quickly. "My parents never talked about Jewish issues." A strange word, "issues." I worry. Her earrings bob. "I knew nothing until *The Diary of Anne Frank* came out," she says. "A wonderful book. I remember how shocked I was. You read it, of course?"

I nod, struggling to accept the "wonderful book" and the "I-didn't-know" argument. But how could she know? She was a kid, my age, and what I knew about the Holocaust came from watching Hollywood movies until I read Anne Frank's diary. No one in the early 1950s, Jew or German, talked much about what happened—especially not to children of parents starting again.

I picture us both in my father's village, two little school girls, me on the third floor with Moses, Angie on the second floor with Jesus, but playing together in the school yard. That's how my father had described it: Jews had one floor of the *volkschule*, Christians had the other two, and all shared the dirt playground. I picture us after school, going into the forest together to make doll blankets out of fern needles and wild flowers, the way my Aunt Hilda said she used to do.

But then what? What happens after her father begins designing bombs for Hitler and my father begins smuggling his money taped to toilets of trains going to Switzerland? And what if I have to wear a yellow armband with a "J," and she is a poster child for good Aryan blood? Would she throw sticks at me, or watch her friends pull my hair, or sing the popular Horst Wessel song:

"When Jewish blood drips from our knives

It solves the problems of our lives ..."

Or would she just pretend I am no longer there?

The sun keeps ducking behind clouds, its light bouncing off buildings and then going dull. Maybe her father was not really for Hitler, but just someone not wanting to make waves. Maybe, as a scientist, Angie's father had no choice: work for the *Führer* or be shot. If he'd been a Nazi, he'd have been tried as a war criminal. I had seen *Judgment at Nuremberg* with Spencer Tracy dispensing justice enough times to believe that. Unless her father was a brilliant Werner Von Braun, he wouldn't have been allowed into America.

"It must have been hard getting into America," I ask, still feeling like Columbo, minus the trench coat. "Did you have family here?"

"No, no one." She looks straight at me. "The Americans wanted my father's brain against the Russians—in case the Cold War became hot."

That night I will dream about Angie in a kitchen, high on her father's shoulders while her mother makes *spatzel*, rolling and scraping bits of dough, as my mother still does, into a pot of boiling water. The three of them are singing and laughing and I, waiting for my father to rescue me, am

crouched in a corner and trying to shout "Are you a Nazi?" but nobody hears.

Over lunch I try for nothing. I tell myself it was long ago, she was a child, so what could she have done? Her father could have been a good man in terrible times. And besides, even if she admitted that he hated Jews, still does, Angie's not like that. She likes me. Doesn't she ask me to get together every year?

So what now? Do I bury the past? Pretend it never happened? Storm out? For the first time in my American life I feel the weight of those verbs—"pretend," "bury," "storm out"—and what they meant fifty years ago when it was so easy for Germans to tell Jews, "So what if your mother dies?" Would Angie have said that? Would I, if I were the "Aryan," and she the Jew?

I think of the gestures of friends that I've heard over the years: how my father's Catholic business friend in

Frankfurt had a two-sided picture hanging in a frame over his desk—one side of Hitler, one of a Schwarzwald landscape. Whenever my father visited, the man would joyfully turn Hitler to the wall for his "good Jewish friend, Arthur." And how the head of the Stuttgart Gestapo saved my Aunt Lotte and Uncle Fred. He lived in their building, had played gin rummy weekly with my uncle long before Hitler, and when the Jewish passports were taken away, he told them, "Let me know when you want to leave and I will give them back for that day." He did, saying, "You are not *typische Juden*." Then he rounded up thousands of others.

I think of my father's Tante Rosa, who lived in his village and was the only one in my family who didn't listen to my father and leave before the borders closed. She kept counting on the collective decency of her neighbors, thinking the boycotts, laws, and meanness would blow over. "I'll be fine. Who will harm an old woman?" she kept saying, certain that sanity would return. And when it didn't, she slit her wrists and was buried the day before deportation "in the Jewish cemetery in her blood-soaked blanket, as she wanted" wrote her Christian neighbor after the war. He had promised her that burial and kept his promise.

"Did your father ever talk about Germany?" Angie asks softly, surprising me.

"About growing up in Rindheim—all the time," I say, hating myself for sounding cheerful, as if Hitler never happened. "And about his escape stories. Those I loved because my dad was the hero, leading our family out of Germany, like Moses." I smile. She smiles.

"What about your father?" I ask, as the Oakland Bay Bridge comes into view, reaching over the whitecaps in the bay to touch the tiny houses, like dots, in the Berkeley hills. It all moves so slowly, like a still life trapped by time, as we are.

(continued on page 54)

The Divine Right of Capital

Marjorie Kelly

Wealth

Where does wealth come from? More precisely, where does the wealth of major public corporations come from? Who creates it?

To judge by the current arrangement in corporate America, one might suppose capital creates wealth—which is odd, because a pile of capital sitting there creates nothing. Yet capital-providers (stockholders) lay claim to most of the wealth that public corporations generate. They also claim the more fundamental right to have corporations managed on their behalf. Corporations are believed to exist for one purpose alone: to maximize returns to shareholders. This principle is reinforced by CEOs, the *Wall Street Journal*, business schools, and the courts. It is the law of the land—much as the divine right of kings was once the law of the land. Indeed, “maximizing returns to shareholders” is universally accepted as a kind of divine, unchallengeable mandate.

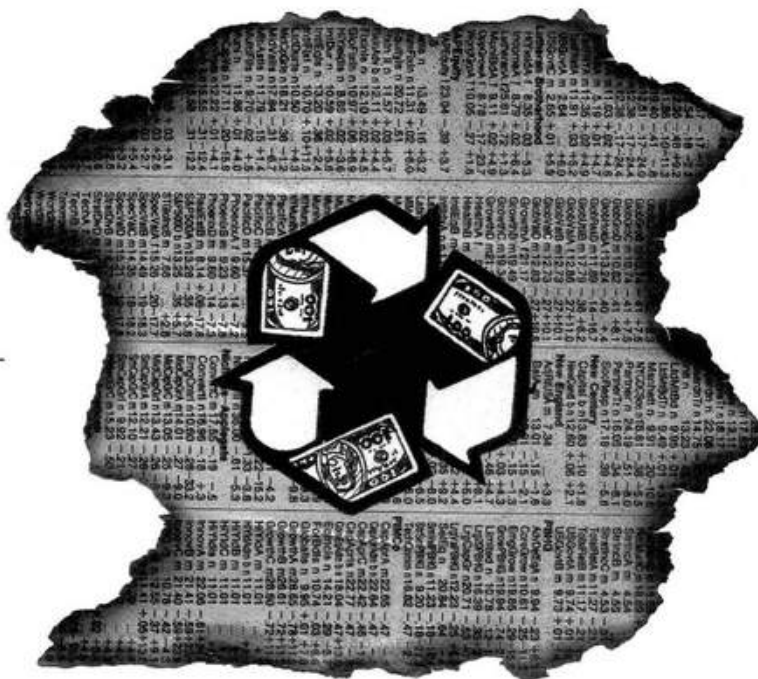
In the business world at large, it is not in the least controversial. Though it should be.

What do shareholders contribute to justify the extraordinary allegiance they receive? They take risk, we’re told. They put their money on the line, so corporations might grow and prosper. Let’s test the truth of this with a little quiz:

Stockholders fund major public corporations—True or False?

False. Or, actually, a tiny bit true—but for the most part, massively false. What’s intriguing is that we speak as though it were entirely true: “I have invested in AT&T,” we say, imagining AT&T as a steward of our money, with a fiduciary responsibility to take care of it. In fact, “investing” dollars don’t go to AT&T but to other speculators. Equity “investments” reach a public corporation only when new common stock is sold—which for major corporations is a rare event. Among the Dow Jones Industrials, only a handful have sold any new common stock in thirty years. Many have sold none in fifty years.

The stock market works like a used car market, as accounting professor Ralph Estes observes in *Tyranny of the*



Bottom Line. When you buy a 1993 Ford Escort, the money doesn’t go to Ford. It goes to the previous owner. Ford gets the buyer’s money only when it sells a new car. Similarly, companies get stockholders’ money only when they sell new common stock, which mature companies rarely do. According to figures from the Federal Reserve and the Securities and Exchange Commission, about 99 percent of the stock out there is “used stock.” That is, ninety-nine out of one hundred “invested” dollars are trading in the purely speculative market, and never reach corporations.

Public corporations do have the ability to sell new stock. And they do need capital (funds beyond revenue) to operate—for inventory, expansion, and so forth. But they get very little of this capital from stockholders. In 1993, for example, corporations needed \$555 billion in capital. According to the Federal Reserve, sales of common stock contributed 4 percent of that. I used this fact in one of those large-typeface quotes in a magazine article once, and the designer changed it to 40 percent, assuming it was a typo. It’s not. Of all capital public corporations needed in 1993, stockholders provided 4 percent.

Well, yes, some will say—that’s recently. But stockholders did fund corporations in the past.

Again, only a tiny bit true. Take the steel industry. An accounting study by Eldon Hendriksen examined capital expenditures in that industry from 1900 to 1953, and found that issues of common stock provided only 5 percent of capital. That was over the entire first half of the twentieth century, when industry was growing by leaps and bounds.

So, what do stockholders contribute, to justify the extraordinary allegiance they receive? Very little. And that’s my point.

Equity capital is provided by stockholders when a company goes public, and in occasional secondary offerings later. But in the life of most major companies today, issuance of common stock represents a distant, long-ago source of

funds, and a minor one at that. What's odd is that it entitles stockholders to extract most of the corporation's wealth—forever. Equity investors essentially install a pipeline, and dictate that the corporation's sole purpose is to funnel wealth into it. The pipeline is never to be tampered with and no one else is to be granted significant access (except executives, whose function is to keep it flowing).

The truth is, the commotion on Wall Street is not about funding corporations. It's about extracting from them.

The productive risk in building businesses is borne by entrepreneurs and their initial venture investors, who do contribute real investing dollars to create real wealth. Those who buy stock at sixth or seventh hand, or one thousandth hand, also take a risk—but it is a risk speculators take among themselves, trying to outwit one another like gamblers. It has little to do with corporations, except this: Public companies are required to provide new chips for the gaming table, into infinity.

It's odd. And it's connected to a second oddity—that we believe stockholders *are* the corporation. When we say “a corporation did well,” we mean its shareholders did well. The company's local community might be devastated by plant closings, its groundwater contaminated with pollutants. Employees might be shouldering a crushing workload, doing without raises for years on end. Still we will say, “the corporation did well.”

We do not see rising employee income as a measure of corporate success. Indeed, gains to employees are losses to the corporation. And this betrays an unconscious bias: that employees are not really part of the corporation. They have no claim on the wealth they create, no say in governance, and no vote for the board of directors. They're not citizens of corporate society, but subjects.

Investors, on the other hand, may never set foot inside “their” companies, may not know where they're located or what they produce. Yet corporations exist to enrich investors alone. In corporate society, only those who own stock can vote—like America until the mid-1800s, when only those who owned land could vote. Employees are disenfranchised.

We think of this as the natural law of the free market, but it's more accurately the result of the corporate governance structure, which violates free-market principles. In a free market, everyone scrambles to get what they can, and they keep what they earn. In the construct of the corporation, one group gets to keep what another earns.

The oddity of it all is veiled by the incantation of a single, magical word: “ownership.” Because we say stockholders

“own” corporations, they are permitted to contribute very little, and take quite a lot.

What an extraordinary word. One is tempted to recall the comment of Lycophron, a Greek philosopher, during an early Athenian slave uprising against the aristocracy. “The splendour of noble birth is imaginary,” he said, “and its prerogatives are based upon a mere word.”

A mere word. And yet the source of untold trouble. Why have the rich gotten richer while employee income has

stagnated? Because that's the way the corporation is designed. It is designed to pay stockholders as much as possible, and to pay employees as little as possible. Why are companies demanding exemption from property taxes? Why are they cutting down 300-year-old forests? Because

that's the way the corporation is designed. It is designed to internalize all possible gains from the community, and to externalize all possible costs onto the community.

“A rising tide lifts all boats,” the saying goes. The corporation really functions more like a lock-and-dam operation, raising the water level in one compartment by lowering it in another.

The problem is not the free market. That notion—buyers and sellers regulating prices without external guidance—is relatively innocent. Indeed, brilliant. Nor is the problem capitalism. The capitalist system—private ownership driven by self-interest—is in many ways superbly effective. Certainly free-market capitalism is the most fruitful economic system the world has yet conceived. If we go rummaging through its entire basket of economic ideas—supply and demand, private property, competition, profit, unconscious regulation, wealth creation, and so forth—we'll find most concepts are sturdy and healthy, well worth keeping. But we'll also find one concept that is inconsistent with the others. It is the lever that keeps the lock and dam functioning, and it is these four words: maximizing returns to shareholders.

When we pluck this notion out of our basket and turn it over in our hands—really looking at it, as we so rarely do—we will see it is an aristocratic edict. In a competitive free market, it decrees that the interests of one group will be systematically favored over others. In a system devoted to unconscious regulation, it says corporations will consciously serve one group alone. In a system rewarding hard work, it says members of that group will be served regardless of their productivity.

Shareholder maximization is a form of entitlement. And entitlement has no place in a free market. It is a form of privilege. And privilege accruing to property ownership is a remnant of the aristocratic past.

The truth is, the commotion on Wall Street is not about funding corporations. It's about extracting from them.

Democracy

Alexis de Tocqueville observed that there are two great Ages of human history: the aristocratic age and the democratic age. In the twentieth century, governments worldwide have made a great passage from one to the other. In the years just prior to World War I, kings and emperors sat enthroned atop most nations of the globe—but they did not, by and large, survive the two world wars. After a calamitous interval of dictatorship and communism, a majority of the world's nations had, by the 1990s, turned to democracy.

We have crossed a great divide in history from aristocracy to democracy. But we have done so only in government. We have yet to democratize economics.

We think of capitalism as the handmaiden of democracy, but that's only partially true. Free market theory points toward democratic outcomes in its emphasis on individuals getting what they earn. But corporate governance points toward aristocratic outcomes in its insistence on shareholder primacy. Corporate governance is anti-democratic. Or, perhaps, pre-democratic.

The wealth-owning class today is a kind of secular aristocracy, much as dictators were secular monarchs, attempting to reproduce aspects of privilege enjoyed in the aristocratic era. In the past, secular monarchs largely failed because they lacked the sustaining myth of the divine right of kings. As fallen dictators from Mussolini to Marcos showed the world, power without myth does not long endure. Analyzing the fall of dictators in a chapter tellingly titled "The Weakness of Strong States," Francis Fukuyama observed, "The critical weakness that eventually toppled these strong states was in the last analysis a failure of legitimacy—that is, a crisis on the level of ideas."

The secular aristocracy must cling to its sustaining myths. They provide the base of its legitimacy, without which the amassing of wealth begins to seem indefensible. That's why the core myth of today's aristocracy—that shareholder returns must be maximized—is considered unchallengeable, nearly sacred. It is a myth with the force of law. We might call it our modern version of the divine right of kings.

Although such myths serve to legitimate a bias favoring those who own property (which today we call "financial assets"), we do not hold them consciously; instead, our legal structures hold them for us, as they once held biases favoring men over women, or whites over blacks.

The first step to changing unconscious bias is to see it. To help us do so is the aim of this essay (and of the book I am writing of the same title). It is a venture into what Michel Foucault would call an "archaeology of knowledge," a foundational dig, examining the ancient conceptual structures on which wealth bias is built. It is an inquiry into the aristocratic echoes in the corporate worldview—the

sustaining myths which support shareholder primacy.

I'm primarily addressing public corporations, because they are fundamentally different from smaller, private, family-owned corporations. My premise is that the shareholder primacy that drives these mammoth firms is, like the divine right of kings, an increasingly archaic mandate, imposed on an organic system capable of self-governance. It is a stricture that is blocking the natural evolution of capitalism, because it is increasingly out of step with the times due to a number of massive changes in the nature of major public corporations:

1. Increasing size. Today, among the world's one hundred largest economies, fifty-one are corporations. They have revenues larger than nation-states, yet maintain the guise of being "private."
2. The shrinking of ownership functions. Though still considered "owners," stockholders in major public companies do not manage, fund, or accept liability for "their" corporations. Ownership function has shrunk to one dimension: extracting wealth.
3. The rise of the knowledge economy. For many companies, knowledge is the new source of competitive advantage. To allow shareholders to claim the corporation's increasing wealth—when employees play a greater role in creating that wealth—is a misallocation of resources.
4. The increasing damage to our ecosystem. The rules of accounting were written in the sixteenth century, when nature seemed an unlimited reservoir of resources, and an unlimited sink for wastes. That is no longer true, but the rules of accounting retain fossilized remnants of those ancient attitudes.

Major public corporations have evolved into something new in civilization, structures more massive, more dominant in the world than our democratic forefathers dreamed possible. They left us little guidance on governing these institutions—the word "corporation" appears nowhere in the Constitution—because only a handful of American corporations existed when that seminal document was written. Washington and Jefferson governed a nation of farmers, in which most nonagricultural businesses were indeed "private," run out of the parlor, or in the barn, as part of the private household.

As the name itself implies, "public" corporations are no longer private. The major corporation, as Franklin D. Roosevelt observed, "represents private enterprise become a kind of private government which is a power unto itself."

We fail to see the growing public power of corporations because we accept the myth that corporations are pieces of private property owned by shareholders whose primacy is a natural mandate of free markets, just as our ancestors accepted that nations were private kingdoms owned by kings whose supremacy was a natural mandate of God.

We live with these myths like buried shells from an old war, the war we thought we had won, between monarchy and democracy. When these invisible old bombs go off—as they have in the resurgence of sweatshops, the rise of income inequality, or the increasing demands of corporate welfare—we become alarmed. We ask, how can the “free market” go so wrong? Believing the myth that the system must remain unfettered, we feel powerless to reach down and defuse the explosive and buried nub of the problem, which is shareholder primacy. Or in broader terms, wealth bias.

Property

In searching for the source of stockholder privilege, we come around again to the incantation of that single, magical word: “ownership.” It is property ownership that gives stockholders power. Thus, like a feudal estate, a corporation must be considered a piece of property—not a human community—so it can be owned and sold by the propertied class.

This word “own” is deceptively small, and worth unpacking. Because stockholders “own” corporations, we are implicitly told: 1) the corporation is an object that can be owned; 2) stockholders are sole masters of that object; 3) they can do as they like with “their” object. It’s an entire worldview in three letters. And as a result of this tiny incantation (like the “Shazam” that turns a boy into Captain Marvel), stockholders gain omnipotent powers: they can take over massive corporations, break them apart, sell them, squeeze them dry, or shut them down—while employees and communities remain powerless to stop them.

Power of this sort has an unmistakable feel of something more ancient. Ownership—that bundle of concepts we also label “property rights”—is one antique tradition that has remained impressively intact. It comes down to us from that time when the landed class was the privileged class, by virtue of its wealth in property. To own land was to be master. And in the master’s view, what was owned was subordinate, as in the imperial presumption that India was a “possession” of the throne of England. Or the feudal presumption that lords could own serfs, like so much livestock.

Ownership, according to British law, conferred upon the owner “sole and despotic dominion.” The phrase is from William Blackstone’s eighteenth century *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. It is a phrase worth lingering over, for “dominion” shares the same root as “domination.” And “despotic” means the tyrannical rule of those who are not free.

Even in John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*—considered a founding document of democracy—God is conceived of as the Great Property Owner. Locke wrote:

For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are....

This notion of one sovereign master extended to the marriage relationship, where only men were permitted to own property. In early American law, a husband became owner of his wife’s property upon marriage. He had sole right to administer it, had sole claim to its profits, and was required to render his wife no accounting. In the 1764 case of *Hanlon v. Thayer*, a Massachusetts court said a husband owned even his wife’s clothing—though she’d brought it with her at marriage. Husband and wife were one legal person, and that person was the husband.

Today, the corporation is considered one legal entity, and that entity is equated with stockholders. Like wives, employees “disappear” into the corporation, where they have no vote. The property of the corporation is administered solely in the interests of stockholders, who like husbands claim the profits, and are required to render employees no accounting. We have thus a “corporate marriage” in which one party has sole dominion. The reason is property.

Profit

The “property” stockholders have in corporations is represented by two numbers. The first is the stream of income, called profit, or earnings. Stockholders get a piece of it in dividends. The second is the value of the corporation itself, called market value, or capitalization. (It’s the value of all shares added together.) Stockholders receive their portion of market value when they sell stock and pocket capital gains, if the stock has gone up. In analogy to a rooming house, you might say stockholders own the stream of rent coming in, and they own the house itself.

The key to it all is profits. This is the wealth—the “property”—the corporation creates each year. The value of the corporation as a whole is often expressed as a multiple of profits (generally called “earnings”), as in the price/earnings ratio. If earnings go down, the value of the corporation will often go down. Hence maximizing profits means working in the stockholder’s interests—and if necessary, working against employee and community interests. Profit is often viewed as a neutral concept, and it could be, if companies made some rational, periodic analysis of how to allocate it. But they don’t. Custom grants to employees and the community no right to a cut of profit. Capitalist theory says it belongs to stockholders alone.

Jeff Gates in *The Ownership Solution* calls this the “closed loop” of wealth creation. Stockholders are by definition those who possess wealth. And in the design of the corporation, all new wealth flows to those owning old wealth, in a closed loop.

In the current narrative of the corporation, it works like this: A corporation exists to generate profit. Profit belongs to stockholders, but they leave part of it in the corporation to fund growth. So a portion (about a third) is paid out as

dividends, and the rest is kept as retained earnings. Those earnings are generated by the income statement, and retained on the balance sheet, where they are added to shareholder equity. Equity is what stockholders initially contributed when they purchased shares from the company. And by the magical closed loop of accounting, equity grows, year after year, while stockholders never contribute another cent out of their pocket.

Ergo: Stockholders “create wealth” without lifting a finger.

We call this “return on equity,” or ROE. It is designed to continue into infinity.

It’s a bit like the plant in *The Little Shop of Horrors*, which ate everything in sight. The more equity grows, the more it demands to grow. If equity is at, say, \$1 million, and grows 15 percent a year for ten years, it quadruples. So if a 15 percent return on equity initially means shoveling out \$150,000 worth of profits to satisfy shareholders, by the tenth year 15 percent requires a shovel four times as big, or \$600,000. The company needs four times the profits just to stay in place as far as stockholders are concerned, yielding the same ROE, year after year.

It’s like pushing a rock up a hill, and when you push nice and hard, the rock gets bigger. There is no top of the hill. You must do this for eternity.

It’s little wonder CEOs at public companies are desperate to boost profits however they can—sending jobs to sweatshops overseas, demanding corporate welfare, refusing to give raises, using temporary workers without benefits, wheedling tax breaks, downsizing staff. No one needs to stand up and tell them to do these things. The financial statements make the demand. The closed loop of corporate accounting holds the demand in place forever.

One enforcement mechanism is the hostile takeover, in which CEOs who fail to deliver are given the boot. Return on equity functions a bit like the Mafia, demanding a larger and larger payment every year, or the hostile takeover folks come and break the CEO’s kneecaps.

