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TIKKUN

LIEBERMAN—HALF A CHEER
AN EDITORIAL

DEATH PENALTY
STEVE EARLE

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2000

\$5.95

Are you going to throw your vote away for someone you don't believe in?

SAYING **No** TO **LESSER EVILISM**

Barney Frank • Michael Lerner
Arthur Waskow • Evelyn F. Murphy
Robert Roth • Jamin B. Raskin
David C. Korten • Arlene Goldbard
Medea Benjamin • Rebecca Kaplan

Plus an interview with
Jesse Ventura



RAP MUSIC

Josh Ozersky vs. Danny Goldberg

KIRK DOUGLAS

talks with Peter Gabel

MOM

Laurie Stone

HIGH HOLIDAY SUPPLEMENT

A WORKBOOK ON REPENTANCE

Sarah Polster on Yom Kippur • Mordechai Gafni on Shofar of Tears
Jill Jacobs on Sukkot & Homelessness

ISRAEL: Barak's Three Transgressions—Uri Avnery; a conversation with Israeli Minister of Justice Yossi Beilin; and David Biale on an anti-postzionist backlash



Lost Psalm

God was the clear pane at the heart
of a stained glass burning bush
filling the temple's western wall.

God was water when I walked
the beach during the eye
of a hurricane. God was water
swelling as the storm moved
across land and then was
the storm in full force.

God was a dune risen
to meet the surge and God
was a dune shrunk
to welcome winter wind.

God was on the tongue
of the first girl I kissed,
then God was on my tongue.

God spoke with flickering
light in a flood of sighs,
spoke without breath,
warm, spoke in tongues.

God was high in the stands
when I was knocked free
of time and space for one
full week making a tackle
in the open field. I shook
on the ground as if charged
by His light. All next spring
and early summer, God sped
through cycles of color
just beyond the edge of sight.

Doctors named it an aftereffect
of trauma but I understood it
was the afterglow of grace
and for months God could be
glimpsed in the creases of dream,
heard just beyond the bell buoy
at land's end, felt in spindrift
when the moon was full.

Finally God was in eastern
Pennsylvania, looming in books
and seminars. But somewhere
on the Susquehanna near Safe Harbor,
crewing a Flying Dutchman,
stretched out to my fullest
over the rushing river
in an effort to keep us all afloat,
I lost Him in a sudden luff of wind.

—Floyd Skloot

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Front Cover:

Untitled by **Michael Hafftka**.

Ink & watercolor on hand-made paper.

Courtesy of www.hafftka.com

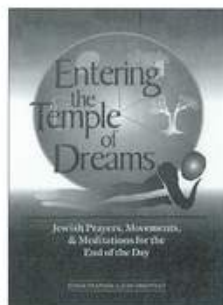


Sikkum: TIKKUN RECOMMENDS ...

Entering the Temple of Dreams

Tamar Frankiel & Judy Greenfeld
Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000

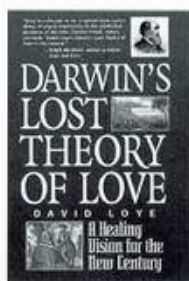
As we abandon conscious control of our lives in order to sleep, we enter a different state of consciousness, one in which we cannot perceive, organize, or plan. Judaism has been a religion of the night, and Frankiel and Greenfeld's book brings us deep into the Jewish evening prayers, creatively expanding them through meditation and visualization to deepen our spiritual experience as we prepare for sleep. This book should be a guide for every spiritual household and a powerful introduction to one aspect of Jewish thought.



Darwin's Lost Theory of Love

David Loye
iUniverse.com, Inc., 2000

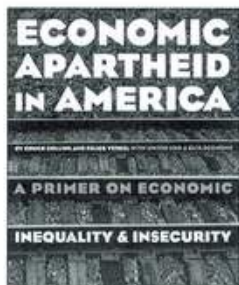
David Loye has rediscovered a part of Darwin's writings that have been almost totally unknown for the past hundred years. Unlike the social Darwinists, Darwin saw human beings as having an instinctive desire to take pleasure in the society of their fellows and feel sympathy for them. Evolution in this view leads to higher and higher levels of loving behavior and an inner drive for fuller realization. A truly important book for anyone who has ever feared that biology doomed us to being aggressive, hurtful, or destructive beings.



Economic Apartheid in America

Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel
New Press, 2000

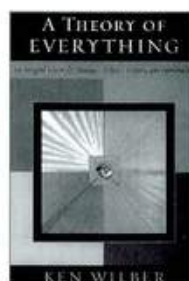
For the past six years, Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel have been building a movement they call United for a Fair Economy. Their central thesis is that the growing economic divide between rich and poor in the United States is the core issue around which to shape a progressive strategy. This creative and extremely useful workbook consistently tells us where to find the people who are doing the best work, the issues they are dealing with, and the directions for future organizing.



A Theory of Everything

Ken Wilber
Shambhala, 2000

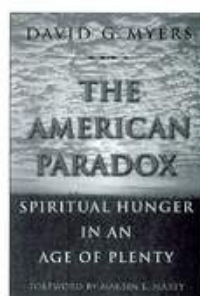
Ken Wilber is the only contemporary thinker I know whose smarts and range make it possible for him to write what he calls "an integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality" and do so with sophistication and grace. Wilber presents us with a map of reality that includes multiples levels of existence and multiple states of consciousness along with considerations of gender, culture, language, and more. Wilber is creating an "Integral Institute" which promises to do for us what the universities have failed to do: to locate each part of the puzzle in relationship to each other part and hence to give us a fully integrated and comprehensive view of the intellectual landscape. Wilber's work is truly gorgeous, and this little volume, though not the best of Wilber (try *Integral Psychology* and *A History of Everything*), is a fine place to get a taste of what he is about.



The American Paradox Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty

David G. Myers
Yale University Press, 2000

David Myers tells a story of the destructive impact of the radical individualism that shapes American culture today. In a comprehensive and very readable overview of society, he arrives at the very Tikkunish conclusion that there is a huge hunger for meaning and spiritual purpose—and, like Tikkun, he notes that if these hungers are not filled in a progressive and humanistic way, they may be filled in a more reactionary way. Myers' book is an important antidote to becoming one-dimensionally involved in the sort of economic reforms supported by Collins and Yeskel—but read together these two books give us an important take on contemporary America.



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Letters to the Editor

Shareholder Rights

To the Editor:

Marjorie Kelly's "The Divine Right of Capital" (July/August 2000) does a fine job of exposing many myths trumpeted by today's corporations. But she perpetuates one: that shareholders "extract wealth" from large corporations. Actually, corporations distribute almost nothing to shareholders, as today's puny (or non-existent) dividend rates demonstrate. Corporations accumulate wealth for themselves. If shareholders "extract wealth" from owning stock they get it from other "investors" who buy their stock, sometimes in bank financed buyouts. Kelly's reticence is understandable. If shareholders realized how close to a Ponzi scheme the stock market really is, they might precipitate the crisis Kelly prophesies.

GEORGE B. DRIESEN
Chevy Chase, MD

Civil Rights

To the Editor:

After being inspired by Michael Lerner's "Emancipatory Spirituality" (May/June 2000), I was dismayed by two other articles that appeared in the same issue dealing with African Americans. The first, a sympathetic book review by Jim Blight of Paul Wachtel's *Race in the Mind of America*, seemed to endorse a "balanced" view of racism that holds both the oppressors (whites) and the oppressed (blacks) responsible for the origins, maintenance, and elimination of the oppression.

Make no mistake, individual blacks certainly need to work on the internalized effects of having been oppressed. However, racism is a "one way" system of domination by a privileged group, whites. We have the responsibility to give up those privileges, and abolish the system of domination.



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The last thing we need is another ostensibly "reasonable," "thoughtful" allocation of any, much less 50 percent of the blame on victims.

The second article was yet another "nuanced," analytical, detached attack on a black man, this time a review of a movie and book about Ruben "Hurricane" Carter by Mark Jacobson. As in the Blight article, the racism is subtle. Why, for example, in a deeply white racist society does any author, much less a liberal periodical like *TIKKUN*, choose to spend time and space describing how this important symbol of blacks overcoming racism is not as good a man as the movie implies?

In fairness, I have not read or seen any of the original works that the authors reviewed or mentioned. However, if *TIKKUN* aims to play a positive role in establishing links between the progressive Jewish community and the historical movement to eliminate racism against African Americans you would do well to assess the fundamental bias of the author (unavoidable, but choosable) and pay less attention to the "intellectual" patina of the piece. It does in fact come down to the old movement song, "Which side are you on?"—and yes, there are sides.