Return on equity lasts forever, as did title of nobility, which had a similarly tenuous connection to merit. At some point, it’s true, someone did invest dollars in the corporation, just as someone quite often did do something “noble.” But that single act granted passive privilege to a string of other folks, who did nothing. They continue to pass on privilege, hand to hand, forever. Of course, privilege of nobility passed by inheritance, while privilege of stock ownership passes by purchase. So we have made a few changes.

One might debate the legitimacy of this arrangement. One might question the rationale of an infinite payback for a one-time hit of money. (Even credit cards let you off the hook at some point.) But let us sidestep that debate.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that all profits



legitimately belong to stockholders. Let us assume they own all tangible corporate assets: the book value of the corporation is theirs. (Book value means everything you own minus everything you owe. It’s what would be left, theoretically, if you sold everything and paid off debts.) Even granted this, stockholders are still running off with 75 percent of corporate value that’s arguably not theirs.

Consider: At year-end 1995, book value of the S&P 500 accounted for only 26 percent of market value. The combined book value of these companies totaled \$1.2 trillion. Market value was \$4.6 trillion. Thus “intangibles” were worth \$3.4 trillion—three times the value of tangible assets.

Thus, even if S&P stockholders owned the companies’ tangible assets, they got off scot-free with other airy stuff worth three times as much.

Included in intangibles is discounted future value (what the market will pay today for estimated future value), plus things like patents and reputation. But also included is a company’s knowledge base, its living presence. Or to call it by a simpler name: employees.

Human Capital

In owning intangible value, stockholders essentially own employees—or at the very least, they have the right to sell them (which amounts to the same thing).

Take the case of the Maryland company in Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which in 1997 sold itself to Space Applications Corp. (SAC) in Vienna, VA. The company’s real assets were its one hundred scientists. So it sold them. As Edward Swallow of SAC told the *Wall Street Journal*, “The company wasn’t worth anything to us without the people.”

“Human capital” acquisitions happen all the time. Through 1997, Cisco Systems Inc. in San Jose, California, had made nineteen of them—mostly acquisitions of small software companies with little revenue but fifty to one hundred employees, for which it paid premium prices: up to \$2 million per employee.

It’s revealing when the accountants go to record such purchases on the balance sheet. If you pay \$100 million for a company with, say, \$25 million in tangible assets, what’s the other \$75 million of stuff you bought? How do you record it? Well, what you don’t record is “one hundred scientists.” In post-Civil War America, we recoil from the notion human beings might be bought and sold. So we say a company has purchased “goodwill.” That’s how it’s booked: as a line item on the balance sheet called “goodwill.”

The parallel to Blackstone is eerie: our law does not support the literal buying and selling of persons, but it does support the principle that stockholders can own certain kinds of property in employees. We allow company owners to sell company assets, even when the primary assets are one

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hundred scientists. This doesn't make these scientists property in the sense slaves were property, because the scientists are free to leave. But neither are they property owners, with a right to vote on the sale and a right to pocket the proceeds. Their status is akin to a third category recognized by Blackstone: "that of a right-bearing subject who is also the property of another."

Employees-as-property is a disturbing concept. But evidence of it is disturbingly widespread—as in the commonplace observation that "employees are our greatest assets." Assets, of course, are something one owns.

And companies can take this quite literally. Consider the case of Evan Brown. This computer programmer claimed to have dreamed up a concept that would fix outdated computer codes, and he wanted to develop it on his own. But his employer, DSC Communications in Plano, Texas, said the idea was company property, because Brown had signed an agreement granting DSC rights to inventions "suggested by his work." Brown never made notes for his concept. So when DSC sued him, it wasn't for ownership of his papers. It was for ownership of his thoughts.

How can companies own employees' thoughts? Isn't it unconstitutional to own human beings? Questions like these are not asked in the property-based society of capitalism. The fact that corporations fail to ask them is a sign of their pre-democratic bias: their archaic mental habit of seeing everything—even human knowledge—as property, and seeking to own it.

Through the lens of ownership, one either owns property, or becomes property. There is nothing else.

It's an attitude that says, if I own the assets of a firm, I own everything created on top of those assets. All new wealth flows to old wealth. This is a feudal assumption—and we can see it more clearly if we make the analogy to land. Say a landowner pays a tenant to farm some land, and the tenant builds a house there. Who owns the house? The landowner or the tenant?

In feudal England, the landowner legally claimed the house. But as legal scholar Morton Horwitz points out, American courts rejected this claim, beginning with the 1829 case, *Van Ness v. Pacard*, where Justice Story wrote: "what tenant could afford to erect fixtures of much expence or value, if he was to lose his whole interest therein by the very act of erection?" Under democratic law, the rule became that "the value of improvements should be left with the developer."

Refusing to bow to ancient property rights, democratic law articulated a new precedent: the house belongs to the person who built it. New wealth flows to those who create it.

In this tradition, employees who "build" atop the corporation (creating new products or new efficiencies) should have a legal right to the value of their improvements. But in

corporate law that isn't the case. Corporate law says stockholders own everything. Hence the increasing value of the corporation flows to shareholders, though they haven't lifted a finger to create that value. The presumption is literally feudal.

Personal Assets

Tied up with this feudal presumption is the notion that property owners *are* the corporation. Employees are incidental: hire them today, get rid of them tomorrow, they're of no consequence. They're not on the balance sheet, so they don't exist in the tally of what matters.

Yes, well. We might puncture this fantasy with a simple question:

What is a corporation worth without its employees?

This question was acted out, interestingly enough, in London, with the revolutionary birth of St. Luke's advertising agency, which was formerly the London office of Chiat/Day. In 1995, the owners of Chiat/Day decided to sell the company to Omnicom—which meant layoffs were looming—and Andy Law in the London office wanted none of it. He and his fellow employees decided to rebel. They phoned clients and found them happy to join the rebellion. And so at one blow, London employees and clients were leaving.

Thus arose a fascinating question: what exactly did the "owners" of the London office now own? Without employees and clients, what was the London branch worth? One dollar, it turned out. That was the purchase price—plus a percentage of profits for seven years—when Omnicom sold the London branch to Law and his cohorts. They renamed it St. Luke's, and posted a sign in the hall: Profit Is Like Health. You Need It, But It Is Not What You Live For. All employees became equal owners. Ownership for St. Luke's is a right that is free, like the right to vote. Every year now the company is re-valued, with new shares awarded equally to all.

Thus we see how the presumptions of property hold up in the knowledge era: the fiction that outsiders can "own" a company, which is nothing but a network of human relationships, is as flimsy as a house of cards. Employees themselves are the cards, willingly holding the place together, even as stockholders walk off with the wealth that employees create.

How long this will be sustainable remains to be seen. But for the time being, employees seem content to remain hypnotized: believing themselves powerless, and accepting (shazam!) that stockholders have sole and despotic dominion.

No one thinks to object when employees are called "assets"—or sold in an acquisition. We don't notice when employees are lumped with "intangibles": as though they are not flesh and blood, but ghosts. It seems rational that corporate accountants recognize the value of "goodwill," even as they ignore the value of employee knowledge.

We accept these notions, because we operate from the unconscious assumption that corporations are objects, not human communities. And if they're objects—akin to feudal estates—then they're something outsiders can own, and the humans working there are simply part of the property. Either you own property, or you become property: there is nothing else in a property-based world.

These antique notions inhabit us at levels beneath awareness. We don't become conscious of them until someone like Andy Law, or Evan Brown, stands up to stockholders and says, "I am not your property." Such gestures are reminiscent of the founding fathers standing up to Great Britain and saying, "America is no longer your property." Or women standing up to men saying, "We are not your possessions."

What seems solid melts under challenge. In the heat of confrontation, the notion of "owning" human beings slips away, like ice melting. Or like an incantation, fading, once we have broken its spell.

Wealthism

It's instructive to recall that at America's founding, the voting franchise was limited by three biases then considered legal: biases based on race, sex, and wealth. All three restrictions on the vote have since been removed. But only the first two restrictions have been recognized as unfair forms of discrimination, which we term "racism" and "sexism." The third, discrimination based on wealth, hasn't yet been fully recognized. We might begin by giving it a name. I suggest "wealthism."

Though it is pervasive, this bias has no coherent history or theory comparable to those dealing with racism and sexism. There is a large literature on "class," which is a vital beginning. But "class" is too amorphous a term. Wealth lurks in its background, but in the foreground are an array of issues, having to do with the family you're from, your mode of dress, where you went to school, how you speak—all of which may be only tangentially related to possession of wealth. Furthermore, America pretends it is a society without classes. But no one would suggest we are a society without wealthy individuals.

In point of fact, "wealthism" has a precision that "class" lacks. Corporate financial statements do not discriminate based on mode of dress. The voting franchise was not restricted based on how people spoke. These structural forms of discrimination find their basis in wealth.

Because we fail to name this discrimination precisely, we fail to see how it functions (how many people understand how financial statements work?) and we fail to claim its history. This history lies cloaked in collective amnesia, lost in a kind of vast national forgetting. How many of us could say when or how wealth restrictions on the vote were removed? How many of us remember Thomas Dorr?

Dorr was a hero in the fight for white manhood suffrage

in Rhode Island, where property restrictions once kept more than half of adult males from voting. In the Dorr Rebellion of 1842, the disenfranchised rose up and created their own "People's Constitution"—mandating universal suffrage for white males—and elected Dorr as their governor. This put Rhode Island in the awkward position of having two governors until President Tyler stepped in to crush the rebellion. Dorr was sentenced to "life imprisonment" (which lasted one year), but his cause was soon triumphant: In 1843, state suffrage provisions were liberalized. By the 1850s, wealth restrictions on the vote were abolished in virtually all states.

We don't know this history, because wealth prejudice remains largely unconscious. Change begins by seeing. And we do not yet see.

Wealth bias is articulated—quite brazenly—in the mandate to maximize returns to shareholders. It is given institutional form in the denial of corporate voting rights to employees. It is right in front of our eyes.

The 1919 date of *Dodge v. Ford Motor Co.*—the case that said the purpose of the corporation is to serve stockholders—is worth noting, for it anchors the notion of shareholder primacy in the era to which it belongs: that era which still denied voting rights to women and blacks, that era when such forms of discrimination were legal. In that time, when only white men were considered full members of society, it seemed natural that only wealth-holders would be full members of corporate society.

Corporations still live in the charmed circle of this taboo. They see their customs as unalterable, like the custom that only stockholders may vote, that wealth's only goal is more wealth, that the measure of success is a rising stock price. We buy into this belief system. With our tiny stashes of stock, we think the system is working for us, even as wages are sluggish, working hours are increasing, layoffs are rampant, and benefits are declining. Even as our children study in poorly funded schools while corporations elude the property taxes that once supported those schools.

There are seams of vulnerability here, once we think to look for them. Great seams of illegitimacy, of a creaky antiquity. One day, when there's been a bit more of a thaw in the climate of opinion, the time will come to strike at a few of these seams. Change might result more quickly than we imagine. Roosevelt enacted his most transformative New Deal laws in just one hundred days, or slightly over three months. This kind of opening for change is likely to come again. For if the system design is unsustainable (and it is), crisis becomes more likely. If the corporate governance system in the meantime seems impenetrable, it's because all closed societies seem impenetrable. The monarchy in its day seemed eternal. Shareholder primacy today seems likewise inevitable and eternal. But history suggests it will not be. □

The Nader Difference

Micah L. Sifry

Do George, Pat, and Al make you wanna Ralph? That could be one of the more interesting questions facing voters as they enter the polls this November. That's because, for the first time in American history since the election of 1948, we are going to have a full-blooded, four-way choice for president. In addition to Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush, who sewed up their nominations on March 7, it is all but certain that the Reform Party candidate will be renegade Republican Patrick Buchanan. And, though the Green Party's nominating convention won't take place until the end of June, it is nearly a given that they will put veteran citizen advocate Ralph Nader on the ballot in most, if not all, of the fifty states.

Unlike his campaign in 1996, Nader is running for real this time. Since officially announcing in late February, he's recruited more than twenty-five people to work on his campaign, including several full-time field organizers concentrating on clearing the many state-by-state hurdles to getting on the ballot. Thousands of volunteers have joined up through the campaign's web-site, www.votenader.com, along with some 1500 people who signed up in one day alone during the April 16 anti-IMF-World Bank rallies in Washington, D.C. Already, Nader is tapping into many of the same currents that fueled the student-enviro-labor protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, where he was a major participant. He's also shaking some pillars of the liberal establishment, raising \$10,000 at a house party hosted by members of the Americans for Democratic Action in Los Angeles and pulling in \$1000 checks from progressive luminaries like Warren Beatty and Paul Newman. All told, in his first three months he's raised over \$700,000; the campaign is aiming to garner \$2.5 million in matchable funds by this August, which would yield a total budget of about \$5 million.

This won't come close to the \$12.5 million that Pat Buchanan will receive in public funds once he captures the Reform Party nomination in August. But here's one early surprise of the emerging general election race: all the attention Buchanan has gotten from the mainstream media as a

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in the slightest.*

third-party candidate has hurt him more than it's helped, while Nader's comparative absence from the spotlight hasn't harmed his chances in the slightest. Proof of this came in a national survey of 842 likely voters conducted at the beginning of April by the respected pollster John Zogby, which found, in a four-way race, Bush leading Gore 42.9 to 38.5 percent, followed by Nader at 5.7 percent and

Buchanan at 3.6 percent. According to Zogby, Nader was drawing about 9 percent of the independent vote, and similar percentages among younger voters and people living on the West Coast, particularly in California.

Another poll conducted two weeks later in Oregon had even more startling results. With Bush and Gore in a statistical dead heat at 40 to 37 per-

cent, Nader was at 7 percent compared to Buchanan's 2 percent. This showing was especially encouraging to the Nader camp considering that he hadn't even made a campaign stop in the state yet (though he had been to twenty-eight other states by the end of April). According to the poll, sponsored by the *Portland Oregonian* newspaper, Nader also had the highest personal approval rating of all the presidential candidates, with 44 percent of those surveyed saying they viewed him favorably, compared to 38 and 39 percent for Gore and Bush respectively, and a scant 13 percent for Buchanan.

Nader's rise holds the potential of shaking up the suffocating consensus that has otherwise enveloped this seemingly endless presidential campaign. As Robert Borosage, the codirector of the Campaign for America's Future, wrote in the *American Prospect* in January,

The President, the Republican Congress, and the leading presidential nominees all agree. The first priority is to raise military spending, adding over \$100 billion to the \$1.5 trillion dollars we are already slated to spend on the world's finest military over the next five years. The second priority is to pay down the debt in the name of defending Social Security. All tacitly assume severe cuts in domestic spending on everything from education to Head Start in order to conjure up the non-Social Security surplus. The largest part of that surplus is to be devoted to tax cuts. Only at this point does [any] argument [between the leading candidates] begin.

Micah L. Sifry, senior analyst with Public Campaign, is writing a book on the prospects of America's leading third parties.

Borosage's complaint is echoed by Texas populist Jim Hightower, who has been noting recently that there is little more than a dime's difference between the major parties. "The Republicans in Congress want to stretch out a dollar increase in the minimum wage over three years," he notes, "while the Democrats want to phase it in over just two years. That comes to fifty cents a year versus thirty-three cents. So I guess there's seventeen cents worth of difference between the parties."

Nader's campaign could bust that cozy consensus open, especially if he manages to force his way into any nationally televised debates. Imagine finally hearing someone raise critical questions about corporate power, the concentration of wealth, the corruptive role of money in politics, the unaccountable power of the Federal Reserve and the World Trade Organization, the need for universal health care, the need for a new energy policy, how to take back control of the public lands and public airwaves, and what it would take to seriously lift all children out of poverty. All from a messenger with impeccable integrity who is genuinely (and sometimes painfully) not a politician.

Wouldn't this be a good thing, particularly for everyone who wants to push the Democratic party to the left, closer to public opinion on issues like health care, the environment, political reform, and corporate responsibility, and further from the business lobbyists and conservative Democratic Leadership Council-types who have dominated it during the Clinton-Gore years?

Steve Cobble, a senior advisor to the Nader campaign and the former political director of the Rainbow Coalition, has no doubt about his answer. "When Nader breaks the Federal Election Commission's 5 percent barrier this fall, it will be a huge step forward for progressive politics." By getting at least 5 percent of the vote, Nader will qualify the Greens' 2004 presidential candidate for millions in public funding, the same way Ross Perot put the Reform Party on the map in 1996. Furthermore, Cobble argues,

The very existence of a funded, qualified, mobilized political party with a progressive blue-green agenda for fair trade, for the protection of core worker/environmental rights, and for honest, comprehensive, campaign finance/voting reform will shift the national center of gravity away from its current domination by corporate special interests. Plus, we hope to see young anti-WTO and anti-sweatshop activists drawn into electoral politics; we should see



an increase in overall voter turnout, which will benefit other progressive candidates and help change the leadership of the House; and if we fight for it, we may be able to force open debates among four candidates with different visions of the future.

Historically, strong third-party efforts have frequently succeeded in propelling new or neglected issues into the American mainstream in just the way Cobble suggests. The direct election of U.S. Senators, women's suffrage, the eight-hour work day, the abolition of child labor, the graduated income tax, and unemployment insurance were all championed first by the Populist, Socialist, and Prohibition parties of the late 1800s and

early 1900s. While the major parties took direct steps to suppress the growth of these parties, they also adroitly coopted their leading issues. It is for this reason that historian John Hicks, a former president of the American Academy of Historians, once declared that a vote for a third party is "probably the most powerful vote that has ever been cast."

No one doubts that Ross Perot's 1992 campaign, where he drew 19 percent of the vote, forced the issue of deficit reduction to the center of the political agenda. The Green Party of New Mexico argues, with good evidence, that strong showings in the double-digits by their congressional candidates in two special elections in 1997 and 1998 caused state Democrats to move perceptibly to the left on environmental issues, health care, and Social Security reform.

Still, can Nader really make a difference in the fall? Or, trapped into the role of a "spoiler," will his support wither, hurting the very causes he wants to build? One hint of Nader's possible impact comes from pollster Zogby, who says his candidacy may motivate a bloc of voters who otherwise won't vote, potentially helping progressive Democrats down-ballot. "Our polling from 1996 shows that you will also see an increase in those who call themselves liberal or progressive [in the electorate] if there's a credible Green party candidate," Zogby told me earlier this year. "That was seen in New York with Ralph Nader, for example."

Though the Nader campaign has been rapidly pulling itself together since he (belatedly) announced his candidacy in February, this breakneck pace of traveling to as many states as possible and gearing up critical petition drives in many places at once is pushing the candidate and his mostly youthful staff

to the limit. Nader's campaign style, though admirably refreshing and direct, takes some getting used to. This is a candidate who shies away from wading into crowds to shake hands, but will stay at the podium for hours until every question is answered. At this point, it's impossible to predict whether the campaign will take off or not. One problem is that many of the people in the trenches are green, in both senses of the word; they have a lot of energy and enthusiasm, but not necessarily the organizing savvy needed to fully take advantage of the moment. So far, few established progressive institutions have embraced Nader or offered help, though the ADA and Friends of the Earth are said to be leaning in that direction.

As Nader's profile rises, the going will get tougher. One hint of attacks to come: liberal congressman Barney Frank, who is backing Vice President Gore's bid for the White House and has little respect for the argument that a strong Nader campaign will help progressives. "I get all of Ralph's reports and not once have I ever seen him lend his support to hate-crime legislation, to efforts to protect abortion rights, or affirmative action. Not once!" he told Pacifica Network News at the end of April. "I work closely with all of the leading progressive groups in my state and not one of them is excited about a Nader candidacy." In response, Nader points to his long record fighting for civil liberties and civil rights, and argues that little discernible progress will be made on the sorts of issues Frank raises if nothing is done about redressing the central imbalance of power undermining American democracy.

A more subtle and less partisan criticism comes from Borosage, who argues that Nader has already missed a key opportunity to shake up the dynamics of the Democratic Party, which for him is still the home of most progressives. "Imagine Nader in the Democratic primaries this year," he says, citing Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 runs as parallels. "Nader would have been able to raise several million dollars, aided by matching money. He would have had a free platform of debates across the country. His populist anticorporate, antitrade positions would have had enormous appeal among organized labor. He would not have won, but in the space of six months he would have educated more people, energized more people, and put more pressure on Gore *et al.* than anything that will happen this year."

By comparison, Borosage argues, Nader now has to operate in relative obscurity, spend scarce resources getting on the ballot, and hope that public dissatisfaction with Bore and Gush leads to a breakthrough this summer or fall. He also questions whether Nader's run will really help retake the House—which he says is "the best way to expand the agenda in American politics now"—though he admits it's a possibility. "The purpose of the Green Party—for which I have respect—is to elect candidates up and down the ticket," Borosage notes. "If Ralph succeeds in getting them on the ballot and in

aiding their candidates down ballot, and if he convinces voters with the argument he must make that the two parties are equally bought and sold, then he's likely to hurt, not help, the prospects of Democrats taking back the House."

Of course, winning back the House won't be that big a victory, since the balance of power will still be with the conservatives. And the painful truth is that when the Democrats last controlled Congress, they still betrayed their progressive base—failing to pass labor law reform, campaign finance reform, and health care reform, to take just three salient issues. It's also clear that Nader, who played a titanic role in the signal victories of the public interest wars of the 1970s—helping create the Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Agency, and passing the Freedom of Information Act, among other achievements—now feels trumped at every pass by a business lobby that

is far better funded and organized than ever, rolling back the hard-won advances of those years. Thus his turn to electoral politics of the third-party variety, and the interest of many progressive Democrats—as well as others who have given up on the work-from-inside strategy—in his campaign.

Ultimately, the real question to ponder is what will help energize the kind of vibrant movement politics that would force the major parties to respond to today's issues in the same way that the anti-Vietnam War movement shattered Cold War liberalism, or the civil rights movement shattered Jim Crow liberalism, or the radical right humbled the Eisenhower wing of the Republican party. The outlines of such a movement can be seen in the blue-green coalition rising around trade and globalization issues, and in the independent-progressive vote for campaign finance reform and "straight talk" that temporarily coalesced around John McCain's maverick presidential bid. But this movement still lacks a coherent center—if one is even possible.

If you believe that third-party presidential campaigns are, by definition, exercises in futility given the winner-take-all system, then Nader's candidacy is a huge mistake. Past failures like Barry Commoner's Citizens' Party run would tend to confirm your doubts. In my view, however, some things are different about this election. First, the electronic media system has gotten more fragmented and is hungry for fresh angles on the presidential race—creating an opening for Nader to reach millions of people. Second, it's a four-way race, which may soften the "spoiler" problem if Buchanan is seen as taking more votes from Bush than Nader draws from Gore. Third, the Internet has made it far easier for like-minded citizens to find each other and organize together, an invaluable resource for cash-starved political campaigns. And finally, there is a real base to be tapped and expanded among labor supporters, environmentalists, and students, as well as independent-minded voters. A vigorous Nader campaign can help build that movement and spread its message. □

As Nader's profile rises, the going will get tougher.

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A CONVERSATION WITH Ralph Nader

Ralph Nader is the Green Party candidate for president. He spoke with TIKKUN in May.

TIKKUN: What do you imagine will be the long term impact of your campaign for the presidency inside the Green Party?

NADER: I hope that my candidacy will create a political force which can contribute to the development of what has been an underdeveloped civic culture. Look how little time we spend with children, for example. Children are more isolated and spend less time with adults than at any time in human history. So I hope that we can move toward a politics which facilitates rather than undermines the banding of people together.

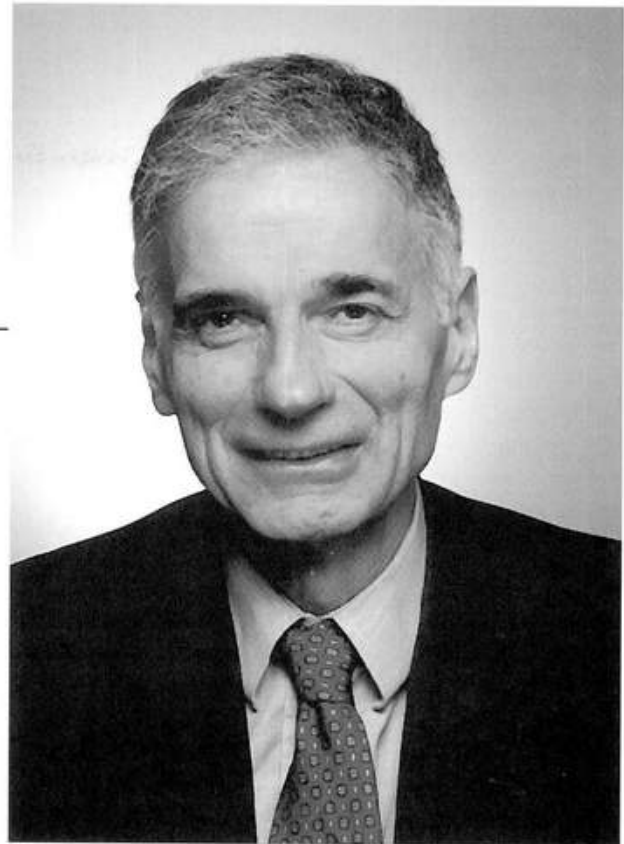
TIKKUN: How does running for the presidency do that?

NADER: I want to set up practices which facilitate the civic activism of the population. For example, if we create flyers or brochures which encourage people to join together in consumer action groups and then can put them into mailings done by banks and other publicly regulated institutions, we can contribute to strengthening a civic culture. In fact, we did something like this in Illinois, which helped people get mobilized in fighting for more power in relationship to the electric, telephone, and gas utilities. In the campaign itself we will be highlighting local struggles—the work of health rights, children's rights, environmental and other citizens' groups seeking to expand citizen participation. Political movements must always be rooted in civic movements.

I hope that we will also bring many young people into progressive politics who never had that experience before, and create a third party lever on the two establishment parties. These days, when the Democrats win they attribute their victory to their cleverness at having taken some of the traditional Republican stances on some issues (e.g. phony welfare reform and eradicating the national debt), but if they lose, they explain it by saying that they haven't been enough like the Republicans. A progressive third party might pull the discourse in the other direction.

TIKKUN: So why not run in the Democratic primaries—wouldn't that have even more impact on public discourse?

NADER: No, this election goes all the way to November; Democrats have to be even more concerned about us because we take votes that they may consider necessary for



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their own electoral victory. And [what we are doing] helps build a new party, whereas once the Democratic primaries are over, you have nothing with which to build in the future—that party is not going to be taken over without far more resources than we are likely to generate.

TIKKUN: As you know, TIKKUN has long called for a “new bottom line” and a new definition of productivity and efficiency. We want productivity to be defined not only in terms of maximizing money and power, but also in terms of maximizing love and caring, maximizing ethical, spiritual, and ecological sensitivity, and maximizing our capacity to respond to the world and to other people with awe and wonder.

NADER: I agree with you that it's important to redefine our notion of productivity and efficiency as if people mattered, both in terms of their health and safety and their opportunities to develop their own culture, neighborhoods, etc. The yardsticks of our economy are extremely commercial in nature—they measure the number of jobs, the amount of money in the economy, and so forth, but they don't measure work hazards, the amount of time parents have to spend with children, the amount of time wasted in commuting, or things of that sort.

Productivity is just defined in terms of maximizing the interests of corporations. If an auto company increases

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expenses in order to build in safety features like air bags, and as a result the number of people killed in automobile accidents decreases, that should be judged an increase in productivity—but it isn't. There is nothing efficient about corporate technology because it unloads all its real costs on the environment in destructive ways, and it wastes people's time. But how do you take something like awe and wonder and put that into a legal framework which might concern government?

TIKKUN: Well, Michael Lerner's new book, *Spirit Matters*, gives a detailed account of a school system which is structured to foster a sense of awe and wonder at the universe, rather than just teaching students how to look at everything from a utilitarian standpoint of "what's in it for me?" Teaching students how to marvel at the world's miracles may be as important as teaching students how to manipulate nature.

NADER: But there's still a distinction between the secular and the sacred.

TIKKUN: While we don't wish to introduce prayer or the teaching of any particular religious traditions in the schools, we do think that some spiritual sensitivities can be taught without violating the kind of separation that the First Amendment was designed to protect. So kids might find that part of each school day is spent in helping kids connect to nature rather than in doing some "project" meant to take control over nature.

NADER: I agree with that. It's part of the aesthetic communion with nature which cannot be quantified and which nevertheless is a very important outcome of a good education. Instead, students are pummeled with stimuli—they never get a chance for any private time or quiet time. While education will always have a training dimension, in our society it is losing the civic, introspective, and philosophizing dimensions which are so important. I'm concerned, though, that if I begin to talk about issues like awe and wonder people will ask, "How are you going to implement this?"

TIKKUN: One way that we turn our spiritual agenda into specific policies is by advancing the idea of the Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—which would require corporations with incomes of \$20 million or more a year (adjusted for inflation) to obtain a new corporate charter every twenty years. That charter would only be granted to those corporations which could prove a history of social responsibility as measured by an Ethical Impact Report.

NADER: I strongly support the idea of using the corporate charter as a way of increasing democratic control. More and more it is the global corporation which most decisively shapes our lives and future. These corporations stand astride the world, commanding the technology, the labor, the capital, the indebtedness that leads to control over governments in the Third World.

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We have all kinds of words to judge aberrant human behavior. We call people who have an irresistible desire to steal kleptomaniacs; we say those students who have trouble concentrating have "attention deficit disorder"; but we never apply these concepts to corporations. Well, aren't drug companies kleptomaniacs, given the prices they charge and the subsidies they get from our tax dollars? And HMOs are certainly suffering from attention deficit disorder—they keep on denying people the health care they already paid for. It's important to ask, why do we apply pathological categories to human beings but not to these institutions?

Of course, you can't close down the corporations, i.e. charter-based accountability, without causing great amounts of human suffering.

TIKKUN: Which is why the proposal in *Spirit Matters* calls for a grand jury to conduct hearings and to be allowed to assign the assets of a corporation with a bad history of social responsibility

either to some other socially responsible group or to the corporations' employees themselves. Or the grand jury could put the corporation on probation.

NADER: I like the idea of corporate probation and the idea of expanding the power of juries. But corporations are geniuses at undermining the best laid plans of the public interest. So I suggest that one way to implement this amendment would be to add another requirement, namely, that throughout the twenty years between charter renewal reviews, corporations inform stockholders of actions that might be viewed as undermining their ability to get renewal under the SRA, such as any actions that were detrimental to the ecology, the community, or the ethical life of the employees. I'd like to see that happen now with regard to television and radio license renewals, which are already supposed to be governed by the FCC. In the final analysis, you can have all the regulatory agencies you want, but the key is how informed, motivated, and organized is the public.

TIKKUN: We are not only talking about ethical behavior, but also about the impact on spiritual life—for example, corporations should have an incentive to create time during the work day for spiritual refreshment, quiet, and inner reflection.

NADER: I'll admit to a certain amount of wariness about the way that people use spiritual or religious notions, especially in politics. I once attended a prayer breakfast in D.C. at which a murderous dictator from Central America was being honored because he stood up to "communistic" peasant protests. I looked around at all these spiritual and prayerful types applauding this gentleman.

TIKKUN: That's why we distinguish between emancipatory spirituality and reactionary forms of spirituality when we talk about a politics of meaning.

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NADER: I do see the importance of that distinction. Though I don't usually talk about this as a spiritual issue, I talk a lot about corporate economies devouring the time of people, both at work and at home, so that they have less time for contemplation about how they want to live their lives and less time for solitude. Every aspect of life becomes a commodity and is put up for sale: the environment is for sale, democracy is for sale, our genes are for sale, our privacy is for sale—it's an all-advancing Moloch. The companies tell us, "You don't have to be active—just be passive consumers. You don't have to play sports—just sit on the couch, eat our junk foods, and watch the spectacles we present to you. You don't have to develop your own local culture—you can just sit and watch the Metropolitan opera and watch how the pros do it." A nation of gazers is not a nation of participants.

TIKKUN: You've been active in leading the struggle against corporate globalization. In the globalization movement there are those who favor radical decentralization and those who wish to see a movement toward global democracy which could regulate how to use resources and energy. Where do you stand?

NADER: An international system could only work if it were based on a series of local and regional initiatives to democratically guide our economic life. Otherwise you'll get the IMF and World Bank based on power-elite interests shaping the world.

TIKKUN: But what if there were a democratically-elected international assembly—would you want that direction?

NADER: I start with the maximum feasible self-sufficiency for communities and regions. That's why the small farm economy was so wonderful for so many years. Without that [sort of self-sufficiency] it's impossible to really hold the international economy accountable.

In the meantime, I would withdraw the United States from the World Trade Organization because the WTO puts commercialism over everything—over health, safety, non-material values, everything. Trade should have to prove that it doesn't damage the environment or people before it gets approval. Today the Gore people are advocating policies which absolutely reverse our traditional privileging of human and environmental concerns above commercial concerns. In the crazy world that Gore, Bush, and the New Democrats support, trade agreements penalize countries for caring about human rights and environmental sustainability, because they are seen as constraints on the highest value which is supposed to be free trade. We've lost five straight challenges to our environmental standards in the tribunals in Geneva because we've been judged to be too

concerned about the environment at the expense of free trade. We are supposed to give up these environmental restraints, and that is unacceptable.

TIKKUN: Do you have a perspective on the Natural Law Party? What's your take on them?

NADER: I don't know anything more than John Hagelin's general ideology—if we go with natural processes we will do better, if we go with science and sound technology we can solve our problems. He does not talk about power structures. This is also my criticism of *Natural Capitalism* by Paul Hawken. These authors think that if you can show a corpo-

ration how to reduce its costs and maintain or increase its sales and not be regulated, you will get these corporations to behave differently. But I say to Paul Hawken: "You don't understand. These corporations have known for years how to be more energy efficient and reduce their costs—but they didn't do it. This will only happen if there is public pressure to shift their decision making to respond to public demands." Hagelin also has to face up to the question of corporate power and how specifically he expects to challenge it or subordinate himself to it.

Otherwise, the Natural Law Party is just talking in a way that is very unscientific because it is not based on a study of how governmental and corporate policies are actually shaped.

TIKKUN: Do you think you'll be able to broaden the discourse in this election, or will the media just ignore what you say?

NADER: I'd love to do a test case: get me onto one of these talking head shows. When they ask me one of their narrowly construed questions I will say, "Wait, time out—I want to talk about the deeper spiritual crisis." Then I want you to time how many seconds I get before the talking head host cuts me off and switches the topic. The pressure to conform to the narrow framing of public dialogue is not just political, it's almost sonic—they cut you off after fifteen or twenty seconds. If they interview you on tape you are lucky to get five or six seconds. My experience is that unless you are on live, anything you say beyond five or six seconds just gets cut off.

The media doesn't want to talk about anything substantive. They've got a few of their standard issues, and they have standardized replies which they expect us to give. So, for example, they don't want to talk about the content of education, but only about whether or not to pay teachers more or spend more money on repairing school buildings, or whether you are for or against vouchers. Everything is means to means to means—they never get to a discourse about ends, and that is also the crisis of an overspecialized society.

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TIKKUN: Unless you introduce a spiritual dimension, you get people falling into the dominant materialism and selfishness of the market—and within that context, a world of everyone seeking to maximize their own advantage without regard to the consequences for others, the responses of the major candidates seem reasonable since they are simply being “realistic” and responding to the needs of the most powerful, which in this society is the corporate establishment.

NADER: Yes, exactly. That’s why I point out in almost every speech I make that every religion has warned against giving excessive power to the commercial interests of their society—no matter what cultures they came from. Everyday experience showed them that this single-minded commercialism was the supreme danger that would eventually trample and undermine every other value system. And that’s not a normal political speech.

TIKKUN: But to push it to the next level, like Peter Gabel does in *The Bank Teller*, you need to explain that those potentials are not just about money and power.

NADER: Yes, but I also worry that if you push it too far you lose the audience which has had its consciousness shaped by the dominant assumptions in this society. When I was working on auto safety I learned to take the issues in stages: first I had to undermine the notion that all death and injury was due to the nut behind the wheel. Then I had to

show that there could be safety devices that would work. Then we could get to the question of mass transit systems. You have to go through stages.

TIKKUN: The secret of American politics is that many people who vote for the Right don’t necessarily agree with its specific policy recommendations but they do agree that something is deeply wrong with the materialism and selfishness of the society.

NADER: A point which the Left has ignored, to its detriment. Originally, the inspiration of the trade union movement was much more rooted in this kind of sensibility, until business unionism won out and it became more and more corrupt at the top, and in some areas it actually became a monster. They forgot this larger vision of human needs.

The greatest relationship between human beings is the gift relationship—the dominant relationship that used to exist between parents and children, or between neighbors. But the commercial culture is obliterating the gift culture. And so more and more people have to buy what used to be available for free in the extended families of past generations.

These are some relevant issues for a political campaign—but if we are ever going to get someplace in the electoral arena, we need to overcome the rigidities which make it seem to be an act of courage to simply tell the truth. That’s why what you at TIKKUN call a hunger for meaning is something I intend to address in my campaign. □



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Excellence in a Mendacious World

Bradley Shavit Artson

Some two thousand years ago, the Jewish community suffered a drought. The Talmud (in Massekhet Ta'anit) tells how the people approach two great sages—Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos and Rabbi Akiva—and ask them to pray for rain. Both men pray for rain separately, but only Rabbi Akiva is answered. Naturally, everyone wants to know why. The answer comes from a *bat kol* (a heavenly voice): “It is not because Rabbi Akiva is greater than Rabbi Eliezer, but because this one, Rabbi Akiva, is a forgiving person, whereas the other one is not a forgiving person” (Ta'anit 25b).

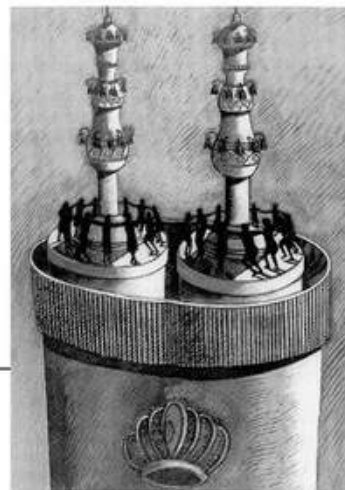
This passage entices me because of its clear sense of what matters and what doesn't. Excellence, in the Talmud's view, is measured by compassion and empathy. Rain comes as a result of goodness, not intellectual rigor, political power, or economic ostentation.

In Western culture we've fixated on other definitions of greatness, removed them from a healthy context, and transformed them from appropriate guideposts into idolatrous fetishes. We say we believe in excellence of academic performance, but what we mean is that we only care about what can be tested, measured, and controlled. Instead of learning for the sheer joy of learning and for the profundity of what we learn, we study for the sake of our tests and we learn only what can be written down and what can be assessed.

We say that we admire excellence in the world of finance, and yet the only wealth we recognize is what can be hoarded in the bank or what can be bought and sold. There are so many forms of wealth that we simply don't allow ourselves to see. Instead of valuing true wealth—that which can be given away, that which uplifts and succors our fellow human beings and our communities—we obsess about accumulating things. Blind to the reality that chasing possessions is one of humanity's greatest sources of misery, we indulge the delusion that material objects can provide us with either security or contentment.

We say we admire prominence, yet we pervert promi-

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson is the dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, Bel Air, California, and the author of *It's a Mitzvah! Jewish Living Step-by-Step* (Berhrman House and The Rabbinical Assembly).



Instead of learning for the sheer joy of learning ... we study for the sake of our tests.

nence into fame, into names that can be recognized and exploited.

Neither academic rigor, nor wealth, nor prominence are bad in and of themselves. But taken outside of a holistic context, they slip into idolatry. And about idolatry, Judaism has a great deal to say to the world and to us.

Throughout its history, Judaism has provided a corrective voice when the general culture goes astray. As Cynthia Ozick wisely observes:

In creating the Sabbath, the Torah came face to face with a nature that says, “I make no difference among the days.” And Torah made a difference among the days. In giving the commandment against idolatry, Torah came face to face with a society in competition with the Creator. And Torah taught the Unity of the Creator. In making the Commandment against dishonor of parents, Torah came face to face with the merciless usage of the old. And Torah ordained devotion to parents. In every instance Torah strives to teach No to unrestraint, No to victimization, No to dehumanization. The Covenant is a bond with the Creator, not with the practices of the world as they are found in actuality.

We cannot hope to succeed unless we continually remind ourselves that ours is a bond with the Creator and not with the world as it actually is. Unless we are willing to fashion a community in which Jewish values dominate, in which our yardstick is that of the Kadosh Baruch Hu, the most Holy Blessed One—unless, indeed, our priorities are broader and more lofty than those of the rampant materialism, cynicism, and hedonism around us, then we too shall fail, our struggles not worth the effort. Our measure of excellence must be different.

I want to propose four standards by which we can measure true greatness:

The first is diligence. Only that which is acquired with real, patient effort can be of value. The Rambam recognizes

this precept in the Shemonah Perakim, when he teaches that “moral excellences ... cannot be implanted in the soul except by means of frequent repetition ... which, practiced during a long period of time, accustoms us to them.” We must learn to habituate ourselves to the hard work of decency and learning, of goodness and caring. Jewish wisdom can be a key to unlock the riches of Torah in its broadest sense, but only if we are willing to toil in its field. There is simply no short cut to God’s courtyard.

The second measure of excellence is piety. Not the false piety of God on the lips and an ostentatious display of observance, but rather a true piety in which, rather than placing ourselves at the center, we put in that special place our Creator. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us in magnificent language:

Let not the wise glory in wisdom;
Let not the strong glory in strength;
Let not the wealthy glory in riches.
But only in this should one glory;
In understanding and knowing Me.
For I, Adonai, act with kindness,
Justice, and equity in the world;
For in these do I delight
declares Adonai. (Jer. 9:22-23)

If we are able to put God at the center, if we are able to ask ourselves—daily, hourly, minute by minute—what would God have me do now? And why is God bringing this to me? I believe that we would act differently towards our studies, towards ourselves, and towards each other.

Third, after diligence and piety, I commend to you dignity. Dignity is the flip side of piety. When we do not put God at the center of our lives, we find ourselves constantly facing our own mirror image, producing an idolatry that is sterile as well as foolish. This is the shallow, shrill dignity of people always asserting their own worth. Instead, the *k’vod ha-briot*, the dignity of all creation, asserts that our teachers are deserving of honor, as are our colleagues, as are we ourselves. No one has the right to ask another person to be a doormat, nor should we look to other people simply for what we can get from them. Putting God at the center prevents us from judging other peoples’ values by the degree to which they correspond to our own priorities and shortcomings.

One of my favorite authors, Rebecca Goldstein, contemplating the way people establish what matters to them as opposed to what matters to God, asks in her *Mind-Body Problem*,

From which region of mattering does God look out on us?
From none, of course. Not because people don’t matter objectively, but because they do. They simply do. Any view that confers degrees of mattering, that distinguishes between those who matter and those who don’t, has no objective validity. We all count in precisely the same way. That’s the view from nowhere inside, the view from out yonder. And its contemplation beckons to me like liberation.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel offers the same message in different words when he teaches: “The ultimate worth of man is due neither to his virtue nor to his faith. It is due to God’s virtue, to God’s faith. Wherever you see a trace of man, there is the presence of God.” If we can fashion an awareness of dignity as a recognition of God’s image in each other, and if we then can remind ourselves to speak to and treat each other the way we would—on our best days—speak to God, we will be able to radically transform ourselves and our world.

Finally, what I think of as the hardest of all the virtues is to cultivate a true inner joy. Our society confuses fun with joy. We rush headlong away from responsibility, away from maturity, seeking escape, seeking indulgence, seeking intoxication. But that is not true joy. True joy is knowing who you are and before whom you stand. Alan Shapiro writes in *The Last Happy Occasion* of that holy joy which “was not a personal joy but the joy of personal extinction, the joy of the body transformed through ritual and unremitting discipline into a transpersonal vessel for the holy spirit, the living God.” We are called upon to be nothing less than vessels for that living God. Working hard to put God at our center can reinfuse our learning and our growth with purpose and with radiant joy.

The very last paragraph of Massekhet Ta’anit speaks precisely of putting God at the center and of the surpassing joy that can come from being in the company of righteous people who do so. The text concludes with the following words:

In the future, the Holy Blessing One will make a circle of all the righteous, and God will sit in their center in the Garden of Eden. And each and every one of them will point a finger toward God, as it says, “It shall be said on that day, ‘This is our God, we have hoped for God and God saved us. This is Adonai, to Whom we hoped. Let us exult and rejoice in God’s salvation.’” (Isa 25:9) □

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INTERVIEW

AN INTERVIEW WITH William Bratton

Jack Newfield with Mark Jacobson

William Bratton was the police commissioner of Boston in 1992 and 1993. From 1994 through 1996 he served as police commissioner in New York City. During that time, the crime rate in the city was reduced by 50 percent. He is also author of the book *Turnaround*, which describes the policing strategies that resulted in the city's dramatic decrease in crime.

TIKKUN: What did you actually do to reduce crime in New York City?

BRATTON: Four elements were involved. One was political authorization. Giuliani campaigned principally on the issue of crime, saying he would be much more assertive in dealing not only with serious crime but with the types of minor crime that people experience every day that made living in New York so uncomfortable.

Secondly, the vision. Vision was critical. I was one of the few police chiefs in America at that time who was comfortable with saying the police should be held accountable for reducing crime—that police success should not be based on response time or the numbers of arrests. I was the embodiment, if you will, of a new wave of policing that was just beginning to take root in the country: community policing. The focus of community policing is on the prevention of crime. We measure success by how much crime rates go down, how much disorder is removed from the streets, how much fear levels go down.

The other two elements were strategy and tactics. The strategies were the problems we intended to address; we studied all the issues and the first three that came out in rapid succession were guns, drugs, and youth crime. Those three were fueling violent crime in New York City, and were also contributing to the fear so many citizens felt. We documented 8,000 open-air drug locations from Wall Street up to Harlem to East New York. Violence is associated with those open-air drug dealers. It's very easy to ride down the street on a bicycle and spray a machine gun against your

*Jack Newfield is the author of six books and a columnist for the New York Post. His three-hour documentary film on Robert Kennedy aired on the Discovery Network. Mark Jacobson, currently a contributing editor at New York Magazine, is the author of two novels: *Gojiro and Everyone* and *No One*.*



William Bratton at his swearing-in ceremony in 1994.

We measured success by how much crime rates go down, how much disorder is removed from the streets, how much the fear levels go down.

competition. So the strategies were intended to go after what was causing violent crime. For twenty years in this city, the New York City Police Department—more than any other organization in the United States—had been deterred from addressing these things because of fears of corruption.