JIM D. DRISCOLL
Tempe, AZ

Slater's Anti-Zionism

To the Editor:

As a long time activist who has worked to promote the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, I was extremely disappointed and offended by the appearance of Jerome Slater's article, "Can Zionism be Reconciled with Justice for the Palestinians?" (July/August 2000). Slater's fallacious onslaught against the Jewish people's collective historical memory will not sway devoted *TIKKUN* readers. However, a person with a strong Jewish identity, who is new to *TIKKUN* and perhaps on the fence about supporting the peace process, may be so repelled by the negative impact of the article that he will not even bother to read the rebuttal which followed it. For the life of me, I cannot fathom one good reason for including such a piece. The fact that Lerner's rebuttal was both eloquent and persuasive is besides the point.

CARMELA INGWER
Forest Hills, NY

TAKING REFUGE

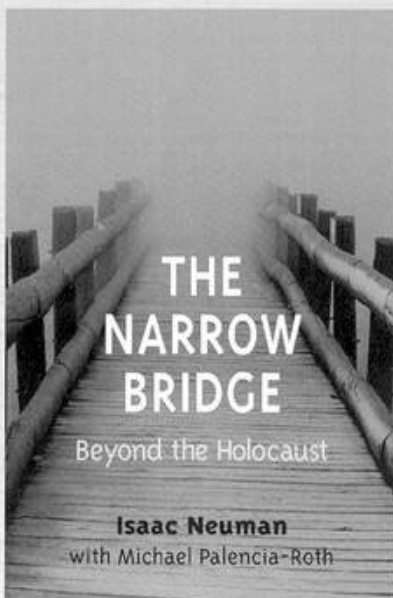
These true stories combine personal interviews with contemporary and vintage photographs to pair the stories of a handful of rescuers with those of people they saved.

"Can be measured alongside the great documentary projects of Lewis Hine, Walker Evans and James Agee, and Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor." — Andy Grundberg, author of *Crisis of the Real*

To Save a Life

Stories of Holocaust Rescue

ELLEN LAND-WEBER



During Rabbi Neuman's spiritual journey from Nazi work camps to America he kept his feet on the "narrow bridge" of life by holding firm to his faith.

"An extraordinary book. Rarely do we read so movingly of the intimate moments of deep faith in God that sustained so many pious Jews during the terrible years of the Shoah." — Susannah Heschel, Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies, Dartmouth College

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Welcome

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

Dear Reader,

As you read these words in September, we will be approaching Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, a time for personal spiritual transformation. As I write these words in August, I feel that we are on the brink of a new political year—not because of the impending presidential election, but because of the tremendous energy and activity progressives have poured into the events surrounding the party conventions. It's a new day.

That's why I am writing, and why I have named this new, sometime column, "Day by Day." As the managing editor at TIKKUN, I know that a magazine does not just appear in your homes or on the stands, but is the work of many hands, each doing his or her own part day by day. The same is true for spiritual and political transformation: even if one big event seems to change our lives, it's the little things we do every day that prepare the way for that event to happen.

I'd like to use this column to connect you to TIKKUN, day by day. I'll tell you what we are doing for *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, and suggest ways for you to join us in that work.

This summer, staff and interns went to the conventions—some of us to participate in the street demonstrations, some to participate in the "shadow conventions" organized by Arianna Huffington. Some of us remain convinced that the best way to advance social change at this moment is to stop the election of George W. Bush, even at the cost of having to work for Al Gore (some of us think highly of Gore). Others of our staff believe that the best way to advance social healing is to build a third party, even if that involves temporarily suffering through a Bush presidency.

That conversation is reflected in the cover story in this issue of TIKKUN, "Saying No to Lesser Evilism." Editor Rabbi Michael Lerner has written a powerful argument for voting your conscience rather than voting your fear. Read it, read the responses and arguments against Michael's position, and start the conversation in your own community. In fact, we are urging you to create a public event in your community, or at least a gathering at your home, at which these issues can be discussed.

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser is the managing editor of TIKKUN.

*We must work
together to repair
the world, little by
little, day by day.*

Some of our long-time readers will remember the TIKKUN salons we started all across the country several years ago. Now is the time to revitalize those salons. The first such salon could be a discussion of lesser evilism, using this issue

of the magazine. Then you might propose to people who enjoy the first discussion to come the next month to discuss another TIKKUN article, or one of the books just out by our editors—either Michael's *Spirit Matters* or Peter Gabel's *The Bank Teller and Other Essays on the Politics of Meaning*. These salons are more than a chance to hear a range of opinions you won't find in the mass media; they are also an opportunity to build what

David Fetcho, a contributor to this issue, calls a prophetic community. Here are his words, describing a recent salon we held in the Bay Area:

Sometimes all it takes to create a real prophetic community is a catalyst to mobilize this network into unity and action. A recent gathering at Michael Lerner's house is a case in point. Michael extended an invitation to the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California (a consortium of mostly Christian seminaries) to attend a TIKKUN salon featuring a discussion with Jim Wallis, founding editor of *Sojourners Magazine* and author of the newly released book, *Faith Works*. Jews and Christians alike found at that meeting a higher ground of unity than ever could have been achieved were it simply a discussion on "Jewish/Christian relations." Our mutual prophetic calling formed us into a community poised for engagement.

That kind of engagement can also happen within a spiritual community. That's why we provide those of you who are Jewish with a High Holiday workbook, so that you can use these days of awe to focus your faith and work on personal transformation. See also the articles in this issue by Mordechai Gafni, Sarah Polster, and Jill Jacobs.

TIKKUN appeals to a wide readership with a diverse array of interests: in this issue you will find everything from an essay on the death penalty to a review of a murder mystery, from an interview with Kirk Douglas to one with Jesse Ventura, from an analysis of rap to a review on jazz. What ties all these articles together is our commitment to a TIKKUN community, to our insistence that we must work together to repair the world, through a politics of meaning and a faith based in social justice, little by little, day by day. Please join us. □

Editorials

Bush's Phony Compassion

Once you debase language, you are on your way to destroying the credibility of the public sphere. If people feel that everything they hear in public discourse is just pure nonsense, they will conclude that there's no point in voting or becoming involved.

So there is plenty of reason to object to George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism." There is little that is compassionate in the Bush/Cheney agenda. George W. has been a champion of the death penalty (as governor of Texas he has imprisoned and executed more African-Americans than any predecessor), scuttled a bill to provide health insurance for poor children, and been generally hostile to legislation aimed at reducing racial profiling, restraining police brutality, or taking guns off the street—guns that kill a disproportionate number of young blacks and Latinos. He has shared his party's hostility to gays and lesbians and has shown a remarkable lack of caring about the situation faced by women who want an abortion to deal with pregnancies generated by rape or incest. What's compassionate about this?

A warm tone and a show of inclusion don't add up to compassion.

Vice President Lieberman?

We rejoice in the goodness of the American people whose capacity to overcome centuries of anti-Semitism made it possible for Al Gore to select U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman as a running mate without feeling that he was sacrificing his electoral chances.

I congratulate Al Gore for having the courage to make this selection, and pray that we will live to see the day when this same generosity is extended to African Americans and gays and lesbians.

Yet, as you may already know if you saw me on the Lehrer News Hour, CNN, CBS, and other news shows, I must temper this enthusiasm for a Jewish vice president with the recognition that Joseph Lieberman was the most politically conservative of the candidates Al Gore considered for the vice presidency. When Bush supporters claim



that Lieberman's voting record shows a man closer to Bush than to Gore and lament the political capital Gore may thereby accumulate with conservative voters, you know that the rest of the country has something to worry about.

Through the legislation he has offered, Lieberman has accelerated the process by which the two major parties are merging into one pro-business, elitist, and morally tone-deaf governing force. In fact, Joseph Lieberman joined with Bill Clinton and Al Gore to create the Democratic Leadership Council precisely to transform the Democratic Party from its previous New Deal roots as the champion of working people, minorities, and the poor to a party that would cater to the needs of Wall Street and to the upper middle class. And they've done a great job. With Democrats on board, the gap between rich and poor has accelerated in the Clinton/Gore years, environmental protections have eroded when they conflicted with corporate interests, and defense spending (despite the end of the Cold War) has been treated as sacrosanct—instead, savings have been found by eliminating or reducing funding for the poor.

It's regrettable that the first time a Jew is selected for high office, that Jew is a person who has been the major Democratic Party advocate for the Star Wars defense system, the one Democrat who is associated with the values agenda of Bill Bennett, and one of the very few Senate Democrats who opposed raising the minimum wage and putting into place other protections for working people.

Given this kind of record, I have been particularly resistant to two claims made by the media about Lieberman:

1. He is the embodiment of the kind of moral leadership we need in America after the tawdry years of Bill Clinton. Though I salute Lieberman's critique of Clinton's sleazy sexual affair, I don't think that this earns him the title of moral leader. When I debated the Rev. Jerry Falwell on CNN on this issue in August, I pointed out that it has been the success of the religious right, coupled with the complicity of the media, to reduce our conception of morality to sexual

behavior. Yet the Bible and the Jewish tradition have a much clearer definition of morality, one that focuses on the following question: how much has your society pursued justice and peace, alleviated the suffering of the homeless and the hungry, and relieved the oppression of the powerless? It is these questions which should be central in judging the morality of those who hold public office, and it is hard to see Joseph Lieberman's past record as a leader on these issues.

2. He is a non-assimilated Jew. I'm delighted that Lieberman is a practicing Orthodox Jew, and I believe that his practice of Shabbat will have a very positive influence on many Jews who have abandoned this incredibly powerful and inspiring spiritual practice. But in my book, *Jewish Renewal*, I describe in great detail the ways that one can be the most observant Orthodox Jew and nevertheless be, in effect, a Hellenist in drag—by buying into the worship of money and power that is the bottom line of American society, and by believing that one must be “realistic” by accommodating to (rather than struggling against) the values of the American corporate empire. When Lieberman chooses to use hundreds of billions of our tax dollars to line the pockets of America's military-industrial complex rather than to fight poverty, he has made a choice that reflects the assimilated values of the rest of the American Jewish establishment which has increasingly opted to cuddle up to the powerful rather than to ally with the powerless. This is a version of assimilation far more consequential than whether or not one eats kosher (though I recommend that too, particularly in its vegetarian manifestation).

Similarly, Lieberman's blind support for Israel and his refusal to critique (or even acknowledge) Israeli torture and human rights violations puts him at odds with the prophetic tradition. The moral blinders about Israel that have been put on by many American Jews and that have become a matter of faith in many Orthodox synagogues have little to do with the Torah injunction to “love the stranger.” Unfortunately, Lieberman has sometimes exemplified this kind of knee-jerk support for every Israeli government—though perhaps not as intensely as Al Gore who, under the influence of his top advisor Martin Peretz (editor of *The New Republic*, and one of the most consistently anti-Palestinian voices in American politics), has been a consistently shrill voice for the right-wing agenda in the Jewish world when it comes to Israel.

Yet the particular way that Lieberman's candidacy has captured the imagination of many Americans also has the potential to change some of what I've described above. Lieberman is now portraying himself as an embodiment of the spiritual and religious values that this country so badly needs. Assuming national office has changed many people in the past, and that may already be happening to Joseph

Lieberman. I believe he is a man of principle. If he has followed other Orthodox hawks in putting too much value in military power, we need to challenge him to live up to biblical calls for social justice and compassion. If Lieberman has been too willing to accede to Israeli insensitivity to Palestinians, we may be able to talk to him about the meaning of Torah's insistence that everyone on this planet is equally created in the image of God.

In fact, the excitement around the Lieberman candidacy is a manifestation of how much spirit matters. Despite the cynicism of mainstream culture—powerfully reinforced in the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton years—most people want to live in a society where principles are more important than the wild pursuit of self-interest. They rightly point to Joseph Lieberman's critique of Clinton, his support for gun control, and his support for campaign finance reform as signs that a more idealistic spirit might

prevail in our society. I want to affirm those aspirations and to suggest that should Lieberman be elected the hopes themselves can form the basis on which we can urge Lieberman to transcend some of the limitations of his past. Just as the hopeful energy articulated by J.F.K. eventually led him to push for politics far more visionary and progressive than he had ever consciously intended when he was a senator, so the aspirations and expectations generated by a man people are responding to as an authentic religious figure could elevate the reality of Joseph Lieberman's political life and make him open to rehearing the most revolutionary love-, justice-, and peace-seeking affirmations of the Torah tradition.

Some Jews have been so excited about Lieberman's Jewishness that they've abandoned all their other moral and political values—as though the struggle for peace and social justice are not fundamental to our Jewish identity. It's time for us to feel secure enough in America that we can welcome this nomination, celebrate the goodness of the American people, and still worry about the way that it may contribute to the erosion of a social justice agenda for American society.

Why Barak Blew It

We are still hopeful that a second Israeli-Palestinian summit will produce an agreement that Barak can take to the Israeli population and that will win popular support.

But the reason Barak blew the Camp David II negotiations in July is the same reason he may have a very hard time selling any agreement to the Israeli public: the Labor party and the supposedly pro-peace Meretz party have both failed in the past ten years to even attempt to build the spiritual and political foundation for real reconciliation with the

Why do some Jews allow social justice issues to take second place to Lieberman's Jewishness?

Palestinian people. Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery's account of Barak's limited vision can be read on page eight.

Here is what a peace movement must do if it is ever to be in a position to actually win the Israeli majority for peace.

- Put forward a visionary picture of what Israel could be. Instead of the Peres picture of Israel as "the Taiwan of the Middle East" (with the attendant fear this raises that as Israel becomes more fully integrated into the globalized capitalist world of dot.com technology the divisions between the Sephardic/Mizrachi poor and the Ashkenazi scientific/technical elite will deepen, leaving many Israelis behind), those for peace need to adopt the language of the Jewish tradition to envision an Israel which is "a light unto the nations," becoming the moral and spiritual vanguard of the world.
- Develop and argue for Isaiah's vision of the Old City and the Temple Mount: "My House (the Temple) shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." God was not saying to Isaiah that all peoples would become Jewish—they would keep their distinctive identities, but Jews would turn their nationalistic symbol of the Temple Mount into a place that would welcome the wide diversity of approaches to holiness. It is in that spirit that Jerusalem becomes the place from which Torah goes forth to the world!
- Teach the Israeli public about the Palestinian refugees, how they became refugees (the work of Benny Morris is a good place to start), and the consequences for Palestinians living in exile. Explain why Palestinians are entitled to compensation and an apology for what happened to them (without buying into the crude forms of postzionism that make it seem as if the fault was entirely Israel's and that forget the huge culpability of Arab leadership). Explain why significant numbers of Palestinians should be allowed to return to Israel, and why the rest need to be given adequate economic support to make the Palestinian state viable—not only as a matter of self-interest for Israel, but as a matter of Jewish moral responsibility.
- Reject and critique the dominant view in Israel that a government that includes Israeli Arabs would be "illegitimate" and hence not an appropriate source to make peace. Insist, in the name of Jewish values, that the highest crime against Judaism is the "demeaning of the other" and that the highest good in Judaism is to care for the stranger in our midst. Remember that we were strangers in the land of Egypt.

So it's not enough to come up with some diplomatic compromise with Arafat. Barak will not be able to sell his agreement to the Israeli public until he moves beyond the sterile language of "rights" and begins to connect with the spiritual values that are foundational to Jewish consciousness. This is one more instance where being visionary and breaking the normal bounds of political discourse is actually the most realistic and practical approach. □

Meet the Editor

Rabbi Michael Lerner will be travelling the country this fall to introduce the ideas in his new book, *Spirit Matters*. Come meet him! If he's not already coming to some place near you, see if you can set up a visit in your community—paid speaking engagements at synagogues and universities help lower the annual TIKKUN deficit (call 415-575-1200 if you know an institution willing to sponsor him). Here's his current schedule:

SEPTEMBER

10	Ottawa, Canada	International Writers' Festival
14	Berkeley, CA	Cody's Bookstore
19	San Francisco, CA	Commonwealth Club
20	Walnut Creek, CA	Barnes & Noble
26	La Jolla, CA	Chopra Center
Sep. 30–Oct. 8		High Holidays with Beyt Tikkun San Francisco, CA (For details call 415-575-1432 or visit www.beyttikkun.org)

OCTOBER

3	Santa Cruz, CA	Book Shop
4	Pomona, CA	Cal Poly Tech
18	Detroit, MI	Church of Today (810) 758-3050
19	Chicago, IL	Crossroads Center (312) 831-9356
24	Springfield, OH	Wittenberg University
25	Boulder, CO	Boulder Books
26	Denver, CO	Regis University

NOVEMBER

2	Berkeley, CA	Pacific School of Religion
8–9	Indianapolis, IN	Butler University
10–11	New York, NY	Bnai Jeshurun Scholar in Residence
12	Philadelphia, PA	Miskan Shalom
14	Washington, D.C.	Politics and Prose Bookstore
15	New York, NY	Open Center
17–18	Cleveland, OH	Kol Ami synagogue (216) 991-0700
30	Portland, OR	Powell's Bookstore

DECEMBER

1	Portland, OR	City Club of Portland
3	Denver, CO	Tattered Cover Bookstore
6	Los Angeles	University of Judaism

Look for later dates in the November/December issue of TIKKUN, and get updates on our website, www.tikkun.org

For Three Transgressions

Uri Avnery

For three transgressions of Barak, and for four, I will not turn away thereof (to paraphrase Amos 1): because of the arrogance, the ignorance, and the lack of leadership.