TIKKUN: But how could you have assertive policing, reduce crime, and still improve relations with the black community?

BRATTON: The fourth element, tactics. What I was all about was devolving authority. Decentralizing it down to the level in the organization that was close enough to the community to identify the community's principle concerns in their neighborhood. Those tactics were what we needed to do on 125th Street in Harlem to get rid of the illegal peddlers up there, for example, or what we needed to do on the killing fields of the Seventy-fifth precinct, versus what we needed to do in Manhattan to get rid of the squeegee pests waiting to clean your car windshield at all the entrances to the island. Those tactics we left up to the precinct commanders. I was authorizing the precinct commander to be the police chief for his or her area.

INTERVIEW

TIKKUN: Do you feel this golden age of policing in New York City was ended by Giuliani primarily because he was envious of the degree of credit you were getting for this reduction?

BRATTON: I have come to believe a number of things were at work here. Early on, concerns had been voiced to Giuliani about my attraction to the press—it was always felt that the attraction was for my own glorification. But he never fully understood: I didn't have a public relations budget. The press was my public relations budget, my marketing office. I'm comfortable dealing with the media and I've got a persona that lends itself to getting out there and mixing it up, whether it's up at Elaine's at night or out for lunches or doing press conferences or having the press in to my office.

Where Giuliani and I butted heads was that very quickly the press was attracted to me on the crime issue. From a political standpoint, he could not afford the credit going to me and my team. He needed that credit for himself, both for his local goals as well as his eventual national goals. He needed to be the guy who was going to control the crime in America. But while he was using the ideas and the leadership of myself and others, it needed to be seen that he was not just the authorization, but the author.

Secondly, I believe we scared the hell out of him when we got crime down so fast. The 10 percent reduction was an internal department goal and most people in the department were aghast. The most they had done in the previous years under Dinkins was, I think, 3 percent. And when we ended up getting a 12 percent reduction that first year, I set a 15 percent goal for the next year, because we had a more experienced team, we had more cops. And we went up to 17 percent. I think Giuliani got a little frightened, particularly when we proposed "Juggernaut." In 1995 our confidence level was up, the strategies were working, the tactics were working, the press was behind us. We were talking about doing a police parade up Broadway, which the mayor side-tracked because he felt it was going to once again attract too much attention to me. And so he raised the bogus issue that the thing was scheduled on my birthday; you know, he was able to use that to kind of cut my legs out a little bit.

The idea was, once again, you couldn't celebrate the police too much and particularly its police commissioner because it would detract from Giuliani. And we were moving too fast. The Juggernaut plan we put together he killed very quickly.

TIKKUN: Could you summarize what the Juggernaut plan was?

BRATTON: Juggernaut was the idea of dramatically expanding the drug unit—the number of people engaged solely in going after drugs and drug-related crime, which

was anything involving guns, youth, and all the drug crime. We were going to pour in thousands of highly trained cops, coordinated with the district attorneys' offices. We would literally roll through the city, like securing a beachhead. And after we secured the beachhead, unlike the previous initiatives in this city, we wouldn't just let the area sink back; we would move in the occupation forces which would be the community police and the beat cops.

TIKKUN: Doing buy and bust operations?

BRATTON: It would have been buy and bust, it would

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credit going to me and my team.
He needed that credit for himself.*

have been going after gun dealers—anything related to drugs. It was literally using all the resources that the police department and the city had in order to go after all the drug-related crime. And we had enough cops that you'd go in, you'd take out the crime in the neighborhood, then you'd move in with the beat

cops. That beat cop could not have secured that neighborhood by himself—it would have been like sending one platoon of guys with rifles into Normandy instead of the full onslaught that they went in with.

Our belief was that the communities could absorb that type of frontal assault, because as we were doing that, we would have the precinct commanders doing the reach-outs, the networking, working with the community, and explaining "this is what we're doing, this is why we're doing it."

TIKKUN: As we're talking about drugs, were you going to make a distinction between different kinds of drugs? What was your policy toward marijuana, for instance?

BRATTON: We went after marijuana, sure. We had a preliminary testing initiative in Washington Square Park because that location had the symbolism of marijuana—that the police and the public did not control Washington Square Park, the marijuana dealers did. So we went after marijuana back then. Back then drugs were much more pervasive—crack, heroin. Now those 8,000 open-air drug locations are gone. And that was the strategy.

TIKKUN: If I'm walking down the street and I'm smoking a joint are you going to tell your policemen to arrest me?

BRATTON: Actually, this is where the mayor and I disagreed. Because what I'm all about is discretion. Depending on the scope of the problem in his particular neighborhood, the concerns of the neighborhood, "discretion" can be an arrest, it can be a citation, it can be a warning. Now that discretion is being taken away, the cops increasingly are frustrated.

What your efforts are all about is changing behavior. Not that you're going to stop marijuana smoking, but the idea is that a person cannot brazenly walk down the street smoking marijuana—it is against the law. The idea is that initially you do arrests, but after you get it under control—so

instead of ten people brazenly selling, you get it down to one or two—you can adjust your strategy.

TIKKUN: Are there different rules for different neighborhoods?

BRATTON: Sure. That's what community policing is all about. Everything I've been talking about goes to the idea that, at the precinct level, you have the authorization to use discretion. In certain neighborhoods the public has to understand that the police can't do everything all the time. It is a matter of how you use your resources.

Certain neighborhoods want prioritization of certain types of crime. A police officer should be expected to address anything he or she sees, but also to have discretion. What has been removed from them over the last couple of years, as I understand it, is a lot of the discretion they had because of the emphasis on arrest numbers.

TIKKUN: Do you think Giuliani is too monolithic in his approach?

BRATTON: Yes, that's an excellent term. He doesn't understand that you don't police the city in 2000 the way you did in 1994. The reason he's in so much trouble in the black neighborhoods is that the police are stopping black young men at a rate probably higher than when we were stopping them in 1994 and 1995. And back then there was a lot more misbehavior in those neighborhoods—drug dealing was going on openly, prostitution, public drinking, gaming. Our crackdown on those behaviors allowed for a renaissance up in Harlem. You constantly read articles about how Harlem is coming back, the night life is coming back. Why? Because we took control of the streets.

But Giuliani keeps pushing. It's like if, after we won the war in Germany and Japan, instead of [instituting] the Marshall plan in Europe and bringing democracy to Japan we had said, "Okay we won. You're the vanquished. Now you're all gonna walk in lockstep and we're gonna put an armed soldier on every corner and you obey every rule." We didn't do that.

TIKKUN: What about racial profiling—"stop and frisk," stopping autos—was that ever a legitimate law enforcement tool?

BRATTON: It still is a legitimate and essential law enforcement tool. Absolutely essential. The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality and essentiality of that. Now that the city has become much safer, now that America has become much safer and people are examining all these issues, they're saying, "well, let's do away with it." If you do

away with it, in five years the city will look like it did in 1970.

TIKKUN: If a black person asked you the same question, would you give them the same answer?

BRATTON: I'd give them the exact same answer. One of the things that people like about me is that when I'm talking to a black audience I'm not talking any different than when I'm talking to the white audience. One of the reasons I get along pretty well with blacks, whether it be [Al] Sharpton or [Charles] Rangel, is that they get it as it is from me. I don't usually tailor my message to the audience.

"Stop-and-frisk" is more necessary in areas of high crime. Today, with so many murders of livery cab drivers [in New York City], that's basically the tool the police are using most effectively—stop-and-frisk. It might not involve the frisk but it's the stop.

Racial profiling speaks to the idea of consciously singling out a black; if you've got three people on the street you focus on the black. But when you're in an all-black neighborhood or an all-Hispanic neighborhood, how is there racial profiling when the only people on the streets are the



*At the precinct level, the police
can't do everything all the time.
It's how you use your resources.*

minorities?

TIKKUN: The Civil Rights Commission says that 50 percent of the people stopped on Staten Island are African American although they make up only 5 percent of the population there.

BRATTON: The city has to be prepared to speak to that. In Staten Island the high crime areas are principally in the black housing projects. In the white areas there's not a great deal of crime going on, so the reasonable suspicion that allows officers to make a stop is going to be much less.

TIKKUN: Do you have any sense of the scandal involving corruption in Los Angeles? What do you do about that kind of a situation?

BRATTON: The Los Angeles situation has many parallels to what Mollin was investigating during his time. Some of the actions in Los Angeles are much more egregious. We had the "Dirty Thirty"—a precinct where corrupt individuals were not necessarily acting in concert. In L.A., you had a whole unit that was dysfunctional. And the activities of that entity were significantly more serious [than in New York] in terms of the levels of assaults and the framing of people.

In L.A., like New York for so many years, there was complacency. After the corruption scandals of the 1970s and the systems the department put into place in response to that, we felt we had the corruption mentality covered. But one of the things that the Mollin commission found out [during the

corruption investigations] was that the systems were like the Wizard of Oz; you open the curtain, there's nothing there.

L.A. has been in denial for forty years that they might have a problem internally. After being celebrated by Jack Webb through the Fifties and Sixties, they were saying, "we are it as far as the professional model." Well, we saw this professional model: they were a disaster—Daryl Gates, O.J. Simpson, the riots. And now we're finding in the year 2000 that they had been a disaster in their internal affairs system too. What you have to guard against is complacency.

TIKKUN: Is there any meaningful way to de-politicize the police department?

BRATTON: Interestingly enough, in a democracy probably not. In a democracy it is clear that the department has to be politically responsive to elected officials. Right now in New York City the water's become very muddied. This mayor, unlike any of his predecessors, has gotten involved in all aspects of the department, from the assignment of people to transfers to the way the department responds to other political leaders to promotions. You can't get promoted in this department without going through the loyalty test.

That is going back to Tammany Hall days—to abuse of political authority. The mayor abuses his powers as they relate to the N.Y.P.D. That was a source of continual frustration, friction, tension, all during my time. And it really is a direct reflection of this mayor and his law enforcement background. None of the other mayoral candidates are going to feel the need to be that intrusive in the day-to-day activity of the department, nor should they be.

TIKKUN: Do you think that law enforcement institutions get distorted by personalities, whether it's J. Edgar Hoover or Daryl Gates or Mayor Giuliani?

BRATTON: Exactly, and the FBI is a clear example; that's why the flushing that goes on in our society of mayors and police commissioners is appropriate. Sometimes you lose a very good person. Sometimes you get a very bad person. But in the aggregate, I think that by and large you can get good people moving through the system and the process.

TIKKUN: Thank you. □

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THE REVOLVING ROOM (continued from page 32)

"Oh, he'd talk about how wonderful and beautiful my mother was, and how I looked just like her!" Angie tosses her hair behind her ear and says solemnly, "He loved her very much, you know."

"And nothing else?" She shakes her head. "And you didn't ask?" I snap, amazed at my anger at her love. *She lost her mother, remember.* Suddenly I hate her bobbing earrings. Stop them, for God's sake! "Nothing else?"

She shakes her head. "All he'd say was, 'Ach, Schattzie—that was what he called me—you can't know what life was like then. Difficult times, difficult times.'" She sits up straighter. "He seemed too sad to ask—and then he died. It was my first husband, you know, who put me through college." She takes my hands in hers. Warm palms, long pink nails. Mine are bitten. "But I am glad that *we* are good friends, *liebe* Mimi" she says, leaning closer. "Who knows ..." now she has the smile I've seen light up a room of hundreds, "without Hitler, we might have met and eaten *spatzel* together in that *gasthaus*! I would have liked that, wouldn't you?"

I would, I would not, I would, would not. The voices in me collide as I reach, with both my hands, for my coffee cup. For Hitler is always there, the ovens are always there, no matter how much I'd rather we be two American colleagues having lunch. Beneath our good intentions, unsaid words linger—*It's not my fault ... I know, but ... I wasn't there ... I know, but ... Sorry ...* Words of anger, loss, and guilt that would change nothing in the past, resolve nothing now—except the possibility of friendship which needs more than we risk in this revolving room.

I will have such talks, in fact, five years later in Germany. Ten women—German and American, non-Jew and Jew—will spend four days in the Schwarzwald woods together, sharing the stories and silences of who we are. I will tell about Tante Rosa and Angie and admit that I still feel in enemy territory in Germany—until someone proves to be nice. And Germans who *are* nice will tell of a grandfather who still is a Nazi; of a father who was a train master forty miles from Auschwitz, who disappeared after the war; of a grandmother who denies that she knew anything at all. And in between these sessions, we will, over lunch, exchange our mother's German cucumber salad recipes and hike through the woods at sunset, talking about our jobs, children, men, and hopes to meet again to tell more, risk more, as we reenter the dark room of legacy with the hope of moving on.

But none of this seems possible in San Francisco when Angie invites me to the annual conference Humor Night, "Come! I'll be in it. It should be great fun!" and I nod, thinking I'd rather go to Fisherman's Wharf if the weather holds. We get up, hug, as the Golden Gate reappears, looking gray against a graying sky. She mentions next year in San Antonio and I mean to keep in touch, I really do, but so far, we keep missing each other. □

Telepathy

Judith Harris

There are various ways of trying to read somebody's mind, or predicting good or bad fortunes. Helen and I were obsessed with seeing and thinking things that weren't there and still getting them right. We studied palm reading, assiduously mapping life lines on the smooth sides of our palms, tracing tributaries of sickness, catastrophe, or crossroads of love. We would sit under a canopy of hung-over pussy willow branches, on the half-mowed and rain-drizzled back lawn, muddying the hems of our washed-out skirts, as we inspected each other's palms as if trying to pick out a splinter. The crêpe-paper trees that dotted our lawn fluttered with each desperate revelation, each inch of roped-in exclamation, in which a wish or dread was confirmed. Helen said I was to have a very long life, longer than Grandma Bertie's who'd crossed the ocean three times. The swaybacked oaks and linden trees hovered in seemingly deep concentration, as the clouds drifted on in great, slow parades of colossal ice castles and marbled lions' manes.

Helen found fate in my hands, twigs and scratches for eventual offspring, and an ominous sign of poor health. With her hands on mine, I watched the sky float over the dunce-cap peaks of trees before reaching further into space. If Helen was correct, the stars were always there whether we could see them or not, even in daylight. Sometimes I thought the skittish sparrows congregating on our roof would eventually take themselves up to those stars. Then the birds began to chortle, and acorns began to scatter like beads on the ground.

When it came to predicting the future, we needed more than luck. Because of Grandma Bertie, Helen thought we had gypsy blood. Draping a veil around her head with an elastic band, Helen twirled barefoot around our living room, pretending to be a fortune teller. She propped our mother's overturned crystal bowl on the table and ran her hands over it. She insisted that she was making contact with ghosts, rolling her r's in a bubble of saliva, which sounded like a Hungarian accent. I pretended to be a rich widow who wanted to talk to her rich husband. Helen told me all sorts of things, and I stared at her the way our mother stared at the girl who polished her nails at the beauty parlor,

Judith Harris' book of poems, Atonement, is forthcoming from LSU Press this fall. She teaches English at George Washington University.



a solicitous but curious stare. I promised to return to her tent at midnight and rescue her from the robbers and cut-throats who had kidnapped her.

Summer turned to fall, and the leaves steadily wound off the branches and fell in gold and copper heaps in the yards. We raked them, gathered them, tunneled through them. One night my father set the yard on fire, burning the stacked leaves to a fine ash. At school that week, we were already studying Pilgrims, although Thanksgiving was more than two months away. We drew turkeys by tracing the outlines of our fingers spread out flat on the page and then coloring them in with crayon strokes like feathers, and adding clawed feet. There was also talk about ancestry, and we

FICTION

were asked to draw our family trees. I consulted Helen, but she was sure we didn't have one and suggested I try to make one up.

"What kind of tree should it be?"

"Maybe maple. Put on little leaves and then try and write some names there."

"What names?"

"Any names at all. I like Marjorie for instance."

"Helen, people don't live on trees. Why are we doing this?"

"Because," Helen explained, "people take pride in their roots."

I thought of Grandma Bertie. A tiny woman, with a black streak in her iron gray hair, whittling her way through the cluttered apartment, her rayon dress somersaulting with roses—her voice was a flurry of gruff sounds and thunder-clap coughs as she squeezed between the plastic-covered cushions. I never took my eyes off of the diamonds in her ears, little starlight, silvery microphones bristling from the naked lobes of her ears.

On the day we had to bring in our family trees, Diane was ready and waiting with her poster board display. She had to have her mother drive her to school just to keep it flat, while the rest of us just rolled them up like telescopes with a rubber band. Diane's mother had ancestors dating back to the Mayflower. She would hang her American flag out from her paisley windowbox at the drop of a hat; she knew about patriotic holidays we'd never heard of. Ivory scented, Diane was the object of our collective envy: she was dainty and whooshed through the classroom aisles boxing erasers for Miss Blumenthal, a tall, gazelle-like woman with a Beatle cut of black hair that swished over her eyeglass frames, her shoulder bones visible beneath her ribbed sweaters, nylons scraping together abrasively as sandpaper.

Today the board was full of interesting information such as "how seeds travel," exhorting the life cycle of petunias and daisies; a banner of alphabetical letters in print and cursive; and a calendar of weathers, going clockwise from sunny to snow. I tried to read her mind the way Helen had taught me to read minds, by closing my eyes tight and concentrating on a pinhead of white light behind the dark of my eyes. "Concentrate," Helen would say, coaching me on how to hold in my breath and shake my hands as fast and hard as I could, so as to distract myself from any other magnetic field in the room (magnetic fields were like brain waves, Helen said) that might interfere with predictions. We wanted to know other people's solutions, their dreams. Most of all we wanted to know what they might be thinking about us.

I was beginning to break the seal of Miss Blumenthal's mind. Whenever she talked, I moved my lips in unison, which annoyed her more than the sound of the rain like so many marching fingernails against the industrial skylight of our classroom. Miss Blumenthal was asking for family trees now, and she had taken out the push pins and stars and rib-

bons for exceptional jobs. I didn't have the tree, and shrunk low in my chair. What I had was a tree with oval leaves shooting, umbrella-necked, from its spine. On each leaf I had written one name. It was my wishful family tree, adorned with fictional progenitors like King Edward, Mary Queen of Scots, Tony Curtis, and Sandra Dee. What was the harm in making a family up? A family that was heavenly with good looks and straight backs was always preferable.

"Class, look at the marvel of a tree Diane's come up with," Miss Blumenthal squeaked after clearing her hoarse throat. "It shows all of her generations from the Pilgrims, and navy officers."

Diane was beaming. Standing on a stool, she hoisted her poster up on the green felt exhibition board and stuck in two red pushpins. Miss Blumenthal adorned the corner with a gold star. My leg was twitching under my desk.

"Louise? Can you share with us your family tree?"

I was mortified; everyone would know that Tony Curtis wasn't really my father.

Miss Blumenthal sensed an opening. I could hear her thinking in my head and my lips started to move involuntarily.

"Louise, what are you doing? Are you mimicking me?"

"No, Miss Blumenthal. I just didn't follow the directions."

"Well, let's see, come around everyone, let's examine Lou's family tree."

I showed it. Diane's china face started to rouge, and the little blue veins surfaced on her smooth forehead. The girls were clumped together like a wildflower bouquet at Miss Blumenthal's hip, their eyes wide.

"Your grandfather wasn't King Edward!" Diane accused me.

"You're lying!" Ralph said flatly.

I peered at Diane, who was more flustered than I was because she was taking this personally. If I wasn't going to execute my genealogy with seriousness, then no one would take hers in the right way. Diane sneered, now backing up like a cat behind Miss Blumenthal, whose neck bent over like a sunflower's, being so overly grown for a woman.

"You're Jews, all of your family, and all of the way back," Diane said this while pointing at me.

I sat down in my seat, which suddenly felt very hard and unforgettably cold. My drawing was on newsprint, etched in shivery pencil. It was a drawing of a real tree, like the dogwoods and shaggy willows that shadowed the blacktop outside, with branches, twigs, and stems, except for little stickers with the fabricated names. I crinkled up the paper with one hand and shoved it inside my desk along with my rubber erasers, loose leaf, ear muffs, and petrified rocks.

Miss Blumenthal, like a movie usher with a flashlight, pinched at Diane's wishbone shoulders, and guided the class away. They all turned heel like so many dominos tumbling over. Left alone, I imagined I could close my mind as

a bud, to see inside the dark of my own closing. I thought of telepathy while raking my hair with my fingers, feeling the curls thick and nettled, strayed out of a tortoise-shell barrette. I wasn't reading minds anymore; minds like Diane's could be hazardous.

That night, Helen and I held our little seance under her sheet with a reading light and magic ball. The ball could answer any question as long as it was phrased as "yes or no." On the bottom of the plastic ball, steamy white letters of invisible ink would appear. We asked it if my mother would get the new vacuum cleaner she wanted from the Sears catalogue. We compared notes on how many times that day we had guessed right about something happening, like when Mrs. Steen came to our door to get her spare key because she'd locked herself out. I knew what would happen just as it did. So when the doorbell rang, I was there with the key in my palm.

"She was surprised," I said, with confidence.

"That's good; very good," Helen murmured, holding the sheets still over her head. She was a blaze of light shooting up from the light bulb, a verifiable ghost.

The next morning was Saturday. My mother stood over me, holding the orange Aspergum and a frothy cup of juice. We were driving to New York to see Grandma Bertie, who lived in one of the high-rise housing projects that cluttered up Rockaway Beach. Her graffiti-scrawled building was a stone's throw away from the freezing winds of the boardwalk where there were boarded-up factories, hot dog stands, and a few penny arcades that stayed open off season.

On the ride up, Helen was threatening car sickness, and my mother was humming, feeling guilty about refusing to let Bertie come live with us. She had cried about that, her black mascara streaming down her cheeks like two black eyes.

But there we were, driving down the turnpike, listening to Andy Williams crooning "Moon River" over the static of the radio.

"Let's make a rest stop," she suggested.

"Naah, let's try to make another exit."

"My bladder will burst, I really have to go," she insisted.

My father swerved off, unwillingly, at the very next sign. With much effort, Helen and I undid our locked positions in the backseat, and pushed our way out. In the Howard Johnson's, there were the sounds of plates clattering, and people talking, and order blanks being punched at the kitchen stove. A woman in lunch counter uniform and cap was ringing up customers at the cash register. In front of her, I eyed the rows of Life Savers and peanut brittle. Next to the register, there was a canister and a cardboard poster of a child in a wheelchair, forcing a smile. I looked away at first, as I always did; then I went back, and put in the change of nine cents I found in my jeans front pocket. I stepped out of myself to see myself doing something munificent.

"How do we know she doesn't keep it, herself, if she can't be making much money here on tips?" Helen whis-

pered, and pointed at the woman who had penciled her upper lip wider than it was.

"I don't know. I think I read her mind."

Helen followed my mother to the bathroom. My mother, who could not resist a free item, had hesitated by the fixing counter, smuggling straws, sugar, salt, and saltines from the dispensers and burying them away in her snap-up crocodile-skin pocketbook. Helen, her vigilant conscience, was fixed to her like a price tag.

"Why do you do that? Why do you hoard those things?"

My mother wouldn't face her, and talked straight ahead of herself. "What's the harm?"

Outside the ladies' room, the floor was already wet with overflow suds. Women's rubber soles tracked through it, leaving trails on the linoleum and back out the double doors to the parking lot. My mother cautiously elbowed the door "in," and we followed, holding our noses. The bathroom was a pungent shock of Lysol, and the sinks were running mystically on their own. We stood in a small line of women, some bear-hugged in jackets, some holding their children by the hand. We were all silent, waiting for a turn. My mother looked slantwise under the stalls to make sure that all had feet showing.