Arrogance. This is the disease of occupation officers. They are unable to look at Arabs as equals. Contempt for Arabs has penetrated their souls and disarranged their minds.

When Arafat said in the past that he would never give up sovereignty over the holy places of Islam, nobody listened. An Arab is babbling something—so what. “We know the Arabs,” say the occupiers. An Arab always cheats, evades, prevaricates, quibbles, equivocates, lies, schemes, tricks. He is sneaky by nature. An Arab must be told what to do. One has to make him an offer he can’t refuse and to demand an “answer.” An Arab has to “internalize” what we tell him. An Arab has to “mature.” One has to “make it clear” to him. (All these are now common Hebrew expressions.) If the Arab does not accept what you tell him, “there is nobody to talk with.”

So says the general, and so say and write his media stooges, correspondents, commentators. Throughout the recent summit, not one single word of courtesy, respect, not to mention appreciation, appeared in the Israeli media about the Palestinian delegation and its leader.

Instead, we heard this: Barak “stays true to his red lines”; Arafat “clings to his extreme positions.” Barak “has succeeded in extracting from them far-reaching concessions”; Arafat “was unwilling to give up anything.” Barak “took the responsibility” and decided alone; Arafat does not take advice from his assistants and “decides everything by himself.” And so forth, day after day.

Ignorance. Everyone who knows anything about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict knows that it is quite impossible for Arafat to give up sovereignty over the holy shrines of Islam. But Barak’s “experts” were certain that there would be no problem, if only the right gimmick could be found. All the well-meaning wise guys, from Yossi Beilin to Shlomo Ben-Ami, contributed their part. Al-Kuds instead of

Jerusalem, Abu-Dis instead of the Temple Mount, embassy status for the Haram-al-Sharif, functional sovereignty, what not. And when Arafat did not swallow the bait and stuck to the simple formula of Arab sovereignty over East Jerusalem (considered by the whole world as occupied territory) they got angry. What a fool! How primitive can you get! He lost everything because of this stupid obstinacy!

It seems that Barak has no advisor who understands the thinking and feelings of the Palestinians. Arab culture places much weight on personal contact, personal gestures, the generosity of the strong. But Barak, who insisted on calling this summit, resolutely refused to meet with Arafat. For

ten days, twenty-four hours a day, he resided a hundred yards from the Palestinian leader without visiting him or inviting him in, even for a cup of coffee. “His body language expressed loathing,” the Israeli correspondents reported eagerly, “at the official dinner, when he was sitting next to Arafat, he devoted all his attention to young Chelsea.” Perhaps he wants to make peace with her.

Lack of leadership. True, Barak has gone further than any of his predecessors. He has helped to demolish the stupid mantra of “Jerusalem, the eternal capital.” But when he reached the brink of the abyss and had to jump over it, he didn’t jump. This was the test. The de Gaulle test. The Ben-Gurion test. The Begin test at Camp David. Failing this test dwarfs everything else.

In history there is the split of a second when a true leader shows his colors. At such a moment Martin Luther said: “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God.” Without squinting sideways. Without looking back. Barak has failed this decisive test. He was afraid to tell the public that there can be no peace without giving up sovereignty over the Temple Mount, afraid they would no longer support him.

A great opportunity was missed at Camp David II. Now the decision becomes daily more difficult. But perhaps, paradoxically, it is easier to jump over the abyss when the decision is forced upon you. Today, Barak has but one choice left: peace with Arafat or political oblivion. Peace means a Jerusalem that is the capital of two states: West Jerusalem the capital of Israel, East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine. If Barak makes that decision, the great majority in Israel will follow. Our job is to push him with all our might. □

*Peace means a
Jerusalem that is the
capital of two states.*

Uri Avnery is a journalist, peace activist, former member of the Knesset, and leader of Gush Shalom, the most militant part of the Israeli peace movement. He was the first Israeli to meet Arafat (during the siege of Beirut, July 1982).

INTERVIEW

A CONVERSATION WITH Yossi Beilin

Dr. Yossi Beilin received his Ph.D. in political science at Tel-Aviv University. He has served in the Israeli government since 1977 as a Knesset Member (Labor), Minister of Economics, and now Minister of Justice (One Israel). He is also the author of *The Price of Unity, Israel at Age 40 Plus*, and *Israel, A Concise Political History*.

TIKKUN: Some of us at TIKKUN worry that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak does not understand the psychological need of the Palestinian people to feel that they have won the kind of national self-determination that Israel sought for itself in 1948. The rumors are that what has been offered to the Palestinian people in recent talks is far less than you proposed in your informal negotiations with Abu Mazen after the Oslo Accords.

BEILIN: I think that supposition is wrong. Barak understands that it is impossible to make peace with a proposal that would not be accepted by the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people, though, must also understand the “red lines” [nonnegotiable needs] of the Israeli people. We have no intention of imposing anything on Arafat nor do we think we could. Since we came to power we have been ready to give up the Golan Heights, we have been ready to implement the Wye accord, we enabled safe passage for Palestinians from Gaza to the West Bank, we released Palestinian prisoners, and we have taken the symbolic act that was important to the Palestinians of giving over control of Abu Dis to the Palestinian Authority.

TIKKUN: In your new book, you have important advice for American Jews.

BEILIN: One thing I suggest is that we need an institute in which American and Israeli Jews meet regularly and exchange views. There is no Israeli-American Jewish committee on an equal basis, with neither side patronizing the other or seeing itself as “the real” solution to Jewish problems. We need such a framework so that we could discuss problems facing world Jewry [e.g. in Austria]. It is time to establish a coordinating center for the Jewish people.

We cannot afford to give the monopoly on conversion to religious Jews in the twenty-first century. Most Jews in the world are secular Jews. We should not require that non-Jews who want to become Jews have to work through the rabbis. There are increasing numbers of children growing up in households where only one parent is Jewish—and many of these will not want to convert in accord with the



stipulations of the rabbis, so for them we need a mechanism of secular conversion.

TIKKUN: What is it that you would be converting to?

BEILIN: To the Jewish people, which is not necessarily based on the Jewish religion.

TIKKUN: It is understandable that you don't want the criteria for who is an Israeli citizen to be governed by religious Jews, but that could be done by modifying the Law of Return. It's not equally clear why you would hold this same approach for being a Jew. What are the criteria that you would use for deciding that someone could be a secular Jew?

BEILIN: Well, the criteria need to be worked on—that's one of our tasks. But there are lots of people who are married to Jews, or who love the Jewish people, people who would want to be Jewish but who don't want to lie to the rabbis. It will certainly be important to ensure that these people know something about Jewish history and identify with it, know something about the Holocaust and Israel, and can assure us that they really want to be Jewish.

There are growing numbers of people who were born Jewish who do not want to be involved in religious life, who won't go to synagogue even on Yom Kippur, who are nevertheless proud to be Jewish, involved in Jewish life and Jewish concerns. Israel has developed a whole culture of secular Jewishness, and there ought to be a way for people to convert to this secular Jewishness.

TIKKUN: This issue of “Who is a Jew?” and how one becomes a Jew has often interfered with other parts of your Israeli agenda.

BEILIN: Yes, we in the Labor party have respected the concern of American Jews who did not want us to accept the halachic perspective on this [who is a Jew] question as defined by the Orthodox parties in Israel. The Labor Party paid an enormous price for deferring to American sensibilities on this question. Had we been willing to give in to the Orthodox on

INTERVIEW

this question in 1988 we would have secured a ruling coalition that would have been able to pursue the Oslo process much sooner. Yet the same secular Jews who convinced the Labor Party to reject a chance to form a government, when later approached on the issue of the peace process, were always quick to say that they would not interfere in the internal affairs of the State of Israel and would support the policies of the elected government. They were loathe to admit, even to themselves, how deeply they were willing to intervene in the internal affairs of Israel when it came to a matter [like the “Who is a Jew?” issue] that they felt directly affected them. But when it came to peace, they used “non-interference” to justify supporting the anti-peace agenda of the Netanyahu government.

TIKKUN: Your book is the first manifesto of secular Jewishness. But what does it mean to be a secular Jew?

BEILIN: Well, this is the task of Jewish life in the new century—to answer that question. You can be Jewish without putting on tefillin in the morning—[you are Jewish] if you are worried about other Jews in the world, if you are interested in the history of your people, if you want to raise your own children to know that they are Jews, if you visit Israel and other Jewish communities, and if you answer affirmatively when people ask if you are Jewish. Or you can become more deeply involved by spending time studying Jewish texts and history—from the secular standpoint. We have a wealth of wisdom in our Jewish texts from which we can draw today without having to accept the religious framework within which our cultural heritage originally developed. We can learn and teach the Jewish legacy without accepting it as a matter of faith.

In doing so, we can find new ways to strengthen a sense of identity. We can have a program through which we commit ourselves as a people to fund the possibility of every Jew being given a trip to visit Israel—what I call a birthright of every young Jew. Every young Jew would receive a birthday card from the local Jewish federation at age seventeen with a coupon for travel and accommodations in Israel during the next summer vacation. It would offer a range of programs for each young Jew to select from. While all of the programs would include some segments on Jewish and Israeli history, each participant would be able to choose between offerings in music, computers, archaeology, art, etc. The idea would be to transform the visit to Israel from a small group of tourists to a summer “jamboree” of young Jews—an annual gathering of the youth of world Jewry that would promote the development of long-term relationships between the participants, including those who come from the same areas of the world but did not have the opportunity to meet previously, and including Israeli youth who would also participate. After returning home, the young Jews would be encouraged to maintain contact with Israel and their local Jewish community.

Spending money this way makes far greater sense than continuing to have UJA/Federation raise money on the supposition that Israel is in desperate need of this money.

Israel’s standard of living is among the top 10 percent of the world’s countries. There is no logic to American Jews continuing to assist Israel in financing its social welfare system. Better to use that money to strengthen the Jewish identity of Jews living outside Israel. And Israel should be the focus of visits by young Jews not because Israel is necessarily “better” or a higher exemplification of Jewish life, but because it is the cradle of Judaism and the only Jewish state.

We can create a Jewish television channel and a powerful Jewish internet system. The creation of secular, traditional, and religious internet sites has the potential for widening access to Jewish information, discussions on Jewish thought and current events, and intellectual stimulation that could open new horizons for Jewish life.

We can develop a secular Jewish curriculum. Abraham Burg’s proposal for establishing an Open University for the Jewish people, with teachers and students from all over the world, deserves our support. This type of university could take advantage of the brightest lecturers and researchers in the Jewish world and exploit the internet and Jewish television networks to deliver lectures and share information from any location in the world. Students would receive written materials via the internet or other media, would be tested in the same way, and could be awarded an academic degree after completing their studies—thus making Jewish learning accessible to young Jews even if they are not located near major Jewish centers.

TIKKUN: Looking at the destructive consequences of nationalism in the twentieth century, some Jews have concluded that the most urgent task facing the world is to move beyond nationalist particularism and develop a universal identity. Those Jews might make the following argument: We can understand why, if you are rooted in the Jewish religious tradition, you may want to perpetuate that form of particularism. But if you are talking about people who no longer are rooted in a religious particularism, it would be better for the world for you to develop a universal consciousness that is not rooted in a national identity. The next stage of the development of the human race requires an ability to see the world from a more holistic consciousness. For example, certain forms of spiritual and mystical consciousness may encourage people to see the world holistically, from the standpoint of the Unity of All Being. But the last thing the world needs right now are new and innovative ways to foster nationalist particularism that do not connect with this kind of unity. Rather than encourage secular people to convert to Judaism, why not encourage them to form this more universalistic identity?

BEILIN: I am not preaching to people to become Jewish. I am addressing the question of how to handle the fate of those who already want to be Jewish because they are in a family or relationship or because they love the Jewish people.

Now, as to the question of a universalistic world that your hypothetical proposed: I would love to live in that universalistic world, but I am not prepared to be the first citizen of

it, nor the first to sacrifice my national identity to be part of it. Given what happened to the Jews in the twentieth century when we did not have adequate national protections, I think we should be the second or the third but not the first to give up our national identity in the name of the universalism you describe.

TIKKUN: We at TIKKUN made that last point you just made as early as twelve years ago when facing those who thought that TIKKUN was limiting itself too much by being an explicitly Jewish magazine.

BEILIN: I'm a good student of yours.

TIKKUN: Turning back to Israel, we at TIKKUN have argued that the Labor Party, of which you are a leader, and the Meretz party, to which you are aligned, have increasingly been unable to mobilize majority support because of the way that these parties fail to address the hunger for meaning and purpose in the life of ordinary Israelis. Labor and Meretz appear to many Israelis to be giving the following message: "Our vision of Israel's future is for this society to play a central role in the globalization of capital, and we urge you individual Israelis to find your meaning in life through the scientific, technological, or material accomplishments you achieve in the globalized competitive marketplace to which we will give you access." This vision may appeal to a sector of the Israeli public which lives on the coast from Tel Aviv to Haifa, but makes many other Israelis, particularly recent Russian immigrants and those from Sephardic or Mizrahi backgrounds, feel very uninspired, because they do not believe that they have the skills or the resources to "make it" in the competitive marketplace. Many of them intuitively recognize that globalization has increased divisions between the haves and the have nots, and they suspect that they will end up in the latter category, not as beneficiaries but as victims of globalization.

As a result, these Israelis feel much more attracted to other communities of meaning—at the present moment, the political Right, manifested through Shas, Likud, and the various religious fundamentalist parties. The marketplace gives the message: "You are valuable if you can make it financially," whereas the right-wing nationalist world gives the message: "You are valuable just because you are an Israeli," and the Jewish religious world gives the message "you are valuable just because you are created in the image of God"—and both of these alternatives offer value to people without regard to what they accomplish in the competitive struggle. Thus you get a political outcome in which many Israelis who might, for example, support a peace process, find themselves supporting political parties that are against peace.

Of course, we at TIKKUN have another objection to globalization as well: we who live in the heartland of globalized capital see not only the good things about globalization, but some of its destructive consequences for the world's ethical

and ecological well-being, so we are not so proud of an Israel whose primary orientation is to figure out how to jump in and accelerate that globalization process.

BEILIN: Over the years I've read your analysis in TIKKUN and I appreciate it and think there is much truth in it.

I think the problem has been exacerbated for a technical reason: the electoral system in Israel has made it possible for people to vote for a Prime Minister from one party while giving their Knesset vote to very particularistic parties, so that

these smaller parties became the majority and the major parties had to become dependent upon them.

I don't think it's fair to say that we in Labor adopted the capitalistic way—we are Social Democrats who adopted a Third Way approach similar to that advocated by Anthony Giddens and modeled by Tony Blair [Barak gave all of his cabinet ministers a gift of Anthony Giddens's book on the Third Way]. But we are searching for our way ... a

way that will not be simply cheerleading for capitalism.

TIKKUN: So what direction do you see for Israel?

BEILIN: First, Israel must complete the peace process. An agreement with the Palestinians is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and peace with them will make it easier to achieve peace with Syria and Lebanon. A comprehensive peace will significantly decrease the danger that Israel will be attacked by extreme outer-rim states wishing to win the support of Arab states.

Peace will lead to normalization and will bring Israel to a stage where a professional army can replace compulsory military service. And this, in turn, will free young ultra-Orthodox from having to remain cloistered in yeshivot in order to receive deferment from army service.

In the realm of religion-state relations, the most crucial task is to create civil marriage and divorce. Another important matter is to deny preferred status to any one of the religious streams of Judaism. It is not absolutely necessary to separate religion and state. Israel could decide to completely separate itself from the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian frameworks and announce that, from now on, they would need to finance themselves. But Israel could also continue to fund them, in proportion to the number of people requiring religious services in each group.

I cannot allow myself to look out from my balcony in Israel and the Jewish world, admiring the many successes of the Jewish people and sighing over the problematic trends. I am convinced that our actions can make a difference. We do not need to undertake such grandiose schemes as Herzl's plan to transfer an entire people from one continent to another. Far more modest steps are likely to ensure that the twenty-first century will be remembered as a wonderful time for the Jewish people. But this means that we must stop sighing and start acting—now. □

*We are searching
for our way ... a
way that will not be
simply cheerleading
for capitalism.*

A Product of the American Jewish Community --



Heidi Altman

When did my Jewish identity start becoming a problem?