"I hate these bathrooms," she said nervously, as if she didn't mean to say it aloud.

"Why are we going to Grandma Bertie's anyway, Mama?" Helen asked.

"She's refusing to eat again."

Bertie had wanted to come to our house for a week in February, to bring her pots and pans, her trunks and linen, and her insults. My mother had said no again. Bertie smelled like musty drawers and mothballs. I avoided Bertie, and because she couldn't speak English, I tried to read her mind with telepathy.

"After all she's been through, to starve herself," my mother continued, almost forgetting that she was next at the head of the line.

Helen commiserated. "She's a nag, Mother, face it."

Then she nudged her forward to go find a toilet. My mother turned back to her, suddenly, like a little girl ashamed to go alone.

"Wash hands, Hel. Wash your hands, Lou." And then she vanished like smoke behind a stall with the carved-in writing: "I love Mark ... for a good time, call Sherry ..."

The bathroom was very big. I peered around. There were elaborate glassed-in vending machines where you could buy anything from breath sweetener to raincaps to earplugs to feminine napkins to tiny thimbles and sewing kits, while the toilets kept flushing in little explosions. At the mirrors, women washed hands with the industrial green mint soap, and rubbed at their tired eyes. Some combed, or powdered, or pouted, or reapplied their lipsticks. My mother took out two bobby pins, and stuck them behind her ears. She suddenly looked alert, energized again.

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"Ready, girls?" I imagined my mother as Clara Barton rallying the girl-nurses on the battleground, rolling her sleeves up, getting ready for chloroform and limb-axing.

"How much longer?" Helen whined.

"About another hour to the Jersey turnpike, and then two hours after that. We're about half way."

"Ooohf ..." Helen sneered, and drew her neck in like a turtle.

"Stop complaining, Helen. Put your mind to something useful," my mother countered.

"Like what? Reading in the car makes me carsick."

"Then think some useful things in your mind. Make lists of things you'll want one day."

Helen made a face behind my mother's back as she turned to shove her way out of the crowded bathroom, nearly knocking down an elderly woman who'd come with a bus tour just minutes behind. She began to put up her two fingers like the devil's horns behind my mother's pounced-out bouffant hairdo, but refrained. Instead, she drew me to her, and whispered in my ear: "You know, I have a premonition. Grandma Bertie's going to die."

"Maybe," I said, then suggested we consult our magic ball before leaping to any conclusions. Together, we walked out with sudden powers of our own.

For the rest of the drive, my mother refused to turn around when she talked to us so that we had to read the back of her head. Her voice, reading turnpike signs, was just as tedious. Meanwhile, Helen and I were fighting over space in the back seat, Helen having already partitioned herself with her limbs stretched out, and her portable hairdryer case and jacket pressed against the handle of the car door. When we passed by the New Jersey refineries venting gas, we all held our noses.

We arrived at Bertie's just as the sun was going down. My father opened the back trunk and Helen and I unfolded our limbs mechanically as if we were unfolding bridge chairs. It was breezy in early November, and the ocean carried a chilly arctic wind up the beach. Along the walkway, between buildings, teenagers gathered around the park benches, drinking beer from bottles concealed in brown paper bags.

Inside the elevator, which was shaped like a rattan bird cage, my father, drawing back the gate, pushed the eleventh floor. The bottom of the car bounced twice and then grinded up the metal shaft. Although we were going up, I had the sensation of drowning. A Mexican couple moved against the back wall with their arms saddled behind them.

"This place smells like vomit," Helen pronounced as the elevator then groaned to a stop at our floor.

"Why isn't there a thirteenth floor?" I asked.

"Bad luck," Helen said and stepped out into the dark, mossy hall. There were smells of fried onions and the sound of a baby screaming behind a chain-locked door. The air was stale with cigarette smoke and whiskey.

"Public housing ..." my mother complained, knowing that she had dropped down a notch in marrying my father, whose mother could do no better than this in America. But as Helen and I saw it, things balanced out in the end because my mother was no beauty, and my father, if he weren't so fat, could be said to be rather handsome in a movie-star way.

At a paint-chipped ochre door, my father stopped and rapped at the knocker. Then, very faintly, as a moth beating its wings at our patio screen, I heard the hush of Bertie's tiny footsteps, and saw her eye like an aquarium's tiger fish peering through the peephole. The door swung open and my grandmother nudged her wan face into the wide crack of the door. She said something in Hungarian, and then reached up to slide the draw chain out, as if waiting for my father to give the right password.

Bertie was thin as a wishbone, her hair twisted back in a bun. My father barged through and the three of us tottered in afterwards. When we came inside, my mother let out a little gasp: furniture was stacked everywhere like the back of a department store warehouse; tables were lopped on chairs with their legs upright as a dog rolling around to scratch itself; a chimney-striped claw-footed ottoman, sleigh bed, and blankets were piled up in a corner. Dust was so thick you could write your name in it. And then there was the hot smell of urine ammonia in the bathroom, wafting in through the hall and mixing with the rotting odor of a cancerous bone.

"Ma, what's all this stuff, where did you get it?" My father demanded. He was filled with the ambivalence of a son who wanted to care for and protect his mother and, at the same time, wanted to be rid of her.

But Bertie just muttered something, and then motioned us to sit down, which was impossible because every inch, every cranny was occupied by something: a piece of furniture, wrapping paper, hand-painted china saucers, playing cards, envelopes, postcards, serving bowls, ashtrays, a clothesline of soiled girdles and hose. My father wedged his way through an aisle of cardboard boxes but got stuck there in the middle of the room; he was a big man, but he was feeling bewildered as a boy.

"Bertie, why don't you get a girl in here to help or something?" my mother asked.

Bertie lifted her hands in the air and shook her head from side to side like a swimmer trying to get the water out of her ears.

"She's gone nuts," my father hissed at my mother, meaning more than that—meaning that my mother was at fault for not letting Bertie come live with us. Hopelessly, he kneeled to pick up some matchbooks.

"Look at this, she could set fire to the place."

"Well, it's not my fault she's decided to live this way."

"Whose fault is it then?" My father stared at her, and she looked like she was going to shriek out loud. Meanwhile,

Bertie sat down on a chair, after pushing away the ironing board that had been piled on top of it. Then she looked at me with cautious cheerfulness. I watched the diamond earrings glitter in her ears. Her earlobe skin was deeply lined and brown as a walnut's shell. I pulled on Helen's sleeve: "Look, she's really a gypsy."

"I *want* those earrings. They're diamonds," Helen said.

"Yes, I know. We should *both* inherit those earrings."

"But how can we share them, which way? We'll have to take turns the rest of our lives."

We were both staring at Bertie as if she were a salamander. We peered around, searching for more things we might be bequeathed after she died. Helen, of course, boasted that she could calculate the value of an item from a distance of twelve feet. She knew authentic things from the cheap stuff.

"I think she's got some genuine gold candlesticks."

I wanted to know what Bertie was thinking, so I tried to concentrate with my telepathy on what was going on in her mind. She just stared at my father picking up the scraps of overturned litter on the floor, while my mother rinsed out a fogged glass cup at the sink.

"They ought to find a retirement home for her, where there are actual nurses," Helen commented.

My mother heard this, and, ignoring the unimportance of our input on financial matters, said dryly, "We can't find anywhere affordable where they would take her on."

Helen waved across the room at Bertie, who was now sitting cross-legged on the chair like a Swami. She felt sorry for her, as did I.

"Let's take her for a walk on the boardwalk."

"Let's," I echoed.

Leaving my father to clean up with a mop and Lysol, my mother, Helen, and I wrapped Bertie up in one of her great fur coats, placed a cane in her hand, and guided her through the jungle of furniture to the door. Once outside the apartment, we pushed her into the chilly ocean air, each of us hooked around one of her tiny arms, like handles. It was only a few steps to the boardwalk and the breeze was salted with little drops that stung our lips and eyes. Bertie was talking to herself.

"I know," said Helen, with a brainstorm, "let's go see *The Miracle Worker*. Have we got enough money for tickets?"

"Why would Bertie want to see that, when she can't even understand English?"

Helen peered at me, baffled as to why I hadn't yet comprehended the irony. Helen Keller couldn't see or hear, either. Bertie needed a hearing aid, but it was too cumbersome for her to wear. But Bertie was willing to go; she was willing to do anything. So we lined up with the rest of the strollers, waiting to pay for our tickets through the glass wall that divided us from the poker-faced cashier. Then,



once ushered in past the crimson velvet ropes, we all sat down in the dark theater, folded our coats back like heavy husks, and waited for the movie to begin.

There were only a few people seated along the gum-stamped, popcorn-riddled balcony, and Helen was ready to pop out of her chair at the instant a grown-up with a hat or teased hair groped into the seats just in front of us. By the time Annie Sullivan spelled words in Helen Keller's hands, by the time Helen Keller splashed her face at the pump with the w-a-t-e-r she had just understood, Bertie was dead asleep, and

snorting a lady-like snore. We let her sleep, and my mother and I cried "good" tears through the last quarter of the movie. Bertie woke up in time to go, and we slowly paraded her home among the flocks of seagulls and droning fog horns coming up from the ruffles of the beach.

"Helen Keller *read* Annie Sullivan's mind. That was a kind of telepathy, right?" Helen inquired.

"Braille is like that: telling you things by the touch. People should be able to talk to each other without even opening their mouths."

"They should read *each other*, like we do." Helen declared this with some conviction. I thought that this was probably true: Helen and I would be forever bound by our telepathic powers.

Not much was resolved that weekend. We left, not knowing what to do about Bertie's palpable senility, her inability to feed herself. We raised our arms up to the rudimentary parapet, our noses pressed to the car's window making little life preservers of fog in the cold. Bertie was no bigger than a fly as she stepped on to the little balcony next to a few wilted potted bean plants. Then she waved back, her arms crossing as if she were trying to signal someone who'd gone too deep into the hurtling waves. I told Helen that I thought she was trying to tell us something in her strange Morse code. She was trying to keep us from going back to Washington. But my mother was already readied for the trip in the front seat of our car, checking the little mirror in the sun shade, like a pilot checking his monitor, reapplying her apple-skin red lipstick.

The next week at school, our reading groups began a "horse race." For each one of us, Miss Blumenthal cut out a race horse out of construction paper and tacked it up on the wall. We gained pace according to how fast we could read and beat the other horses that hopefully loped behind. In order to prove that we'd read the book, we had to give an oral report. This was taking up an unusual amount of time, and we weren't doing our usual math or science problems. The heat of competition was in the air, and we eyed each other warily.

Diane, a blue horse, was out in front. She had read all of the *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* books, and was starting on

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Nancy Drew. I was tied for second place with Jill Lerman, who had a brown horse a shade darker than mine. Jill wore glasses and plaid vests, and played with her crotch while she read. Sometimes, Miss Blumenthal would rap at her desk and tell her to take her hand out from between her legs. But Jill just glared at her, picked up her book and placed it vertically on her desk, and sneaked both hands up her crackling slip to the elastic band of her underpants. She was doing the very thing that Helen and Miss Blumenthal had said was a sin whether you were Jewish or Christian. But Jill seemed to find great pleasure in doing it, looking dreamily at the page while she kept reading the words faster than anyone else in the class.

I had my heart set on winning that contest. Looking back now, I don't know why it was of such importance to me. I can't think of anyone who would've been the least impressed if I'd won or disappointed if I'd lost. It was just something I thought I could actually win at because, among other things, I was a cheater. I'm not sure what started me cheating; maybe it was the way in which my father, the moral auditor, delivered his lectures on fair play and honesty. It was as if he were always crossing his fingers behind his back when he would move from the literal to the abstract, from the incidental to the collective wisdom. There was a margin for error, for bending the rules, as long as it didn't seem to hurt anybody.

So if I couldn't read fast enough to match the author's mind in books, I decided to make up lies about them. Before long, I was a farmyard stretch beyond Jill, and gaining strength. Miss Blumenthal did not realize I was white-lying. I had to make amends for doing so poorly on the family tree.

One evening, I went home with Jill for supper. It was Friday night, and Jill's mother, Edith Lerman, celebrated Shabbat. Jill and I were the only Jewish girls at school and found ourselves paired together often, especially during the Christmas season. Her father, a newspaper journalist at the *Star*, was never home for dinner, so Jill, her mother, and I gathered around the dining room table, lighting candles, eating challah and chicken with honey.

After dinner, Mrs. Lerman would paint our fingernails with white nail polish, and we would peer out her windows at the white moon that matched our ten fingers, and spread them out to dry. Then Jill sat down on her high riser and opened her paperback to the final chapter, gleefully twiddling one hand under her dress, forgetting about me. I gazed out to the banner of elm trees, and the palette of stars spattered just above them. Then I saw, as if in a dream, a woman, in hailstorm light, falling down stories and balconies, her dress puffed up like a parachute, her eyes like marbles skittering everywhere, and the flat earth, cut up and sewn back together like a patchwork quilt, sucking her all the way down. I heard the bones crack, and lungs burst like balloons against a white pavement. A doll's

head rolled over the bushes and landed in the grass. And then I knew.

"Mrs. Lerman?" I called up the split level's carpeted stairs.

"Yes, Lou?"

"I think I have to go home now."

"Why, dear, is something wrong?"

"Yes," I replied plainly.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too," I said.

Mrs. Lerman drove me home in her Volkswagen, while Jill, who could not be left alone, sprawled in the front passenger seat. Mrs. Lerman smoked a Kool cigarette, and exhaled out the window. The breeze was refreshing.

At my house, I jumped out of the car, forgetting to say good-bye to Jill, who had fallen into a hiccupy sleep. I thanked Mrs. Lerman and lugged my bookbag out and up from the car floor, slamming the door with my foot. I could hear Helen thinking, and knew.

The screen door slammed behind me. I saw my father huddled in his kitchen chair, his face scribbled up in pain. I'd seen him look like that the day after Helen was shot in the neck with a rock that had been sucked up in his lawn mower. My mother was wearing a "Bake Pie" apron and rubbing Brillo on the bottom of a pan. Helen was picking at a plate of cold string beans.

"I know, I know what happened," I blurted out, as if I were delivering something.

My father was surprised and paid rare attention.

"What happened?"

"Grandma Bertie killed herself, didn't she? She threw herself out of the window and kind of flew down. Her head was decapitated."

My mother wheeled around and supported herself with one rubber gloved arm against the side board. She looked at me as if she'd just seen a ghost. My father's mouth gaped open.

"How did you know?" My father's eyes were red and moist. He had survivor's guilt.

Helen looked at me, astonished, horrified, but slightly proud of my skills in telepathy. Now it was official.

"I'm not sure, I just read her mind."

"How?" My father demanded.

I just stared at him, and said, "There are walnuts in your pockets."

My father's hand slipped into his jacket pocket and fished up three walnuts Bertie had stuffed in his pocket just as we were leaving.

I thought then of the diamond earrings and how they had glittered and sputtered in Bertie's wrinkled walnut-colored earlobes. They had spoken to me as she never could and I had heard it in my thoughts, the way the dark sky hears the conversations of stars at night, a soft sound in the long path of the blind leading the blind. □

A Cold Day in Rochester

Danny Siegel

I am definitely a beach person. I don't ski, and I don't have the least shred of machismo to bundle up in sock cap, double gloves, and boots to brave the winds that slash through my coat like a knife. I would rather be by a huge pool, zoned out in some place near Nowhere so I can do the kind of thinking that doesn't include, "Pick up the dry cleaning," "Don't forget to get detergent and paper towels at the store," and "Call the car insurance people about the dent in the fender." You understand now why I dreaded going to Rochester, New York, in late January. Mitzvahs or no Mitzvahs, I wished we had scheduled for May when the snow was off the ground and flowers would begin to come out.

As it happened, despite the bone-chilling cold, I had a spectacular time. Shabbat was lovely at a local synagogue, but the highlight was Sunday at the JCC, a Mitzvah day for 150 teenagers which gave new meaning to the phrase, "Cold hands, warm heart."

I've done a number of these Mitzvah Days. Cynics may say, "Every day is Mitzvah day! Devoting one day to this kind of thing misses the point," but I don't agree. Not only are so many Mitzvahs accomplished on that day, but many more are planned for the near and distant future, and then *really happen* in the near and distant future!

Here's some of what happened during my Mitzvah Day in Rochester:

1. Twenty-seven people learned how to do CPR and were certified that day. *Pikuach Nefesh*—saving lives.

2. A dozen learned how to make chicken soup, which would be delivered to a homebound individual the next Shabbat. With their newly acquired skills, many more gallons would be cooked over the coming years. Big Mitzvah!

3. Thirty-five of our dazzling young people learned how to do Mitzvah manicures and to give hand massages. Not so far in the future, they will go to local nursing homes and work their skills on some of our Elders. *Hiddur Pnai Zaken*—the Mitzvah of making our Elders' faces glow.

Danny Siegel is the author of twenty books including *1+1=3* and *37 Other Mitzvah Principles to Live By*, and *Tell Me a Mitzvah*, *Tzedakah Stories for Children*. To learn more about making Mitzvahs happen check out www.ziv.org.



4. Ah!—my favorite: an Arthur Murray dance instructor taught about twenty-five of the young people dance steps from the Big Band era. Now the Jewish youth of Rochester will arrange to hold a Senior Ball at a nursing home. It was such an incredible sight, such enthusiasm, even by the ones (like me) with two left feet.

5. Mitzvah clowning: Jalapeña the clown dressed a half-dozen kids up, painted their faces, and taught them magic and other clown tricks. They performed for the crowd

at lunch, and set a date for going as a Mitzvah Clown Troupe to a children's hospital. Wow!

6. Adults and kinderlach brought in prom dresses to be donated to individuals who couldn't afford to buy one for their school prom.

7. A family brought in their black labrador, a dog-in-training for a blind person. (I suspect a number of the kids will become puppy raisers.)

8. What people usually consider a "ho-hum": a group of kids went to a soup kitchen and cooked and served. No, this Mitzvah isn't "sexy," or off-beat, or dazzlingly different. Yet nothing minimizes the importance of the Mitzvah of *Ha'achalat Re'ayvim*—feeding hungry people.

9. Two young women cut more than ten inches of their hair to be donated to Locks of Love (www.locksoflove.org). This project will make wigs free of charge for children who have had permanent hair loss. (To reach the program, contact Jennifer Hornsby by phone (561) 963-1677, by fax at (561) 963-9914, or by e-mail at info@locksoflove.org.)

Each of these Mitzvahs may seem small, but the impact is Big. This is not Kids' Stuff. It works for adults as well as kids. To find out how to do such an astonishing Mitzvah Day, contact Alina Gerlovín at (617) 965-7350, or by e-mail at agerlovin@jewishrochester.org. She'll help you make it happen.

I close with a quote from the late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel about youth: "I would say to young people a number of things.... I would say let them remember that there is meaning beyond absurdity. Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we can, everyone, do our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all the frustrations and all disappointments."

Inspiring words for all ages. For sure. □

Short Takes

A Look at What's in Other Monthlies and Bimonthlies

Here TIKKUN continues our conversation with American intellectual, political, and cultural monthly and bimonthly magazines.

Dissent

In the spring 2000 issue of *Dissent*, Todd Gitlin marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon by examining the various lessons that have been extracted from that national humiliation. To some, he says, Vietnam is a "cautionary ghost," which encourages American leaders to think a little harder before they send in the troops. Now, says Gitlin, "whenever an American president contemplates using military force for any purpose ... he finds himself staring at a topography of quagmires and slippery slopes." While that is not necessarily a bad thing, he points out that "useful specters can also be overly influential.... As Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor show, along with the negative example of Rwanda (which illustrates the cost of inaction), there arise strong claims for the use of international force." What we should have learned, he says, is that there is a need for an international police force, ideally one administered through the U.N. If such a force is created, "before a war fought with weapons of mass destruction ... the specter of Vietnam may perform its last useful service."

Adbusters

Adbusters, the quirky and provocative Canadian bimonthly, devotes much of its June/July issue to a minute examination of what writers Kalle Lasn and Bruce Grierson call "Malignant Sadness." Noting that the World Health Organization predicts that, by 2020,

"depression will be the world's second most debilitating disease (after heart disease)," the writers cite a disparate collection of experts, including shrinks, philosophers, pollsters, and economists, as they search for the causes of this widespread melancholy. "Is it social isolation?" they ask. Modernity? The electronic environment? Consumer capitalism? An existential crisis of meaning? Postmodernism? Like a good mystery novel, ample evidence is presented against each suspect, but alas, in the end the culprit remains at large (although postmodernism seems to be the odds-on favorite). However, they do question the likelihood of developing a healthy culture in a world where "reality has become just one of many options." The way back to happiness, they say, is to find and learn from places and cultures "where people still connect—not electronically but physically and emotionally—with one another."

Scientific American

A fact-rich section in the June 2000 *Scientific American* dispassionately analyzes and quantifies three aspects of modern-day warfare, providing a solid base for the kind of informed outrage that's essential for effective action. Jeffrey Boutwell and Michael T. Klare, codirectors of the Project on Light Weapons at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, credit the increased production and global sales of small arms with enabling many of the small conflicts around the world; Richard F. Mollica, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard, presents new evidence that the "vast majority" of survivors of mass violence suffer from "low-grade but long-lasting mental health problems" which

create an invisible impediment to post-war recovery, both personal and national; and finally, Neil G. Boothby and Christine M. Knudsen of Save the Children cite international apathy and poverty as two of the reasons for the sharp increase in the number of child soldiers. "It is no coincidence that forced recruitment of children occurs most frequently in societies where the standard of living has stagnated or suddenly declined." Their conclusion: "Eradicating absolute poverty in the first decade of the twenty-first century is a moral imperative." This excellent section belongs in every activist's clip file.

In These Times

The failure of "welfare to work" programs is examined in the June 12 issue of *In These Times*. While lamenting a "dearth of solid information" on the subject, author Neil deMause quotes a report by the Urban Institute which found that "up to half of women who've left the rolls report serious problems feeding their families." The presidential candidates have largely ignored this issue, except "for the occasional one-upsmanship ... over who cut more people from the rolls." But this is likely to change. A fast-growing grassroots movement includes activists concerned with healthcare, housing, poverty, hunger, immigrants' rights, women's rights, kids' rights, and labor unions—as well as federal and state politicians. The goal, says one welfare activist, is to "challenge the notion that if you provide welfare, you're doing bad things to people. We're trying to say that if you do it and do it well, the government could eliminate poverty." □

The Loyalty Line

David Silver

■ *Stickin': The Case for Loyalty*, by James Carville. Simon & Schuster, 2000.

You can actually hear James Carville's voice loud and clear as you read *Stickin'*. That inimitable fast drawl is, as usual, utterly certain. And this is, without a trace of puritanism, his "Book of Virtues"—a visceral manual for all those who are happily, unashamedly, motivated by traditional humanitarian liberalism.

"The Case for Loyalty" is the subtitle; the book presupposes that in this day and age an actual case has to be made for loyalty. It will come as no surprise to TV political hounds that Carville feels that Washington is the world headquarters of easy betrayal. Defending his stickin' to Bill Clinton is a major rationale behind this semi-autobiographical little tome. The fact that he was nowhere in his life (by his own admission) when the Clinton campaign rocketed him into national renown probably accounts for his fierce love of the president and for his loyalty per se. He tells us without restraint that Bill and Hillary were his first real friends in politics and they virtually saved him from a despair-filled fate in his forties. From this, his major point takes shape—don't desert your friends.

Carville's intransigent partisanship must seem vile to Republicans and conservatives, but to the Democratic faithful he was the lone answer to the successful pit bulls of the Reagan era who decimated the Left with their bit-

ing appeals to the baser instincts in the collective consciousness and their launch of massive materialism in America. The dilution of this rightist strength in the form of the pallid George Bush, Sr. laid the groundwork for a renewed fighting spirit on the part of the New Democrats of the early Nineties. Carville was their voice, Clinton was their paragon. Carville's defense of Bill starts in that most honest of places—personal friendship. But it does not end there—he feels passionately that the president has been effective for the country—that his triangulatory shifts of policy are totally forgivable in light of the general good. Lack of loyalty to concepts is forgivable in a system in which progress depends on sensible compromise.

The author admits his dislike of certain Clintonian faux pas—the unsuccessful attempt to take away legal immigrants' benefits, for instance—but he adamantly refuses to condemn his old boss for messing with Monica: "If the main thing I have to get over in my life is a friend fibbing to me about sex, then I have had a pretty easy time of it." This quick dismissal of ersatz outrage is typical of the general power of *Stickin'*—there are no two truths about things—the only truth is the one that applies to quotidian life. James is nothing if he isn't a regular guy, albeit one with preternatural debating powers. You stay loyal to a friend—stray cat sex is just not a big deal. Conversely, Newt



Gingrich's lack of shame over his own oral sex peccadilloes is reviled only because of the Newt's bright scarlet hypocrisy. Carville is excellent on right-wing neo-seventeenth-century black hat-ism. He articulates beautifully what most of us felt during the get-Clinton years—the Republicans protesteth too much, seeming more like secret masturbators than sincere mass debaters.

Carville is big on relentlessly keeping up the attack on your political enemies—he suggests not getting too chummy even with adversaries you might like; taking on such pals atrophies the professional defender of the faith and weakens the cause. What would he have to say about someone like the much-liked liberal Dennis Rivera, who recently had a tête-à-tête with rightist New York power broker Joe Bruno and came out of it genuinely feeling that Bruno is a "wonderful person"? This is where a critique of Carville becomes plausible—isn't the dogged loyalist sometimes a pain in the neck? Don't we need chinks in the

David Silver has produced, directed, and written TV shows and videos for PBS, Fox, NBC, ABC, and Polygram, among others. He is currently writing his autobiography.

armor just to retain objective truth? James doesn't think so, ("I am not an objective person—I'm not a hypocrite"). However, he does blast those who are loyal to clear-cut immoral, murderous causes, like Nazism or any extreme conservatism. He makes the salient point that loyalty to an individual is often dangerous—Nazi soldiers, for example, pled loyalty to Hitler, not the country or the government, therefore making it easier for Hitler to maintain continuous mass hypnosis and possession.

Another example: Carville is a Catholic but refuses to be loyal to Pius XII. It's not Pius's sleazy silence on the Holocaust that Mr. Carville resents—it is more the current Vatican's hints at sainthood for Pius that are the real anathema to him; it seems downright common sense to James Carville that you should be disloyal to those who are disloyal to basic moral principles. Therefore, loyalty is central to all right conduct. Loyalty to people, loyalty to bottom-line codes of rightness. He cannot abide those of the Right who use religion to divide, to hurt, or to kill—"religious zealots killing people for God clearly suffer from too much loyalty." The narrow religious right's unswerving antipathy to social welfare proves the mean spiritedness of rightist use of power. Carville's elongated thesis on loyalty is a stunningly perceptive and humane document—it maps out nothing less than the universe of a true liberal's consciousness.

The stakes are really high in this book—it is a moral compendium in the great genre of ferocious polemicists like Francis Bacon, John Ruskin, Michael Foot, Gore Vidal. Such writers may seem flippant or even impertinent on the surface, but they are in fact warriors in the cause of compassionate governance. That's not to be confused with the phrase "compassionate conservatism," which will not do for a James Carville—there is too much oxymoron and not enough oxygen in Governor Bush's attempt at softening a syllogistically hard-nosed belief system.

To Carville, conservatism by its very nature cannot abide societal forgiveness. He therefore has no problem in stickin' to his feelings about the inherent nastiness of rightism.

Now, the book is a lot of fun also—it is never dry and if it does preach it does so without bombast or self-righteousness. Mr. Carville emanates humorous confidence in his views because they are

*Carville knows that
there is a direct
correlation between
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redemption—be loyal
or be lost.*

in his very bloodstream—they are not manufactured or simulated. There is a contemporary leprechaun quality about his video persona—a refreshing change from the self-satisfied sound bite punditry of so many on camera. This is why we like him on *Crossfire* and *Larry King Live* and *Meet The Press*. His almost omnipresent, thoroughly satisfied immersion in successful liberalism is important for the cause of the concerned in America. His persistence allows us the luxury of thinking that if there are to be some big changes, let them be in the hands of those who basically care about other people. Clinton's real successes in the face of a ridiculous quantum of hostility from the Right is a source of glee to Mr. Carville and to all those who crave some restoration of the qualities of kindness and love rather than meanness and hatred.

Carville says, "to deny a friend is to deny Christ." Herein lies the most penetrating aspect of Carville's ethical intelligence—loyalty as searing reflection of true spirituality. If you allow yourself to go any way the situational wind blows, with minimum loyalty and maximum self-gain, then, well, you become a bad person. Denying

Christ is not a little thing. Carville knows that there is a direct correlation between loyalty and redemption—be loyal or be lost. This biblical gravitas adds the missing dimension to his TV taunting and terrorizing—the man has ironclad convictions and is ironically the absolute antithesis of the merrily mutable New Democrat stereotype. Of course, it is far easier for an independent player to maintain firm commitments than a president or a candidate, and Carville is the undeniable number one cheerleader for Clinton-Gore-Hillary, but no one seems to be telling him to curb his watchdog regularity all over the media.

Carville is clear throughout this book that it is easy to be loyal in good times, but the real test is when you are in the midst of difficulty. His TV presence has been even greater since Bill Clinton's multilateral troubles. He asks, "Are you going to be a Teflon friend or a Velcro friend?" It is not hard to imagine James gritting his teeth when all the impeachment talk started and deciding to not only take aim at Ken Starr but also to increase his visibility in the media in order to single-mindedly, single-handedly counter the conservative assault. If there is a right-wing conspiracy (and who could doubt that the calculated, manifest hatred of the Clintons is something akin to that), then JC was going to be a one-man army, countering it in his own breezy, bellicose way.

Thirty-odd years later, no matter how thin the connection actually is, our society still retains its recollection of the Sixties/Seventies cultural war between the hip and the square. George Will never manages to forget the satanic Sixties and went so far as to excoriate Allen Ginsberg, for instance, hours after the poet's passing. Carville is one of the very few visible public commentators (along with Ralph Nader and Jerry Brown) who maintains something resembling Sixties polemic outrage. After all, the nature of conservatism has not changed significantly since then—reduce taxes,

decrease governmental responsibility for the disenfranchised, attack the arts and the artistic, promote code words to keep up a racial divide. Unfortunately, the left has morphed into a far more gentlemanly version of itself, in general without the firepower needed to deal with the sophistries of the Wills and Bennetts, not to speak of the dangerous antique rationales of the Falwells and Robertsons. One Carville does not a radical party make, but at least he has the verbal and intellectual dexterity to squash the more disingenuous moral posturings of the Right. Abbie, Jerry, Jane, and Tom might not have been exemplars of consistency, but their fire and passion is sorely missed in these days of quietude. Meanwhile Carville remains in place, unaffected by the suck of the center. Yes, his pragmatism might envelop many strands of Democratic thought including centrism, but his manner and aggression keep up the good fight year in, year out.

Stickin' deals candidly with some of Carville's own dilemmas of loyalty. Take George Stephanopoulos: Mr. Carville leaves no doubt as to his opinion of George's early denunciations of his old boss, yet he still wants to remain loyal to him because they are friends. You cannot just dump a friend, even if that friend dumps your other friend. Again, the author is stressing the very tough skein that should hold true friends together. It would not keep him tight with a Charles Manson or a Unabomber or even a Newt, but it won't affect a bond if nothing obviously terrible took place.

This lucid delineation of where to draw the line in staying loyal is actually very touching and automatically forces you to examine your own faithfulness carefully. "We all have some treachery in us" he says and this is as much a self-indictment as a general statement. Carville knows he is not a saint, but he also knows that he has his monitoring system in place and will not easily betray others given the importance of loyalty to him. This is what makes the book significant. Carville's constancy is

a slide rule for the soul. His insistence on stickin' with those who brung you here is more than just a kind of good-old-boy, hail-fellow-well-met cliché. It is at the root of the struggle to avoid a modern malaise—the culture of convenience. Courage underlies loyalty. It is not always easy to stay true to those around you, those who have cherished you, nurtured you, loved you. And to make it even more complex, it is not always right to stay loyal to those very same people. Milosevic and Saddam must have pals—do their friends care about mass murder?

Carville spends time on the anti-Communist purges of the Fifties. The investigations were actually known as "loyalty-security programs" and therein lies the potential abuse of loyalty. The societal hysteria induced by Joe McCarthy and HUAC strikes Carville as a warped kind of "immunization" against totalitarianism. It completely turned the ethic of loyalty upside down, hurting and killing people in the process. J. Edgar Hoover—or, as Carville calls him "this panty-wearin,' phone-tappin,' file-keepin,' SOB"—set up the "Federal Loyalty Review Board" to snoop on federal employees and get them fired on the slightest suspicion of

left leaning. For Carville, this sorry period in twentieth-century American history proves the eminent dangers of allowing institutionalized pseudo-loyalty to take hold and poison a whole population.

This leads to one of the most striking points in *Stickin'*—the age-old connection between loyalty and patriotism. He points out that most, if not all, dictionary definitions of loyalty include a reference to patriotism. Clearly, Carville believes that patriotism is often at the root of immoral actions which are justified to and by the people. Vietnam is the most glaring example of our time. Very few believed that the United States had any deep justification to engage in the Vietnam war, but many served and died in its flimsy cause. Even here, where presumably everything's been said and stewed over for a generation, Carville comes up with a typically astute opinion on patriotism in war. Most soldiers who show great bravery in scary battle conditions do it so as not to let down their comrades. Maybe some have patriotic thoughts in their heads, but it is in a soldier's intensified camaraderie that we find the most

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The Time of the Dreamer

Michael Tomasky

- *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election*, by Zachary Karabell. Knopf, 2000.
- *The American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace*, by John C. Culver and John Hyde. W.W. Norton, 2000.

Every four years, it seems, people remark that the current presidential election is undoubtedly the worst yet. They always have a point, too—it's true that with the benefit of hindsight we can probably look to 1988, the year of Willie Horton, as our recent electoral low-water mark, but even if the graph has blipped up just a bit from that embarrassing nadir, it's still safe to say that the general arc is downward.

This year's model seems certain to fulfill the lowest possible expectations. George W., in the proud Bush tradition, can scarcely get a properly ordered sentence out of his mouth, a difficulty over which he is constantly "pillared" (his word) in the liberal press. The idea that this package of frosting might actually become the president of the United States is not so much ideologically threatening, as it is kind of ... silly. Yet Al Gore, as I write these words (early May), appears to have entered into another one of his crises of the soul—a good thing to experience, it must be said, although not while one is running for president: he is, on the most basic level, just not pre-

sent. He'll snap out of it at some point, but in any case, he neither inspires the remotest passion nor a raw emotional response; nothing, save abortion rights and the make-up of the Supreme Court, seems to be fundamentally at stake; and, with Bush having made the expected tactical overtures to the center (e.g., not bashing teachers' unions, occasionally mentioning the environment), less—perhaps far less—separates the two men than separated Bill Clinton and Bob Dole.

Two recent books take us back to a very different time. Interesting, for several reasons, that they should land in the world right now, granting us perspective on the degree to which the old ideological parking lot has been squeezed. The very title of Zachary Karabell's *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election* is frank and suggestive; the author, a writer and academic who has previously published a study of U.S. policy in the Third World during the Cold War, believes that 1948 gave us a campaign that was "the end of something." It was, he says, the last campaign in which voters could choose among four candidates who represented a full and varied spectrum of American political belief, and before television took con-

trol of things. "After 1948," he writes, "the political process changed to meet the demands of television. But initially, it was TV that tried to mold itself to fit politics." His descriptions of how television tried to cover politics in 1948 are vivid: three of the four major parties' conventions were held in Philadelphia because the vast majority of American televisions (fewer than one million at that point) were situated somewhere between Boston and Richmond, and reception was iffy even there; and the networks presented largely unmediated, gavel-to-gavel coverage of the sort available today only on C-SPAN. By 1952, the networks had sussed the game out and learned how to package the show, from which point politics became something that was produced expressly for television.

Karabell's chapters float back and forth among the four protagonists—Truman, of course; Republican Thomas Dewey; Strom Thurmond, then a Democrat and the carrier of the Southern states' rights banner; and, most interestingly, Henry Agard Wallace—brilliant agronomist, bellicose



Vice President Henry A. Wallace in 1947.

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populist, avowed anti-anti-Communist, and probably the most controversial figure in mid-century American politics.

In the summer of 1995, I was doing some research on the topic of the collapse of the American left, and did some looking into the Wallace campaign. This wasn't so easy to do five years ago; no book such as Karabell's existed, and there were no full-scale or serious biographies of Wallace from which to draw. I went mostly from contemporaneous newspaper and magazine accounts, the vast majority of which regarded Wallace with, at the very least, contempt. One critic, the better to drive home the point of Wallace's utopian and indeed quite dangerous

optimism about the human condition, hauled out the major planks of his platform, which were as follows: disarmament and banning the bomb; internationalization of the Suez and other global hot spots; a unified Irish homeland; indemnities for Japanese Americans who had been interned during the war; national health insurance; an expanded public works program; legislation to wipe out the poll tax; and a program, admittedly less specifically laid out than the other points, to elevate women to "first-class citizenship."

Well. It's fair to say, isn't it, that one good way to tote up the scoreboard of history is to look at a statement from the past, such as Wallace's platform, and measure the degree to which the statement still seems valid, or valuable, in our time. The exercise, in addition to its other benefits, often provides us a rueful laugh; sometimes, I like to get under the skin of Republican friends by reminding them, if the decision had been entirely in the hands of their party, there would be no labor laws, no Social Security, and no civil rights laws, since a majority of Republicans opposed all of those.

And so, we can consider Wallace's platform in this context. Not half bad, wouldn't you say? Two planks—elimination of the poll tax and payments to

Japanese Americans—finally accomplished, after fits and starts, and, in the case of the former, opposition that relied on violence; both regarded today almost universally as steps forward. The others, in process in one way or another or still awaiting their moment, all regarded—not universally, but by enough of us—as things that need doing. The Henry Wallace of

The Henry Wallace of 1948 could scarcely give a speech without ducking the rotten eggs. But time is proving to be on his side.

1948, as Karabell documents over and over, could scarcely give a speech without ducking the rotten eggs and commie-pinko invectives hurled from hostile audience members toward his person. But time, on most matters, even if most of the chattering class is slow to acknowledge it, is proving to be on his side.

As I said, in that summer of 1995, I could locate no Wallace biography that was serious and authoritative. That can't have been an accident. As long as there was a Cold War, and even for a few years thereafter, the American political discourse didn't have much room for a man who opposed the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, who wanted to negotiate with Joseph Stalin, and who, as Harry Truman's secretary of commerce, spoke out on Cold War foreign policy so regularly, and at such odds with the stated policy of the administration for which he worked, that Truman tossed Wallace over the side. Remember, also, that 1992—the year after the Soviet Union ran up the flag—saw the arrival of David McCullough's massive and cheerleading biography of Truman, which swept all sorts of prizes and elevated Truman to iconic status.

So it makes a sort of sense that we would have had to wait until the

twenty-first century to get our hands on *American Dreamer*, the newly published biography of Wallace by John C. Culver and John Hyde. Straight away, you'll notice the name of the first-mentioned co-author; Culver was a liberal Democratic senator from Wallace's home state of Iowa in the 1970s, swept out of office in Ronald Reagan's 1980 landslide. Even Culver's name, let alone

Wallace's, brings forth a sea of memories of a time not so distant chronologically but inconceivable today. Today's Iowa would not elect a man with Culver's politics, just as today's Indiana would not produce Birch Bayh (his son Evan, a senator now, is much more centrist), nor Idaho a Frank Church.

I don't know for a fact that this brilliant and evocative biography has been a lifelong passion and goal of Culver's, who now practices law in Washington (Hyde is a Washington-based journalist). But it sure reads like it. The authors trace Wallace's roots, Republican and fiercely Christian; his career in agronomy—he developed various corn hybrids, and, perhaps paradoxically given his leftist politics, became an incredibly successful and rich capitalist; his tenure as Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of agriculture, an agency he transformed into what was arguably the central wellspring of New Deal policy initiatives; his years as vice president from 1940 to 1944, before Roosevelt dumped him at the behest of party leaders mortified at the thought that FDR might die and this dangerous loon might actually become president; and his career as a journalist, which he somehow managed to maintain during most of those years (even while running for president in 1948, he kept up his column in the *New Republic*, a decision of the editors that led to more than one resignation).

The book, like the man, is fascinating throughout, and every stone is overturned. The narrative builds, as we might expect, toward the basic question of Wallace's public life, and the

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one that has prevented the mainstream from granting the man any positive consideration: his position on the Soviet Union. The authors don't deny that Wallace was naive about Stalin. The chapter about his observations on life in the U.S.S.R. is titled "The Dreamer": "He was sort of a dreamer archetype, the king of all dreamers." In the spring of 1944, with the war winding down, Vice President Wallace visited the Soviet Union. He was escorted to the port city of Magadan, a gold-mining center. Not too swiftly, he described the city in the publication *Soviet Asia Mission* as "a combination TVA and Hudson's Bay Company." If it occurred to him that certain conditions were changed in anticipated of his visit—"watchtowers were dismantled, wire fences removed, prisoners herded out of sight"—the dreamer chose not to notice. By 1952, retired to his farm in Westchester County, he acknowledged that "I was altogether too much impressed by the show put on by high Russian officials."

His epiphany came a little too late. In the heat of his 1948 campaign, he published an "open letter" to Stalin putting forth specific grounds on which the two countries could negotiate peaceful coexistence; when Stalin wrote back that he was impressed by Wallace's proposals and could envision working with Wallace... well, let's say it did not give him a bounce in the polls. He entered the race with trepidation over whether a third-party effort was a useful exercise, but was convinced that Cold War policy was compromising American principles and expected four or maybe five million votes. But by October, the establishment had anathematized him completely, and Truman, in a move difficult to imagine today, tacked to the left and pulled off his historic upset. Wallace was left with 1.15 million votes.

And yet, there are aspects of the Wallace position of which American foreign policy could have used a dose. In 1946 he wrote to Truman that a thousand years of Russian history was

the story of "resisting invasion and conquest," and that America might profit by examining its policy through other eyes:

These facts [of the U.S. military buildup] make it appear either 1) that we are preparing ourselves to win the war which we regard as inevitable or 2) that we are trying to build up a predominance of force to intimidate the rest of mankind. How would it look to us if Russia had the atomic bomb and we did not, if Russia had 10,000-mile bombers and air bases within a thousand miles of our coastlines and we did not?

I write these words a week after listening to hours of commentary on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, during which more than a few voices bemoaned the fact that the United States might have avoided that war if we had been able to see the Vietnamese situation less from our viewpoint (East-West hegemonic struggle) and more from theirs (nationalist liberation and aspiration). Not many members of the nation's elite were willing to consider that kind of point of view. Wallace was. Dreams are not always such a bad thing.

Our time, as the current presidential race is demonstrating, is not about dreams. We won the Cold War, we kick-started the global economy, and now we run the show, or at least our corporate emissaries with their factories in Indonesia and China do. Our time is about efficiency. It's myopic to dismiss these developments whole cloth and deny that the boom-time has brought America much good news: if the longest peacetime economic expansion strikes you as something that's been mainly for the rich, then remember the fact that black and Latino household incomes are at their highest levels ever. But one thing Wallace's story tells us is that prosperity, which he knew from his personal life, isn't quite enough as an end in itself. It has to be used, and how it is used defines the society. There are far worse legacies for a man to leave behind. □

THE LOYALTY LINE (cont. from page 65)

credible loyalty. Men in the horrors of battle do not want to let their fellow fighters down. The same is probably true for firefighters and cops.

Not all of this book is super serious—Carville talks about his restaurants, includes hearty recipes he feels loyalty to and also gives us his felicitously biased views of sports. It's OK to be as nuts as you like over your team. Yet even in sports, Carville finds amazing examples of loyalty—Pee Wee Reese's brave befriending of Jackie Robinson moves Carville more than most things.

James Carville, in his strong marriage to Mary Matalin, has publicly and privately demonstrated his loyalty. The two wide poles of modern American political ideology are fused in this odd relationship. He snarls at us: "I just love my wife, and if anyone can't deal with that, that's their problem." So, he admires her loyalty to him, to their children, and, yes, to the Republican party, and, more obsessively, to the Bush family. Who could forget her convoluted yet brainy televised rationalizations on behalf of the senior George's miserable performance in the 1992 election? So she has loyalty.

But what if Mary woke up one twenty-first-century morning, having dreamed vividly that the Bushes are agents of Lucifer or something, and declared to the barely awake Cajun that she was renouncing Bushism for ever and wanted to do work for the Democratic National Committee? Would James immediately be repulsed by her disloyalty? Would this weirdest of all marriages shatter? No, never—Carville would laugh, get out of bed, and welcome her to the left loyalists, dismissing her grand old party as backstabbers and not worth the cardinal virtue of loyalty in the first place. One thing we know—James Carville will never betray the underlying tenets of humane, compassion-based politics. Yes, he is a mega true believer, but he is armed with the saving graces of a major wit and a world class intelligence. □

FILM REVIEW

Israeli Secularists' Revenge

David Biale

■ *Kadosh*, directed by Amos Gitai.
Kino International, 2000.



It is no secret that Israel has been gripped for decades by a struggle between secular and religious Jews over the very nature of the Jewish state. Since David Ben-Gurion formed the first coalition that excluded the Communists but included the Orthodox Zionists, all Israeli governments have built their majorities by making concessions to religious parties. At first, these concessions involved the maintenance of a status quo which had existed since the British Mandate (for example, no bus service on Shabbat, except in Haifa). But with the rise of more militant ultra-Orthodox or *haredi* parties—and particularly Shas, the party supported by many North African Jews, among others—the *Kulturkampf* has become much sharper; the *haredim* increasingly use the state to support their growing institutions, while secular Israelis respond with increasingly extreme criticisms. Yet, although secular Israelis, who are the overwhelming majority of the population, often speak of the Orthodox control of marriage and divorce as the most oppressive feature of their lives, they have never turned that anger into the obvious solution: a coalition of secular parties to separate synagogue from state.