Perhaps when I took a job with an organization fighting female genital mutilation in Africa and my cousin asked, "What? There aren't enough Jewish girls in trouble for you to help?" My questions about identity certainly intensified when I fell in love with a Muslim man and our families erupted and boiled for one year until we submitted to a forced farewell. Today, they continue, as when an Israeli Jew tells me I am betraying my people by working for an organization which supports the fundamental human rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

For much of my adult life, it seems, my Jewish identity has been enveloped by anger and confusion. It is the uneasiness I feel each time I am confronted with Jewish ritual. It is the shame I feel when I stare into the face of a Palestinian child who has been arrested without due cause and mistreated by Israeli soldiers. It is the anger I feel when another member of my family asks, "But what have we done to them? What rights do they have for you to defend?" Us. Them. Often I wonder how in the world we would survive, what would happen to the entire species of human being, if the rhetoric of "us" and "them" was suddenly taken away. Who to hate? Who to love? Who to blame?

In 1989, I celebrated my bat mitzvah at Temple Beth Ohr in Orange County, California. Chanting from the Torah in front of those who love me, the beginnings of a

Heidi Altman spent a year in Jerusalem as an intern at B'Tselem. In September she will begin a master's program in international affairs at Columbia University.

deep connection to Judaism welled up inside of me, a love for this religion that brings people together and allows us to ask questions. I didn't know that in the same year seventy-eight Palestinian children under the age of sixteen were killed by Israeli security forces. (Not even the army spokesperson contended that life-threatening situations were involved in most of these cases.)

As a teenager, I developed a heady enthusiasm for religion and became involved in the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization as the coordinator of Judaic programming for the southern California region. During these same years (between 1987 and 1993), in a universe entirely separate from mine, 432 Palestinian homes were entirely demolished, 432 families left homeless. The homes were demolished by the Israeli government, in contravention of international law, as collective punishment against the families of those suspected (not yet tried, not yet convicted) of involvement in terrorist attacks.

In 1995 I began studying at Yale University, and within a year was leading the Conservative minyan at Hillel. My college age crisis of faith came quickly, and by the end of 1998, I had quietly stopped attending Shabbat dinners, and my absence was noted at minyan. How could I join in prayer when I knew that, while I studied in Connecticut, the General Security Service legally used torture as a method of interrogation in Israel? I learned that Palestinian detainees were violently shaken, deprived of sleep and food, tied in painful positions, and exposed to extreme temperatures and frightening threats. I learned of the intolerance and fear among all religions. I found myself confused.

I am living this year in Jerusalem as an intern at B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights

in the Occupied Territories. In this year my eyes have been opened in frightening ways, and my faith has been tested to the breaking point. I have studied Hebrew, wished I understood Arabic, participated in heart-warming Shabbat dinners, traveled to refugee camps, visited the Western Wall, and stood in solidarity with Palestinian families who were evicted from their homes for "security reasons."

Living in the midst of the much-discussed secular-religious divide that is Israel is a bewildering experience. What has affected my religious identity the most is the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics in Israel—it is taken for granted that the Orthodox haredim are quite right-wing on the political spectrum, while it seems nearly taboo, if you are on the Left, to engage in the least bit of religious observance. Religious leaders in Israel grandstand daily on antiliberal topics, blasting the left wing for its sympathy with the Palestinian cause, and pledging their solidarity with the Jewish settlers who are illegally residing in occupied territories. One of the only (struggling but wonderful) exceptions to this rule is a small organization called Rabbis for Human Rights, which is villified by the rest of the religious community. In my own life, I realize that the aversion to all-things-religious I began to develop several years ago has done nothing but grow stronger. This, I know, is a shame. Some of the most potentially heart-warming evenings I have spent in Israel were those surrounded by friends around a lively Shabbat dinner table.

While my experiences living in Israel have proven to be at times shocking, often enraging, and always difficult, my frustration and anger is greater still when I turn west-ward, toward the American Jewish community and its leaders. One of my internship projects has involved inviting American Jewish organizations to include an information session with B'Tselem in the itineraries of the "youth missions" they send to Israel. These information sessions include a description of human rights work in Israel, a presentation of the human rights situation in the Occupied Territories, and a facilitated question and answer session. Most organizations have not returned my letters, emails, or phone calls. A very few organizations expressed interest; many gave me a tight-lipped "no" without explanation. Whenever the opportunity arose, I attempted to engage in dialogue.

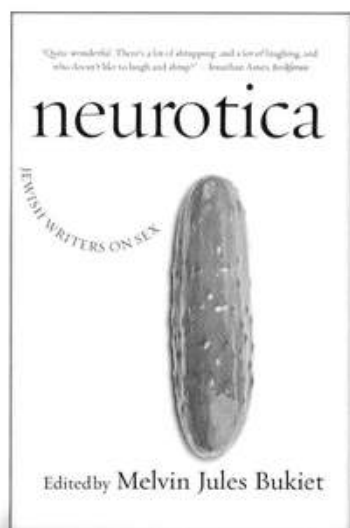
Speaking with a representative from one of the largest nationwide Jewish youth groups, I inquired as to his organization's lack of interest. "Our director," he replied, "says that when we have a written agreement with the Palestinians, maybe then, maybe, we can begin to talk about the poor Arabs." Sarcasm poisoned his words. So I spoke with his director, who reminded me that he is dealing with youth who arrive in Israel knowing little to nothing about the country, and perhaps even less about Judaism. I replied that I understood, having been one of these youths only years prior. "I don't want to bring them to Israel," he insisted,

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"only to tell them about how bad we are." He went on to explain that he would never claim that the words published by B'Tselem are untrue, but that they are simply not words he wants shared with the youth on his programs.

Of course, there is a segment of the Jewish community which has embraced the words of organizations like B'Tselem and confronted the often close-minded institutions of the Jewish Diaspora. One such example is this very magazine, *TIKKUN*, which has consistently publicized B'Tselem's information about torture and other human rights abuses. And there are others, individuals and organizations doing grassroots peace and human rights work in the Middle East, as well as advocacy within the United States and elsewhere. Yet this segment is still cast aside as an extremist fringe by the broader Jewish community, represented by such giants as the UJA/Federation and AIPAC. These giants establish the agenda which is heard worldwide as the "voice" of Judaism and, specifically, American Judaism.

I understand the stated priorities of the leadership of American Judaism—to support unconditionally the state of Israel and to fight for Jewish continuity in the Diaspora. However, I also understand the connection that has grown in the United States between Judaism and liberalism, and the way that most American Jews present Judaism to their children—not as a harsh set of rules dictated by an unforgiving God, but as a code of accepting and pluralistic values and beliefs. If I am a product of the liberal American Jewish community's attempt to inculcate its priorities in its youth, then this attempt has stopped far short of success. Because these are the questions that we are left with, we children of the American Jewish community:

If Judaism is a religion which embraces equality and preaches peace, why is the Jewish state brimming with prejudice and unjust laws? And why was I led to believe otherwise, that Israel truly is a "light unto the nations"? If I was taught tolerance and understanding in the name of Judaism, why have I been brought up believing that an entire nation of people are terrorists? Is this any way to stop a cycle of violence? If I was taught the moral code of acceptance and pluralism as a part of Judaism, why is the world so strictly divided into camps of "us" and "them"? Why is it a source of pride to the family that we are friends with the Arab family down the street, but a disgrace if I fall in love with their son? Why am I a champion of good if I work for the human rights of struggling Jews in developing countries, but a betrayer of my faith if I work for the human rights of suffering Palestinians in the holy land?

I am only twenty-two, so I cannot claim wisdom enough to know that there are no answers to these questions. But I know that in my searches over the past few years, I have not been able to find such answers. Something must change,

*We are a people
who have been
betrayed, and who
have betrayed.*

something fundamental about the way the American Jewish community teaches its youth. Something fundamental about the importance of "us" and the hatred/fear/misunderstanding of "them." To support the state of Israel "unconditionally" and without judgement is ludicrous and unreasonable. No country is infallible; no country is so untouchable that it can be ignored by the international community and placed in a bubble of sanctioned hypocrisy. Indeed, we live in a world where evolving norms of international human rights exist, where they can be applied and enforced through international pressure and advocacy (look, for an example, to the end of apartheid in South Africa). No country should be immune to this, not the United States of America, and not Israel.