The reasons for this paralysis are many and complex. Certainly, the divi-

sions between secular Israelis over how to make peace with their neighbors have typically taken precedence over solving the problem of religion. But there is something deeper at work here as well. One sometimes has the sense that secular Israelis have a stake in continuing to be “the oppressed,” with the Orthodox and the ultra-Orthodox as their oppressors, despite their electoral ability to liberate themselves. It is almost as if some ambivalence about traditional Judaism lurks under the surface, as if there is some unspoken belief that requires the Orthodox to hold power over the secular. Perhaps secular Israelis share a vague sense that secular Hebrew culture cannot stand on its own, that it needs the conflict with the religious out of which it originally arose a hundred years ago. Or, perhaps it is the sense that a secular, democratic state in which religion is a purely private matter might undermine the very foundations of Zionism.

One sign of this ambivalence is that, side by side with condemnations of the ultra-Orthodox as throwbacks to the Middle Ages, secular Israel has become increasingly obsessed with the *haredi* world. Hebrew language books ranging from anthropological treatises to semi-pornographic novels that purport to “tell all” about this exotic tribe that lives

mysteriously in the midst of a modern society sell well. Amos Gitai’s *Kadosh* is the latest contribution to this genre. It is the first Israeli film in at least a decade that has been distributed in commercial theaters in the United States. It is one of the only Israeli films ever to do well in the Cannes Festival, and it racked up good sales—some 300,000 tickets—when it played in Paris. Clearly, the film appeals to the voyeuristic impulse in American audiences (this is not the first film to treat sex in the *haredi* world: several years ago, the American-made *A Price Beyond Rubies* covered similar ground). In a country where a large percentage of the Christian population calls itself fundamentalist, Jewish fundamentalism might exercise a similar fascination among the secular.

Kadosh tells the story of two sisters who live in an ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem (it is a very odd community that seems to consist of no more than a half-dozen members). The older of the two, Rivka, is married to Meir. Their marriage started with real feelings of love, some of which still exist. However, because the couple has failed to produce a child in ten years, Meir’s father, the rabbi of the community, orders him to divorce Rivka. A strangely passive character, Meir spends most of the film staring off into space, increasingly unresponsive to his wife’s attempts at intimacy. The rabbi justifies the divorce by referring to a talmudic

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injunction, but he also tells Meir, in what is the film's most transparently propagandistic moment, that it is necessary for the ultra-Orthodox to have children in order to outnumber "them" (by which, we are to clearly understand, he means the secular Israelis). Rivka is sent away while Meir is married (or so the film implies without actually saying so) to another woman. Rivka sinks into a deep depression and then, in an enigmatic final scene, possibly a fantasy, she returns to Meir, has sex with him, and dies, perhaps by committing suicide.

Meanwhile, in an interwoven plot, her younger sister, Malka, is determined to resist the pressures of the community to marry. She is in love with a lapsed haredi rock singer named Yaakov (he is not, however, completely lapsed since the lyrics of one of his songs celebrate the Torah, a touch that most American audiences will fail to understand, but which is based on an Orthodox rock subculture that exists both in Israel and America). Despite Malka's protestations, she is nevertheless married off to Yosef, a brutish, perhaps retarded character who cruises the streets of Jerusalem in a car with a loudspeaker calling on Jews to repent because "the year 2000 is approaching" and the Messiah is about to come. In the most painful and gratuitously prolonged scene of the movie, we see Yosef consummating the marriage in what can only be described as a rape. Malka rebels by visiting Yaakov in a nightclub, where they have sex; in retaliation, Yosef beats her with his belt. At the end of the movie, she flees her marriage and the haredi community, watching her sister's funeral from a distance.

Gitai's purpose seems completely, indeed simplistically, clear. We are to understand that women in the haredi world are as thoroughly oppressed as they are in Afghanistan under the Taliban. The culture he creates cinematically is grey, brutal, and joyless; all the men, with the possible exception of the ineffectual Meir, are misogynistic beasts. The painfully slow pace of the movie reinforces the sense of a lifeless

world. For his secular Israeli audience, the message is that these ascetic haredim are their remorseless enemies, determined to reproduce themselves biologically until they outnumber the secular (one thinks of Pharaoh's warning about the demographic danger posed by the ancient Israelites).

Now, it is certainly true that, from a secular point of view, there is much in Orthodox Judaism—and even more in ultra-Orthodox Judaism—that is oppressive, constricted, and misogynistic. The haredi world undoubtedly has its share of pathological sadists and it is possible that there are small sects like the one in Gitai's movie. There are as many variations between groups of haredim as there are between secular Jews. But most viewers will take this film as representing all haredim. And Gitai's one-dimensional characters and wooden dialogue make his polemic too facile, a kind of agit-prop of the Israeli Left.

If Gitai was intent on creating a credible portrait of the haredi world, even in order to criticize it, he might, at least, have done his homework. This is particularly puzzling since Gitai's coscreenwriter, Eliette Abecassis, is herself Orthodox. Yet, to the eye of this viewer, the film seems full of mistakes and missteps. For example, no ultra-Orthodox Jew thinks that the year 2000 has anything to do with Jewish messianism. In the marriage scene, the most important act—the giving of the ring and the recitation of the betrothal formula—is left out. Although this is supposed to be a haredi community dedicated to having children, we see no children, whose ubiquitous and numerous presence would be the first thing an outsider would notice in a real haredi neighborhood. The vocabulary that the characters use to describe female anatomy and sexual relations is drawn from Israeli slang or modern Hebrew rather than from the very rich, but different vocabulary of the rabbinic tradition. And, so on.

But most importantly, the Halachah that requires divorce after ten childless

years is rarely, if ever, enforced. Even though childlessness is extraordinarily painful in the haredi world (as it is for many couples in the secular world), it is not considered a reason to divorce if the marriage is otherwise intact. The midrash from rabbinic times itself undermines the law. In a story found in the Song of Songs Rabba, a childless couple divorces, but in order to indicate that they have parted amicably, they throw a divorce party. The husband tells his wife that she can take with her the most precious item in the house. She gets him drunk and has him carried to her new home. When he awakes, she tells him that he is her most precious possession. A miracle then occurs and she conceives. What the midrash seems to suggest is that love—and not procreation—conquers all.

Gitai will have none of this. He has constructed an ultra-Orthodoxy that is not believable, even on its own terms. But there is more. Many may see this film as a feminist critique of Orthodoxy, but why should feminists like a movie that portrays women as either submissive or suicidal, despite verbal gestures towards rebellion? Instead, feminism is a convenient hammer used to hit the haredim over the head. And while the director poses as a feminist, he voyeuristically strips his female characters bare. Much like the preacher who inveighs against sexual impropriety by describing in lascivious detail all the forbidden fruit, Gitai's camera only *appears* to be on the side of the two sisters. The excruciating sex between Malka and Yosef on their wedding night goes on just a bit too long to be only a critique of haredi sexuality: there is some kind of strange fascination with this scene as well as revulsion.

Moreover, Gitai has cast Mizrahi (that is, Middle Eastern and North African) actors and, in one case, an Arab actor, to play most of the men, while the women are all Ashkenazi (that is, European). This is impossible—and therefore another error—since Mizrahi haredi men never marry

(continued on page 75)

Opening the Letters

English Cadences In Israeli Poetry

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi

- *Wild Light* by Yona Wallach, tr. Linda Zisquit. The Sheep Meadow Press, 1997.
- *Unopened Letters* by Linda Zisquit. The Sheep Meadow Press, 1996.

English in Israel has always been somewhat beside the point. Not a combatant in the “language wars” where Yiddish was the sparring partner. Not a participant in the territorial wars, where Arabic continues to be the contender. Not even part of the Eurocentric culture wars where German, Russian, and French have been the heavyweight challengers. English has only a bit part to play in the drama of ingathering those “Lost Tribes” who, by their own admission, speak Kurdish, Yemenite, Amharic, and, most anciently and recently, the Bantu of the Lemba. Of course there *was* the Mandate—with its legacy of legal and judicial discourse. And it’s true that, long after the Bard disappeared from the Israeli high school matriculation exam, a proper modicum of respect endures for his literary heritage. But the more ubiquitous it is, the more English—and in particular its American stepchild—have been

regarded not as a contender for but as a pollutant of whatever enterprise you happen to subscribe to. In socialist eyes, Coca-Cola and Microsoft are the icons of capitalism, engraved on every signpost and storefront. In the ears of religious puritanism, English rings discordantly as the language of liturgical compromise. Even postzionists, post-colonialists, and expatriates guard Hebrew zealously as the bedrock of their identity when all the other idols have been smashed.

It seems, however, that while few people were paying much attention, English did become part of the poetic landscape in Israel. The poets of Yehuda Amichai’s generation incorporated into their own struggle the elitist seductions and religious echoes of the Anglo-American modernisms of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens along with the antimodernist cadences of W.H. Auden and Philip Larkin. The democratic and natural speech of

William Carlos Williams and Robert Creeley and the anxious, autobiographical shadows of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath lurk more or less unobtrusively behind a whole generation of confessional poets including Dahlia Ravikovitch and Meir Wieseltier and the younger, more experimental poets such as Zali Gurevitch, Maya Bejerano, and Leah Ayalon.

At the same time, in a kind of reciprocal gesture, a group of immigrant poets and translators have been turning English into a language of cultural production in Israel. Linda Zisquit is one of those who writes her American self into the culture while coaxing its Hebrew voices into English. During the decades that borders were being contested and jealously watched, Israel’s claustrophobia was reflected in the paucity of translations from the Hebrew, which safeguarded its literature within the precincts of an internal domestic conversation. Zisquit can be counted among those who mark the new era of open borders, a translator who is also an English poet of the place. Along with Harold Schimmel,



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BOOK REVIEW

Dennis Silk, Robert Friend, Shirley Kaufman, Gabriel Levin, and Peter Cole, she has helped to create a new acoustic space in Israel. The publication of the two books under review represent the kind of dialogue that can emerge within that space.

Zisquit's translations of the Hebrew poetry of Yona Wallach give the English reader a glimpse into the

*Acts of linguistic as
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poetry.*

extraordinary achievement of both poets and, at the same time, attest to the struggle of the English language to accommodate itself to such unyielding terrain. In addition to translating some of Wallach's most challenging poems, Zisquit has written an introduction which contextualizes both the poetry and her own encounter with it.

Yona Wallach (1944–1985) was born and died in Israel and in the Hebrew language. In a culture still obsessed with boundaries and identities, her short and stormy life was punctuated by a series of radical experiments with limits, which resulted in a term in Talbiyah for madness and a term in the hospital for LSD. The last limit, her losing battle with breast cancer, was crossed at the only possible border, the poetic encounter: "The hypnotist was here/ she spoke of the body tired from all the years/ serving and doing things for us/ and I went out from the body/ and sat on the edge of the bed/ looked at it/ and climbed up to lick it/ stroke it/ take care of it" ("Outside the Body").

In the years since Wallach's death, her poems have won a certain pride of place, constituting the female voice as an alternative poetic subject and Tel Aviv as alternative poetic site—the

venues for infinite experimentation and iconoclasm. Much has been written about her influence on the next generation of women poets. But Wallach will never stay put, either in the space of her own skin, or in the confines of her city or any school of poetry. Her argument is with every complacency—of faith, of language, of love.

Aharon Shabtai, in an appreciative essay written just before Wallach's death (and translated in this volume), says that her "major contribution was that she introduced to Hebrew literature the language of the self." But her real contribution may be that she was one of the first native Israeli poets to explore the deconstructed self: "Make me a double," she writes, "someone else in my place/ who will love and suffer/ live and sleep/ yawn and arrange/ clean and acquire/ and initiate...." ("Make me a Double"). Ventriloquizing a whole chorus of alter-egos—Cassius, Sebastian, Lola, Cecilia, Pythia, even a "Yona" who is as much Yona-tan (Jonathan) as Yona—Wallach's protean shape and claim to the exotic and mysterious resemble another female poet poised on the edge of madness and infinite self-proliferation, Else Lasker-Schüler. But her German-Jewish counterpart wandered the alleyways of Jerusalem in her last days as pilgrim and exile, God-dazed and casting about for a familiar sound among the stony surfaces of a language she did not know. Wallach, by contrast, remains so fully embedded in her native language that she can turn its strictures into opportunities for the most daring poetic acts, as in "Tefillin."

In her incorporation of religious articles as sado-masochistic instruments, Wallach not only touches the daemonic but insinuates herself noisily and brazenly into a conversation that goes back to the third or fourth century, when irony entered the Jewish imagination and God became domesticated as an object on the human stage. The rhetorical question posed in the Mekhilta, "Who is like unto thee

Tefillin

Come to me
don't let me do anything
you do it for me
do everything for me
what I even start doing
you do instead of me
I'll put on tefillin
I'll pray
you put on the tefillin for me too
bind them on my hands
play them on me
move them with delight on my
body
rub them hard against me
stimulate me everywhere
make me swoon with sensation
move them over my clitoris
tie my waist with them
so I'll come quickly
play them in me
tie my hands and feet
do things to me
against my will
turn me over on my belly
and put the tefillin in my mouth
bridle reins
ride me I'm a mare
pull my head back
till I scream with pain
and you're pleased
then I'll move them onto your
body
with unconcealed intention
oh how cruel my face will be
I'll move them slowly over your
body
slowly slowly slowly
around your neck I'll move them
I'll wind them several times
around your neck, on one side
and on the other I'll tie them to
something solid
especially heavy maybe twisting
I'll pull and I'll pull
till your soul leaves you
till I choke you
completely with the tefillin
that stretch the length of the
stage
and into the stunned crowd.

among the mighty [*elim*], O Lord, Who is like unto thee among the speechless [*ilmim*]?" is an irreverent pun that fills the space substituting human speech for divine revelation after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Some seventeen centuries later, after the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, a post-Enlightenment God is given just enough speech by the Hebrew poet H.N. Bialik to place Him on an equal footing with the poor mortals created in His image; surveying the ruins of Jewish life, the Jewish God moans, like some simpering shop owner, "I have gone bankrupt [*yaraditi mi-nikbasat*]." And yet He is summoned back for a brief curtain call a few decades later in the post-Holocaust Yiddish poetry of Jacob Glatshiteyn, as the poet's "wander-brother" and object of infinite compassion: "I love my sad God,/ my wander-brother./ I like to sit with him on a stone/ And silence to him all my words" (trans. by Benjamin Harshav, *American Yiddish Poetry*). Even more recently, in the midst of the contemporary Wars of Israel, the God of Israel is chastised by Yehuda Amichai for keeping compassion to Himself: "God full of mercy,/ If God were not so full of mercy/ There would be mercy in the world and not just in Him." God remains the address in all the permutations of Jewish imagination.

Yona Wallach's address is also direct, but she does not engage in a *din torah* with the Author of the universe or with the theodicy that has framed the collective story; hers is for the most part a very private, mystical engagement with God and the apparatus of human-divine (or female-divine) encounter. Still, the private is often enacted in the most public places. When it becomes clear at the end of the poem that "Tefillin" is a performance meant to be staged, meant to convey the shock of the new in the presence of an audience, the sacrament passes from ritual to theatre; as in a grotesque Purim masquerade, it is invoked as its own inverse,

both desecrating and domesticating the sacred, introducing it into the most intimate spaces and validating it by violating it.

Zisquit writes that Wallach is an "aggressive, transgressive sacred prostitute"; the reference here is to the ancient *kadesha*, who engages with holiness through her sexuality. Put another way, even when the public dimension of her poetry makes sexuality a form of exhibitionism, God remains a metamorphic referent or norm for all acts of encounter and penetration: "Never will I hear the sweet voice of God/ Never again will his sweet voice pass under my window/ Big drops will fall in the wide open spaces a sign/ God doesn't come anymore through my window/ How again will I see his sweet body..." ("Never Will I Hear the Sweet Voice of God"). If Wallach's manipulation of the language of holiness resonates most loudly as a postmodern Hebrew equivalent of the "metaphysical" holy wit of John Donne, it is the quiet courage of Emily Dickinson that echoes persistently beneath its surfaces—the solitary, peremptory female longing for communion that animates every mote of the natural universe.

Such manipulation has consequences. The mystic Hebrew poet Zelda, as brazen in her own way as Wallach was in hers, could not go beyond the trappings of desecration to countenance the power unleashed by those straps. After the publication of "Tefillin" in 1983, she renounced their friendship and declared that she would never again share the pages of any publication with Wallach.

But it is not only the fortress of religious faith and sexual decorum that is breached by a pair of recalcitrant phylacteries. Acts of linguistic as well as sexual and religious transgression are yoked in Wallach's poetry. In the long poem "Hebrew," the speaker engages explicitly in crossdressing, both sexual and grammatical. As the stable language of male prowess, Hebrew has long since replaced God in the secular

imagination. The masculinity of the Hebrew language in its Zionist manifestations has become a subject to be adored, disdained, or accepted with mild exasperation, depending on the mood and political orientation of each speaker. For Wallach, it is the opportunity to engage in poetic acts which are daring in both their sexual and their linguistic reach:

בשמות מין יש לאנגלית כל האפשרויות
כל אני – בפעל
הוא כל אפשרות במין
וכל את היא אתה
וכל אני הוא בלי מין
ואין הכדל בין את ואתה
וכל הדברים הם זה – לא איש לא אשה
לא צריך לחשב לפני שמתיחסים למין...

English has all the possibilities for gender every I—in effect
is every possibility of sex
and every you (feminine) is you (masculine)
and every I is sexless
and there's no difference between you (feminine) and you (masculine)
and all things are it-not a man not a woman
you don't have to think before referring to sex
Hebrew is a sex maniac
She discriminates against or in favor
doesn't begrudge grants privileges with an account longer than the Exile in the plural the he's have priority with great subtlety and secrecy in the singular opportunities are equal who says all hope is lost
Hebrew is a sex maniac
she wants to know who's speaking almost a vision almost an image what's forbidden in the whole Torah at least to see the sex
Hebrew peeks through the keyhole like me at your mother and you when you were both bathing then in the shack ...

—from "Hebrew"

The presence of English as referent in this poem makes the translator's task transparent, if not easier. Zisquit has chosen to designate the gender of the second person singular pronouns "at" and "ata" with the use of parentheses:

"every you (feminine) is you (masculine)." Another translation of these lines by Lisa Katz (*The Defiant Muse*) reads "*she is he* when it's *you*! I doesn't have a sex/ there's no difference between she-you and he-you"—which this reader, anyway, finds utterly confusing. Shimon Sandbank (in *Aderet le-binyamin*), reflecting on his translations into Hebrew of Shakespeare's ambiguous "thou" and Paul Celan's "du," invokes Roman Jakobson's definition of intrinsic linguistic markers—that "languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey." Hebrew *must* deliver the gender of its subjects and objects. (In translating Shakespeare's sonnets, Sandbank had to resolve the ambiguous gender of the beloved and to render explicit for the Hebrew reader what had remained ambiguous for four centuries of sonnet readers.)

The only way Wallach can ambiguate gender within the boundaries of her own language is by doing violence to its syntax. Her poem, "Suddenly I Become" ("Pitom ani na'aset"), which starts out in the first person female voice, slips into the masculine mode through appeal to "adam," universal, neutered Man—and continues more or less to the end in the masculine voice. In English translation, the price of that segue can be registered in the semantic but not in the linguistic space:

פתאם אני נעשית אדם פחדן
למה לא קבלתי מחמאות על גבורתי
ולמה לא הפכתי אמיץ יותר ...

Suddenly I become a cowardly person
Why didn't I get praise for my courage
And why didn't I become a braver man
And where's the standard that was mine
And someone else and why exactly me.

Suddenly I'm a cowardly person
As to what I wrote, my name disappeared.
Someone else wrote this a brave
Strong beautiful person
And I meanwhile am a small she-nut,
floating on my ground, pink and round
What is left of me may it be blessed
Forgive the error, not intentional, so what.
—"Suddenly I Become"

"Suddenly I become a cowardly person ..." is a statement we take on faith, not on the tongue. The defiant sex-change operation that occurs in Wallach's poem is stated but cannot be enacted in Zisquit's English translation—or, put another way, the translator's unavoidable neutering of all parties makes the transition from cowardice(f.) to bravery(m.) and the loss

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of identity that that entails far less radical. This is especially so in the case of Wallach's grammatical treachery over what Zisquit renders as the "she-nut": in the Hebrew, Wallach allows the male gender of "egoz" or "walnut" to be momentarily violated to permit the reentrance of the female voice with the feminine form of the verb "tzafa," floating. This act is rendered in the translation by the addition of a gender pointer, "she-nut floating." The "error" to be forgiven may be grammatical, but it thrusts modernist, bounded, gendered Hebrew into the indeterminacy of the postmodern. The translations, inevitably, perhaps, seem to provide a gentle refuge from that very struggle, and to keep English in some space still alien from the vortex of Hebrew culture.

In some ways no two poets could be more different than Yona Wallach and Linda Zisquit. While Wallach delivers herself from the shackles of sex mania through transgressive linguistic and erotic acts, Zisquit avails herself of the ambiguities in the unmarked gender of English second-person pronouns. Her poetry is at

once more explicitly confessional, more securely placed within the boundaries of a fixed self, and less explicitly gendered:

And all the while
you were standing there
leaning against the frame,
your bones a line
straight up?
In fact, undoing
the damage,
canceling out
my minus?
You mean, I could have
stopped in mid air
and not fallen?

—"Vertical"

Aharon Shabtai writes of Wallach that "basic aspects of life are familiar to her only in a cerebral manner: she creates words, but not life, in the sense that life is created when one knows how to make use of love—something Yona doesn't know." Zisquit knows. Her poetry is infinitely generative, viscerally connected with life's "basic aspects," teeming with life and with love: with the fullness of motherhood and the fullness of passion and the ritually-determined, and inevitably violated, consciousness of sin and of the waters of absolution. Wallach's poems, like a mystical emanation, spin out of an object, an encounter, a word:

I know too that my wonderful china
cup broke
and I didn't pick up the pieces
If I'd gone mad I'd have built
thousands of tiny velvet carriages
and in each one
I would have put a sliver of that
porcelain....

—from "Sebastian"

Wallach's madness is a sliver of porcelain inside every one of thousands of tiny velvet carriages, the endlessly proliferating sparks that emanate from the broken center of the universe. Just short of madness, the poem is always perched on the edge of that vertiginous encounter. But in Wallach's lexicon its inverse, sanity, is *not* the reconstruction of whole artifacts out of the shards of life. It is for

Zisquit: "That summer the heat wave/ went on swelling, I tried to contract myself/ before I fixed the world."

"Fixing the world" is the task that Zisquit sets herself as archaeologist of the present: fixing the absence of the beloved between the lines of a poem, like fixing the sleepy head of a child beneath the cool sheets, like registering the sounds of grass growing straight are acts of faith where the domestic has been sacralized. The struggle appears to be between desire and decorum, "to let go all we claim to own,/ to free want's other wing in the open air" in a profusion of heat and fever—subject to the haunting, confining, and compelling memory of mother's "need/ for close living, definition, sacrifice." The parental and social voice resonating from across the ocean brings the admonition and comfort of the simple strictures of childhood.

But there is another authorizing voice here, a Hebrew voice contained in the midrashic epigraphs and subtexts that punctuate Zisquit's poems; they are not pellets of digested wisdom or edicts of behavior but a model for fixing the world whose governing principle is storytelling and exegesis. They provide in the first place the license to tell stories and imagine the lives of biblical forebears as characters on the same stage with us—the literary imagination's great compensation for the loss of revelation, of the kind of mystic encounter claimed by Wallach's poetry.

Zisquit's poem "Posit" is authorized by two talmudic epigraphs locating the center of gravity of the world's beauty and the world's suffering in Jerusalem ("Ten measures of beauty/ suffering came down into the world; nine were taken by Jerusalem, one by the rest of the world"). The poem itself begins: "Had Rachel not looked up/ Jacob would not have seen her./ There would have been no water,/ no winding dream,/ no tribe or unrelenting/ portion of sadness/ dispersed on his land, his Jerusalem,/ and I would not have promised/ to gather them

home ..." Life's encounters are not so much informed as *explained* by other texts; here it is midrash that acts as exhortation not for some static moral order but for commenting on and comprehending life as it is "remembered" and life as it is lived. The mythic and religious imagination, the Hebrew language and Jerusalem as the center of past and present drama are brought together in the English cadences of this poem.

The title of the entire volume is taken from a talmudic adage: "An unopened letter is like an uninterpreted dream." The letters that are never read both contain and explain the soul's secret. Like the unseen letter in S.Y. Agnon's "Tehila," the story—or the poem—is the interpreted dream, the surrogate for an impossible communication. Another midrashic poem, "Ethics of the Fathers," is the flagship for an endlessly interpreted, interrogated life. Fire, passion, and dread are offered not by a *kadesh* at the entrance to the temple but by a stumbling soul to the certain knowledge of an infinitely compassionate response:

Eat a third, drink a third,
and leave a third for anger.
And after waking rise slowly.
And after lovemaking
rise slowly. And after too much
wine rise slowly. And after
bloodletting rise slowly.
We rise slowly after silence,
taking a breath at a time.
After days bent over the garden,
slight comment about our clothes,
the dust, the daylight.
Shaking off sand and dread,
our bodies rise and learn to speak
again.

—"Ethics of the Fathers"

What happens when the translator opens up the (Hebrew) letters for the English reader? What happens when the American poet uses Hebrew to open her own soul? These two volumes provide an eloquent reflection on the question of languages and literatures in a dialogue that rose slowly, after silence, taking a breath at a time. □

ISRAELI SECULARISTS (from page 70)

Ashkenazi women (the reverse is occasionally true). Given the gender division of the movie, there is something deeply troubling about Ashkenazi women representing the oppressed heroines and Mizrahi men (the Shas party?) their evil oppressors. This coding is subtle and will be missed by American audiences, but those who know the code can see how the film maps the Orthodox-secular conflict onto the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi ethnic conflict. If this analysis is correct, then the film is throwing fuel on not just one, but on two cultural fires raging out of control in contemporary Israel.

In the final analysis, it is the extremism of this film that is most disturbing. Persuaded that the haredi world is monolithically fanatical, Gitai seems to believe that only the most extreme portrait of that world will serve to condemn it. But the film only makes the case that *both* the haredim and the secular Israeli Left need to learn the virtues of moderation and subtlety. The way out of the present polarization lies, on the secular side, in a greater understanding of what makes ultra-Orthodoxy an attractive alternative in a world of global capitalism—indeed, not just understanding, but also actively engaging with the very textual tradition that the Orthodox have claimed as their monopoly. As the midrash quoted above suggests, the tradition itself may contain countervailing voices to patriarchal oppression. The Orthodox, for their part, might also find a counter-intuitive path to rapprochement by advocating separation of synagogue and state. As the Orthodox philosopher Yeshayhu Leibowitz argued, only when weaned from the state will Orthodox Judaism compete creatively in the free market of ideas. It is therefore doubly unfortunate that *Kadosh*, the only portrait that many American film-goers may see of the complex world of the haredim, rather than pointing a way out of Israel's *Kulturkampf*, is itself a symptom of the disease. □

Jewish Music

Ya'acov Gabriel

I admit that I watched the Grammys this year; aside from Jennifer Lopez' nearly non-existent dress, what struck me most was the split between music that was creating wreckage and music that was healing. I'm not referring to volume, or sensuality, or stuff for kids that I am too hormonally removed from to grasp. I'm talking about all the music that kvetches, batters, and whines as opposed to the music that strengthens, expands, and liberates. In the former category I put Kid Rock, screaming that people should know who he is, and TLC, demanding that the men who come their way not be "scrubs" but real hunks and studs. In the second category, healing music, I put Carlos Santana, playing with brilliant *duende* (soul fire), and Sting, singing about dreaming of a God who lives in the desert to a sensationally mystical Moroccan rhythm track. The contrast of intentions and consciousness was startling, and apparently America is out there buying both trips.

In Jewish music, we also have a split, but it is more between what rings true and what feels stilted and canned. There are a lot of CDs that come my way that fit into the second category, CDs that have the best of intentions but don't really get off. Perhaps it's because of low budgets and discomfort in the studio or because the artists are trying to be "commercial," or perhaps it's just because people are aping traditional styles in a klutzy way. In any case, there's a lot of ersatz stuff floating around, so it is a great joy when some-

thing perfectly in the pocket appears.

Fortuna is a Brazilian singer who composes and renews Ladino, Sephardic, and Hebrew music in a very special way. On her four CDs, *Mazel*, *Mediterraneo*, *La Prima Vez*, and *Cantigas* [Harmony Ridge Music, (800) 611-4698; harmusic@rahul.net], her singing is childlike and affecting. She has the Brazilian stylistic trick of the effortless, artless, nothing-to-hide vocal. Her understated passion is bolstered by the high drama of the Spanish melodies, and by her instrumentation of all kinds of drums and stringed instruments. Her music is at once Middle Eastern and South American, a flush-cheeked, hip-swinging combo that is exotic, erotic, and God-hungry all at the same time. Some of her melodies shift from major to minor and back, alternating joy with yearning the way Hasidic music often does. She apparently has gathered many of the melodies from elderly Sephardic Jews in New York, Paris, and São Paulo, and performs them in rich traditional costumes. I hope she gets to North America soon, so I can see her in action, but in the meantime her CDs will keep me happily entertained.

Hanna Tiferet is another woman who knows that child-like singing can be a blessing. One of the most prolific and well-loved songwriters in Jewish Renewal for the past two decades, she writes songs and rounds that are very easy to learn and use. Also, her flute



playing adds a sweet countervoice to her deceptively simple melodies and delicately nuanced arrangements. Working with producer Fran Avni, her last two recordings, *Olamama* and *A Voice Calls* [(617) 363-9415; HannaT@world.std.com], show her desire to stretch beyond her solo folk roots into more elaborate productions. There is an air of mystery to her songs, both in subject matter and in delivery, but it is a sweet mystery, not a malevolent one. She seeks the mystic voice that calls in the wilderness, to strengthen both herself and the community of souls around her. A student of Reb Shlomo Carlebach and Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, she has been a Havurah founder, a spiritual counselor, and a prayer leader around the world. I don't know if either recording fully captures the essence and gentle charisma of her live performances, but they do open the door to music worth hearing and learning.

Buckminster Fuller once said that each completed act of creativity, whether well promoted or simply tossed into an attic trunk, is one more victory against the forces of entropy. Hanna Tiferet and Fortuna, as well as Santana and Sting, are doing their part to keep the healthy juices of the world from running down. As Neil Young might put it, long may they run. □

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Rabbi Ya'acov Gabriel leads the Jewish Renewal Congregation Har Shalom in Fort Collins, Colorado. His seventh recording, Living Tree, was reviewed in TIKKUN November/December 1999.

Mind the Gap

Paul L. Wachtel

■ *The Bridge over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*, by William Julius Wilson. University of California Press, 1999.

The ethnic and racial identifications that largely define our nation's politics, often treated as if they reflected stubborn facts of nature, are in fact the highly contingent product of the human psyche. What we call race does not reflect any carving of nature at its joints; the taxonomy that divides humanity into separate "races" resembles more closely the intellectual equivalent of an ax murder.

But notwithstanding the arbitrariness and subjectivity of our definitions of race or ethnicity, these emotionally loaded categories have a powerful hold on almost all sectors of our population. A central concern of William Julius Wilson's latest book, *The Bridge over the Racial Divide*, is the way these divisions and group identities hamper efforts to address our stubbornly persistent inequalities. The words "identity politics" do not appear in the pages of *The Bridge over the Racial Divide*, but—as much as conservative insensitivity to our society's continuing inequities—identity politics is the specter that haunts Wilson's pursuit of a more just society. In Wilson's analysis, the interests of African Americans, as well as those of the vast majority of working men and women in our



society, require a "national multiracial coalition with a broad-based agenda." Toward this end, he adds, it is essential that "the obstacles to multiracial coalition building be removed."

Those obstacles lie in part in the historical seduction of the white working class to shore up its own fragile status by disparaging people of color. As Kenneth Clark, the distinguished African American psychologist, put it, "Being white in America made [immigrants and lower class whites] feel equal to all other whites, as long as the black man was down below." But the obstacles lie as well within the communities of our nation's racial minorities. Attitudes that serve, in the short run, to maintain self-esteem in the face of adversity and marginalization have in ironic fashion ultimately contributed to perpetuating the very isolation and deprivation from which they arose.

Wilson is surely aware of the powerful psychological dynamics that fuel this double-sided pattern—both how minorities' need to defend their self-esteem against constant assaults can shape perceptions and behavior in

peremptory and sometimes restrictive ways and how whites use the behaviors thus generated as a justification for their own role in perpetuating inequality. But throughout his work, his primary aim has been to place those patterns within the larger context of our changing economy. In the present era, he argues, our inequalities no longer derive predominately from racial discrimination per se but from the contemporary economy's demands for greater skill levels from its workers. For many African Americans, hampered by the multiple and concatenating effects of previous discrimination and exclusion, this change in the demands and expectations of employers has meant *continuing* exclusion; the stepping stone which less skilled jobs provided to many other groups in our society over the years was removed just when African Americans were poised to ascend.

Wilson has at times been misunderstood as denying the continuing impact of racism or the special burdens borne by African Americans in our society. (An official resolution passed by the Association of Black Sociologists, for example, expressed "outrage" at the purported misrepresentations in his book, *The Declining Significance of*

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Race.) In fact, however, what Wilson offers is not a denial but a more subtle and ultimately more useful analysis of what those burdens are and what maintains them. Far from ignoring the continuing reality of racial prejudice, Wilson's research has documented the stereotype-laden attitudes among employers that frequently lead them to prefer hiring recent immigrants rather than African Americans. But, as Wilson has also noted, restricted opportunities can lead to attitudes and behaviors regarding work that can lead to further restricted opportunities. Indeed, as I have discussed in my own book, *Race in the Mind of America*, ironic vicious circles pervade the entire realm of race relations. Behaviors and attitudes in the black community that are very largely a response to white disdain and indifference further strengthen those very tendencies in the white community, reinforcing the inclination among whites to distance themselves from African Americans and to minimize both the injustices African Americans endure and the privileges that whiteness brings in our society.

In considering how we might intervene in this complex tangle, Wilson offers two related strategies. Most fundamentally, he advocates throughout the book the necessity of forging multiracial coalitions based on common interests. Those common interests derive, to a significant degree, from the impact of globalization on diverse sectors of the population, an impact far more complex and less unreservedly sunny than advocates such as Thomas Friedman would have us think.

Wilson recognizes that such coalitions will not be easy to achieve. To be effective, they must address the key concerns of each group in the coalition without the pursuit of those concerns alienating members of the other

groups. Hence the second of Wilson's strategies. Appreciating both the crucial importance of affirmative action to African Americans and the degree to which affirmative action has become a powerful source of divisiveness, Wilson advocates a policy of "affirmative opportunity" to replace—or be the latest incarnation of—affirmative action.

In evaluating how effective his strategy of reframing affirmative action is likely to be, it is important to recognize that much of the heat in the debate over affirmative action derives from confusion over what kind of unfairness accounts for the differential economic circumstances of blacks and whites.

*Growing up in a
neighborhood plagued by
poverty, violence, and drugs
makes it very difficult to
obtain economic success.*

Although discrimination (especially in covert and subtle forms) has by no means disappeared from American life, there are many settings—university admissions and faculty hiring are good examples—where blacks now do have equal opportunity when their credentials and experience are equal to those of white applicants. Indeed, given the same qualifications, they may well even have an edge. This is the part of the picture most readily seen by whites and most often minimized or denied by affirmative action activists.

On the other hand, there is very considerable inequality of opportunity when one considers how hard it is for African Americans to encounter, over the course of growing up, the *circumstances* that will enable them to develop equivalent skills and qualifications. Growing up in a neighborhood plagued by poverty, violence, and drugs, attending schools that are underfunded and poorly functioning, or having to cope with constantly

being perceived through a filter of distressing and disparaging stereotypes makes developing those skills and qualifications extremely difficult.

Which aspect of this present reality you emphasize determines, to a large extent, your attitude toward affirmative action. From the first vantage point, affirmative action seems no longer necessary and even unfair, an instance of "reverse discrimination." From the second, affirmative action is a way of dealing with the stubborn persistence of widespread and systemic unfairness.

Affirmative action has become such a contentious and emotionally loaded issue in large measure because advocates (pro or con) often leave out or brush aside the half of the picture that does not fit their narrowly conceived understanding. Proponents of affirmative action frequently fail to acknowledge that qualified blacks are sought after. Opponents frequently ignore the continuing circumstances that make a mockery of the idea of a level playing field.

Wilson's suggestion that we replace affirmative action with "affirmative opportunity" is designed to address continuing inequalities while transcending some of the features that have made affirmative action such a lightning rod. In emphasizing early education programs, job training, and college scholarships that reward academic achievement, Wilson aims to ground affirmative action efforts in programs consistent with the dominant American belief in rewarding effort, persistence, and developed talent. But when he calls for "flexible, merit-based criteria" he seems to me to introduce potentially mischievous ambiguity.

Wilson is correct that someone from an inner-city background who shows "perseverance, motivation, interpersonal skills, reliability, and leadership qualities" may achieve greater success than a white suburban youth with higher SAT scores but without those admirable traits. But this kind of example perpetuates the fiction that

has placed affirmative action on such a fragile foundation. Were affirmative action—under any name—really a policy simply of finding highly qualified people whose abilities are misrepresented or underestimated by scores such as the SAT, it would be a much less controversial policy than it is. Meaningful affirmative efforts to bring African Americans into the mainstream will in fact—indeed must—include some African American applicants who are less qualified than some of their white competitors at that point in time. And the foundations for such efforts—both morally and politically—must emphasize the larger systemic conditions in American society that, as part of the (still not fully addressed) fallout of massive historic wrongs, have given African Americans as a group much less opportunity to develop their real potential. It is the very fact that so many African Americans do not enter the competition with equal qualifications that requires affirmative efforts to conquer the lingering consequences of injustice. Breaking the cycle that perpetuates this circumstance generation after generation is a moral necessity and an economic benefit for our entire society.

To be sure, one may legitimately question our very notions of “merit” or “qualifications,” as TIKKUN has persistently and probingly done over the years. In a society that so early induces values of materialism, competition, and self-interest, it is far from clear that “the best and the brightest,” by our conventional standards, are those who are most likely to contribute to a just society or to the well-being of its members. Paralleling in certain ways arguments by African American critics about the purportedly Eurocentric biases of our selection criteria, this perspective suggests that the problem lies not in the lesser qualifications of African Americans competing for jobs or university admission but in our very notions of what those qualifications should be.

I am in sympathy with TIKKUN’s critique of our narrow materialistic vision of the good life and the ideas of merit it tends to spawn. Questioning fundamentally the basis on which opportunities and rewards are allocated in our society—including the enormous inequality we accept even apart from racial and ethnic differences—is a crucial task in an era in which the market and its tender mercies are revered in almost theological fashion. But affirmative action is not such a critique. It is a strategy—pursued within the current system and tinkering at its edges—to reduce some of the most glaring signs of inequity.

Progressives have played into the hands of the Right by making affirmative action the centerpiece of the progressive agenda on race.

Those inequities are still massive enough that some version of affirmative action remains essential. But precisely how we approach and conceptualize affirmative action is crucial. I have argued in *Race in the Mind of America* that progressives have played into the hands of the Right by making affirmative action the centerpiece of the progressive agenda on race. Much more fundamental changes are in fact necessary to ensure that all African Americans grow up in circumstances that truly enable them to fulfill their potential. Those larger changes will be expensive, and conservatives would rather not spend the money. It is in their interest (at least from the vantage point of short term political gain) to let enough African Americans “slip through” via affirmative action to release the steam in the pressure cooker, while at the same time reaping the public relations benefits of officially opposing that policy and complaining about “reverse discrimination.” Conservatives also have a stake in

not acknowledging how deeply harmful our nation’s inequalities have been. When progressives essentially argue that people who have had to face neglect, marginalization, and stereotyping have come through the experience with the same level of skills and qualifications as those who have not had to endure such privations, when they argue that only bias makes us think that the experiences and opportunities so readily available to privileged white youth have any bearing on the actual skills relevant to the tasks they will face at college or at work, they unwittingly aid those who seek to obscure the terrible human costs of injustice. We indeed need to rethink our notions of fairness, merit, and what it means to be a productive member of society. But fudging the realities of affirmative action and of the differences in readiness to compete in our economy that that policy is designed to address is not the way to do it.

William Julius Wilson’s great genius over the years has been in maintaining a staunchly progressive agenda without fudging the realities. His fusion of realism and idealism is a model to which I hope a new generation of scholar-activists will aspire. I do have questions about some of the specifics of his proposals. His strategy of “affirmative opportunity” will need further refinement as it encounters the very realities he has done so much to probe and explicate. His larger goal of developing an effective multiracial and multiethnic coalition for progressive change will require even more conceptual and political analysis. But he is pointing us in the right direction, and he backs up his recommendations with a commanding grasp of both the daily and the statistical realities of American life. The divide is still wide, and the urgency is great. It is time to start working on the foundations of the bridge he calls upon us to build. □



What Children Teach

Michael Nagler

■ *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope*, by Jonathan Kozol. New York: Crown Publishers, 2000.

Readers of *TIKKUN* may need no introduction to Jonathan Kozol or the kind of books he writes—or rather, *has* written—for this one is different. Importantly different. *Ordinary Resurrections* still gives devastating statistics about the disadvantaged children of the South Bronx to whose fate he dedicated *Amazing Grace* and much of his life: “Rikers Island ... with nearly 20,000 inmates, 92 percent of them black or hispanic, is believed to be the most racially consistent penal colony in the Western world”; the segregation rate in the Mott Haven schools is also 99.8 percent, and few of the children have a male relative left in their home; nearly a quarter of the children come to school with asthma pumps, thanks to the waste dumps and incinerators which litter their neighborhoods (and which the better off will not have in their own backyards). But we read all this from a different vantage point. As Kozol states, “I hope ... that this book is neither bitter nor despairing, because despair and bitterness are not the words that ordinarily come to mind when you spend time with the children here.”

But there's another reason he has done well to lighten up: pain and bitterness don't change anything. At least, not for the better. “Morbid and reiterated incantations of despair” are not the way to “heal the world.” The children are. Our love for them is. In

the end, this is a very mature, and redemptive, book.

Kozol makes us feel the pity of segregation, but not wallow in it: “This is their life, and they must live it. Most of them do so with considerable courage and without self-pity.” Such a response dignifies and humanizes these children. It's exactly the way out of despair—for them. For us, the way is to take action. And to do this, we have to feel that action is possible, that redemptions happen. When another child does something nice for a difficult ten-year old, a look of satisfaction sweeps across his face, “and it immediately makes one ashamed to recognize how little it has cost in time or in attentiveness to make this moment possible.” Reading this account reminded me of a recent reconciliation project in the Balkans where, the organizers found, it took Croat and Serb students less than an hour to find out that they have a lot in common, in contrast to what they have been told by their government, the media, and often their parents since 1991.

To act effectively we do not necessarily have to renounce our advantages if we have them; we have to renounce the sense of separateness that advantages can create between us and the less fortunate. In one of the wisest political insights of the book, Kozol quotes a local activist who brought him up short when Kozol tried to disguise his Harvard education and talk like one of the Mott Haven residents: “That doesn't equalize the game. We know your education. Use it for our children.”

Religion is very real for the children

of Mott Haven, and in that connection Kozol makes an observation I usually find too “politically correct” for comfort: a priest once told him, “children minister to grown-ups quite as much as grown-ups minister to children.” Kozol watches the children at their “high-church” rituals from the distance of his adulthood and his Judaism, but his intense love for the children brooks no distance, and he himself seems to be affected by the “deep religious faith that keeps a child in a positive and optimistic frame of mind.”

As René Girard has pointed out, the moment you listen to the *victim*—for Girard, the first time this happens in history is the Book of Job—the justification for scapegoating goes up in a puff of smoke. Jonathan Kozol's earlier books were written not from the viewpoint of the victimizer, to be sure, but often from that of an enraged bystander. But in *Ordinary Resurrections* he listens intensely to the youngest victims of our structural violence and injustice. In an image that can stand for the way this book itself takes us into these children's lives, he speaks of the way one of them confides in him, “a whispered message through the heated tunnel of the child's hands placed right beside my ear.” This book is a galvanizing message of an agonizing love, communicated through the heat of Kozol's mature passion.

The passionate is the political. But it has to be mature. Gandhi once said, “I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.” Kozol has learned that lesson, and this book teaches it beautifully. □

Michael Nagler is chair of the Peace and Conflict Studies program at the University of California, Berkeley. His latest book, *Is There No Other Way: The Search For a Nonviolent Future*, will be published in September by Berkeley Hills Books.



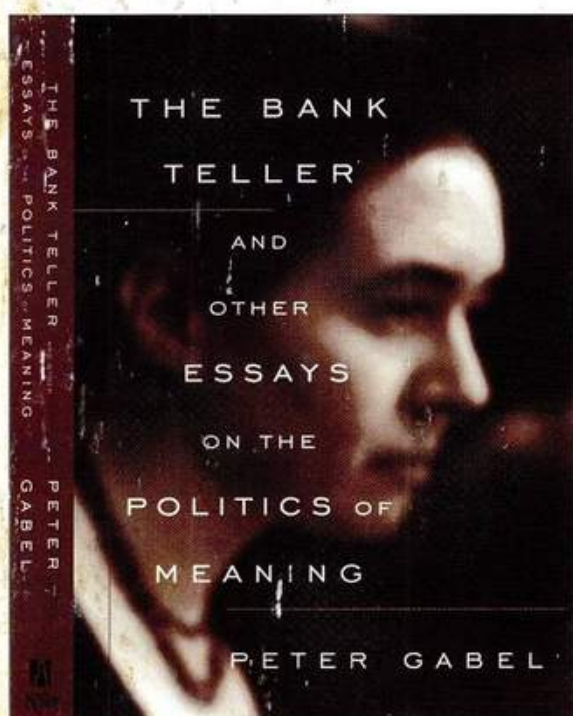
*Tikkun (te-kün) ... to heal, repair and
transform the world.
All the rest is commentary*

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THE BANK TELLER

AND OTHER ESSAYS ON THE POLITICS OF MEANING

By Peter Gabel



THE BANK TELLER explores the desire within each of us to overcome our isolation and to see and be seen by the other in a relation of authentic connectedness. Peter Gabel asserts that this desire for "mutual recognition" is the very foundation of our social being, and is as fundamental in the spiritual realm as the need for food and shelter is in the material realm. He shows how the fear of humiliation blocks our capacity to become fully present to each other and leads us to collectively reproduce an alienated and artificial society that isolates us from one another and from the capacity to fully experience the natural world. In a series of strikingly original essays, Gabel shows how "the opening up of desire" requires a fundamental challenge to our existing social institutions and a new political strategy that invents new forms of work, friendship, and community.

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