In a sense, I agree with the spokesman for the organization who I spoke with on the phone—the way to approach this situation is not to bring the youth of the American Jewish community to Israel, to sit them down, and to tell them how and why Israel is bad. Because Israel, at its core (I still believe), is not bad. It is a country which faces astonishing battles every day, and which finds itself caught between the often opposing demands of religion and democracy. In the course of these battles, many have died, many have been injured, and many principles have been cast aside. I challenge the American Jewish community to face up to these injustices, to admit that they have occurred, and to present this truth to its children. Rather than inculcating in our children a blindingly one-sided version of a righteous Zionism, we as American Jews should be discussing the true face of Israeli politics, with all of its difficulties and challenges and frustrations. I wish I had learned as a child that Israel, a country that is an invaluable refuge for our people, has a complicated past and a perplexing future. I wish I had been taught that I, as a Jew in the Diaspora, am expected to advocate for social justice and fairness in the country that represents my religion to the world. I wish I had been taught these things so that at the age of eighteen, when I picked up Human Rights Watch's country report on Israel, I would not have felt betrayed, not felt as if something had been kept from me, not been left with the gnawing suspicion that all I ever believed and knew of my people was tainted and somehow false.

The truth may be frightening, but it is powerful beyond any cliché or aphorism I can quote. Had I been armed as an adolescent with the truth about my people, my religion, and the state of Israel, I might not feel as alienated from and skeptical of the American Jewish community as I am today. We are a people, like all peoples in the world, who have been betrayed, and who have betrayed, who have suffered injustices, and who have committed injustices. It is time to own up to this history publicly and privately, to prove to our children that we truly are the liberal, progressive community we claim to be. □

CAREER TIP OF THE DAY:

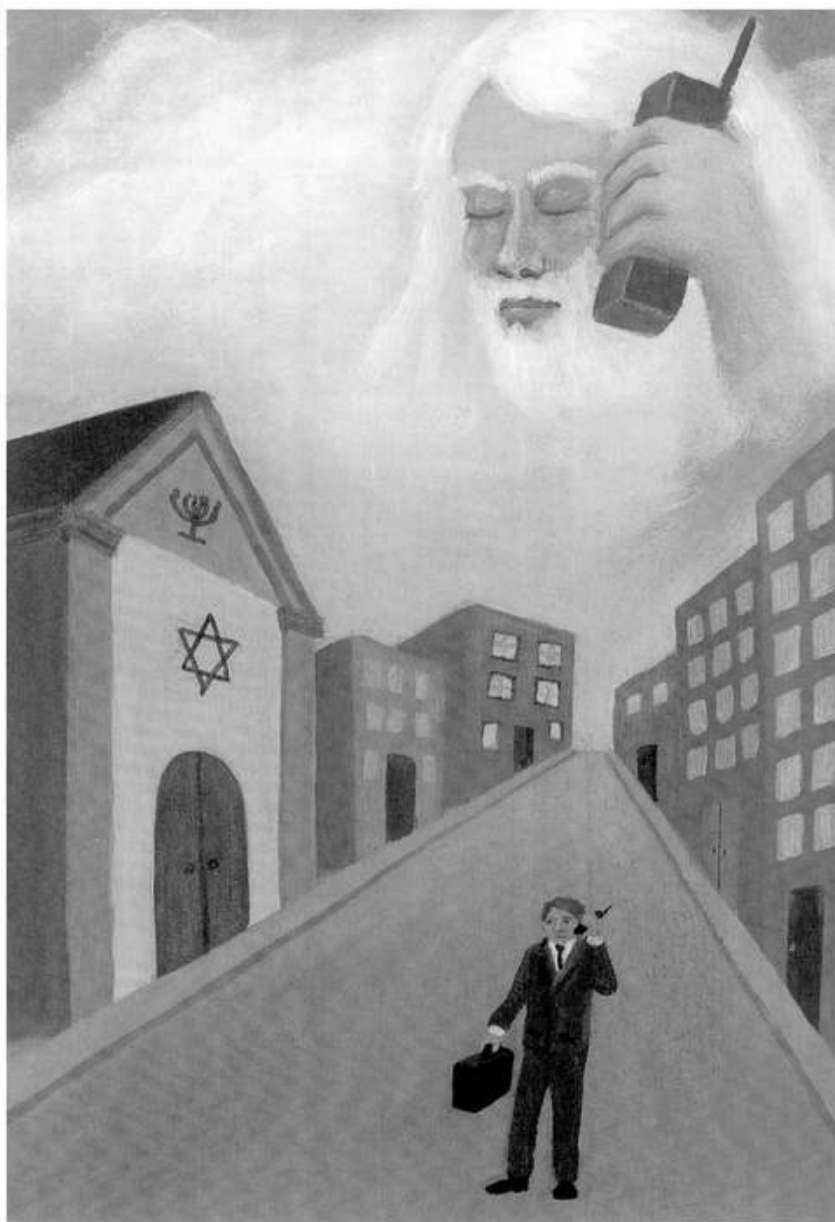
Become a Prophet!

David Fetcho

I was speaking with a friend at a party not long ago. We had quickly moved past the usual pleasantries and were talking about the meaning of prophetic calling in America today. I mentioned a character in a novel of mine whose basic dilemma is that he's not quite sure whether he's a sick guy with a messiah complex, or an uncertain messiah with a "guy complex." My friend responded, "I know many people who feel called by God. Yet they also feel that they risk being dismissed as nut cases if they claim a prophetic role—even though others may regard them as contemporary prophets. It's too scary and ultimately too self-marginalizing to make that kind of claim, even if one does in fact hear an undeniable call from the universe." It was this conversation that moved me to write this article. Though I come from a Catholic background, and now work primarily in progressive Christian circles, the substance of my growing sense of spiritual calling probably has a lot in common with those in other spiritual communities.

For me it began as a kid, while I was growing up Catholic in those good old pre-Vatican II days in a Polish, Irish, Italian parish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Perhaps the single most pointed memory, the one that gathers into itself all those early spiritual longings, revolves around a story our parish priest once told about some ardent young priest, a saint-about-to-be, who one bleary morning crossed behind the front altar on his way to prepare for early Mass. It was the same route he took every morning in his black cassock, before he put on the vestments for Mass, everything still a little out of focus—maybe before his first cup of coffee—which might explain the nonchalance of his turning to look at some movement in the corner of his eye. There in the darkness behind the altar was a little flitting luminance; some magnetic aura radiating out and maybe a voice in the

David Fetcho is a writer and composer living in Oakland, California. He and his wife Susan are artists-in-residence and retreat leaders with New College Berkeley, an affiliate institute of the Graduate Theological Union.



base of his brain that made him hesitate for just a moment. And it's what our priest said next that was the killer, uttering the word for what happens when a human being is grabbed by the soul and pulled into a sudden unmasking light, the bright flow beneath the surface scum, so alive with joy and presences. As he crossed behind the altar, and saw that brightness, "he fell into ecstasy," the priest said.

Then our storyteller just folded that word up and put it in his pocket. Our handsome young priest was so eager to seem relevant to us kids, he just couldn't follow through with the implications. He carried this word that could change everything about every one of our miserable little existences and he couldn't bring it out into full view, wouldn't let us wrap our sore, scraggly brains around it. So he quickly moved on to ask who'd had their first erection. But when I heard this story, and so many others like it, about the saints who would heal people, or feed the poor with their own last scrap of food, all I could think was, how could anyone possibly believe that anything else matters?

It all came down to that one word and everything it

ILLUSTRATION BY ELENA RODRIGUEZ

implied. Ecstasy—like a rare and single note of an invisible birdsong nearly lost in the usual tangle of words and activities. I wanted with all my heart to glimpse just a wing, a flash of color. If this is the whole point, I thought, why can't they just admit it and tell us how to get there?

I carried the word with me like a cocoon in a jar all through school. But the most amazing thing to me was that no one else seemed to care very much. Ecstasy-schmectasy! What was important to my peers was, did you see Carla Costanzo in that sweater at the bingo the other night and do you think those're real? For the adults in my life, it seemed the most urgent business was to be groomed for a good job, get pressed into this mold called "normal" as soon as possible, and learn that church is for Sundays, while the rest of the week is where "real life" happens.

Meanwhile, I was becoming convinced it was just the opposite. It seemed plain to me that the mysteries proclaimed on Sunday called everything *else* into question. This produced a strange and profound sense of personal dislocation. I could no longer be content to accept the business-as-usual, status quo assumptions being passed to me by either cultural osmosis or the somewhat less subtle pressures of parents and peers to conform. I felt caught between two worlds, one of which seemed unattainable, and the other, increasingly, unendurable.

Don't misunderstand, though. This is not a dislocation I in any way regret. It is one, on the contrary, that I credit for saving my life.

By the time I was ready to leave high school, I had given up on Catholicism's ability to deliver the transformation I was now desperate to find. I gravitated to the margins of social respectability. I hung out with the longhairs, and formed a folk group called "The Prophets" that performed an angst-filled repertoire of social protest songs to mostly blank-eyed audiences. When I became entranced with the hyper-romantic portrayal of eastern philosophy I found in Aldous Huxley's novel, *Island*, I began telling people I was now a Shivaist.

What followed was the predictable course for disenfranchised Baby Boomers: a couple years of college interrupted by the more pressing concerns of psychedelic infatuation, countercultural immersion, getting tear-gassed in Vietnam war protests, and religious experimentation. When I ended up disillusioned with Movement infighting and the obliterated promise of a Worker's Revolution, I took initiation into a Tantric Hindu sect that promised enlightenment in one lifetime and a cosmic plan to change the world.

I stayed with that group for two and a half years, convinced that I would find the ecstasy (now called *ananda*, or bliss) that I had so wanted as a child. What I found instead was a subtle reorientation of my search. What started out as a burning need to question everything had somehow gotten subsumed into an unquestioning dogma that the suffering, contradiction, and general mayhem of the world was

Christianity in Jewish Terms



Edited by
Tikva Frymer-Kensky,
David Novak,
Peter Ochs,
David Sandmel,
and Michael Signer

Over the past few decades,



there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish-Christian relations, including signs of a new, improved Christian attitude towards Jews. *Christianity in Jewish Terms* is a Jewish theological response to the profound changes that have taken place in Christian thought. The book is divided into ten chapters, each of which features a main essay, written by a Jewish scholar, that explores the meaning of a set of Christian beliefs. Following the essay is a response from a second Jewish scholar and a Christian scholar. Designed to generate new conversations within the American Jewish community and between the Jewish and Christian communities, *Christianity in Jewish Terms* lays the foundation for better understanding.

Contributors: Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Sandmel, Michael Signer, Robert Chazan, Irving Greenberg, Christopher Leighton, David Ellenson, David Tracy, Hindy Najman, George Lindbeck, Elliot Dorff, Stanley Hauerwas, Yitz Greenberg, Kendall Soulen, Larry Hoffman, Ruth Langer, Robert Wilken, Leora Batnitsky, Robert Gibbs, John Cavadini, Elliot Wolfson, Randi Rashkover, Susan Ross, Menahem Kellner, Nancy Fuchs-Kraemer, Clark Williamson, Steven Kepnes, Laurie Zoloth, Miroslav Volf, David Blumenthal, William Schweiker

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simply illusion; just another part of the hologram of existence itself. But by that time I had become a personal transformation addict. I was convinced that our only hope was to practice enough meditation so that I might be able to see our ant-like lives as Shiva's gorgeous and terrible dance of death and rebirth, and then to hightail it off the karmic wheel into Nirvana. Even my guru's elaborate program for social redistribution of resources was, ultimately, so that everyone could have a material base from which to meditate and get liberated from material existence.

Maybe it was my Catholic upbringing needling at the back of my conscience, but I began to feel that old dislocation again. When I wasn't meditating or teaching yoga, I'd take long walks in the Berkeley hills where the intricate interplay of light and texture and creatures in their complex pursuits called to my senses. Despite my best efforts to see through the veil of *maya*, life itself convinced me that there was some kernel in the universe, some God molecule at the center of things. Right here, in the very world of shapes and senses, one could somehow brush—although I resisted naming it—against a solid edge of the skin of God. And the more I tried to think of all the injustice and suffering in the world in terms of karmic consequence, the more I experienced what felt like the grief of this God of beauty over all the self-inflicted pain of the world. What more can I say? God spoke to my heart, and I knew I had to go a different way.

To think you hear the call of God is a dangerous thing, as anyone familiar with such self-deluded prophets as Jim Jones, David Koresh, Charles Manson or Ma Anand Sheela can appreciate. To *actually* hear the call is maybe worse, since with it comes plaguing self-suspicion that never goes away. Once I had decided to follow the God of the Bible into that God's intimate and deeply personal engagement with all of life, it slowly became clear that I was also being called to a self-conscious identification with the prophetic tradition. This was not a job that was in my top-ten list of career choices. But I'm here to say that despite the seeming absurdity of naming myself a "prophet," the gradual realization of what is my authentic prophetic calling has infused my life with a depth of value and sense of connectedness—not to mention the seasoning of pain and frustration—that I would never otherwise have known.

When we think of the character of "the prophet," we don't generally think of Jeremiah grinding his teeth in the gravel while coming to grips with his calling. Instead, I think the picture most people have in mind is of Charlton Heston playing Moses: the magnificent, glowing man, larger than life, who comes down the mountain as the only guy who's ever managed to fingerprint God and live to tell about it. (Of course, we now know it was because he was packing a piece.)

By contrast, the scriptures say that we are *all* called to nurture a prophetic consciousness that calls into question every given assumption of our social milieu. They also pretty strongly infer that a part of the price of that calling will be the evaporation of all the glib certainties that make for a stable and happy cultural existence. Here is where Christian theology and the theology of TIKKUN find common ground, in the understanding that the prophetic legacy is renewed in a community infused with the Spirit of God, in those who have been "disoriented" from their lives as

servants to all the machines of contest and reoriented to a gifted and gifting life of trust in the God of justice and mercy. My reading of both the Hebrew and Christian testaments has taught me that all of us who claim the biblical tradition are called in some way to be a synapse in that prophetic consciousness.

I suspect that more people hear God's real call than anyone might imagine. Maybe everybody does at one time or another. But

the voice is so discontinuous, the call so very opposite to the myths we've staked our lives on, that we make tracks as fast as we can to turn on the computers or the TVs to drown it out; to crank up the volume on the broadband braincast pulsing out the sedating message, "Who am I to think like this? Who do I think I am to imagine God is talking to me? Who am I to question a society that is so obviously riding the crest of Progress?"

Maybe it's a small comfort, but more than a few of the Hebrew prophets had pretty much the same reaction. It is an alarming thing to claim for oneself the directive of God. More so the mantle of spiritual teacher or prophet. It seems both preposterous and overwhelming. So we shouldn't be too surprised to find a certain part of ourselves in the same boat as the prophet Jonah, fleeing to the Tarshish of dot-com prosperity or internet virtuality, to the analgesics of normality and conformity, rather than daring to speak the affronting word of the Lord.

But the story of Jonah has a twist. The whale of judgment on Jonah's cowardice became the whale of Jonah's deliverance. When he was spit up on the shores of Nineveh he was at the same time delivered out of his fears and into the power of his calling. This story certainly speaks to my condition. Even in my moments of gravest self-doubt, when I am tempted to dismiss my calling as a throwback religious fantasy, I can sense that dark shadow of the Lord moving under the ship. I can almost hear the hissing spout off the starboard side. Then a new and strange kind of certainty takes hold of me. I've learned from Jonah (and from life!) that even if I am cast from what I thought was my refuge headlong into what I fear the most, I will then only be gathered into the deeper security of the Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

*To think you hear
the call of God is a
dangerous thing....
To actually hear the
call is maybe worse*

Is this the experience of "ecstasy" I longed for as a child? Not really. That was like being fascinated by the skin of a great animal, the strength of which I had no way of comprehending. As I've come to know the bones and muscle system of my calling to a prophetic ministry, I understand it to be far deeper than any transcendent rapture. Certainly I love to be swept off my feet with feelings of spiritual rhapsody. But finding my place and expressing my call within an engaged prophetic community has become my solid ground.

Indeed, it is in community with others who have accepted their prophetic calling that I discover my truest life, and the courage to live it. And this, I think, is what makes my story of some plausible relevance to others, whatever their religious or spiritual persuasion. For, at bottom, the energies of prophetic ministry—to confront at the root the dominant structures of injustice and dehumanization—are perfectly coherent with our deepest personal longings: to find and inhabit our truest lives. But on both counts, as soon as one entertains the notion of prophetic calling, one quickly discovers that it is a call impossible to fulfill in isolation. To attempt to do so is simply to undertake a "hero project" that is bound to end in disillusionment or bitterness.

I was extremely fortunate that my reintroduction to Christianity as an adult took place in the context of a radical and progressive community that did not focus exclusively either on the personal dimensions of faith (as do an unfortunate number of Christian churches), or the social/political ones. It was a true prophetic community in that it engaged us at the heart of our hearts, while it drew us into meaningful and transformative engagement with the concrete needs of the world. Sadly, this and so many sister communities no longer exist as intentional families, which is felt as a loss by all who were part of them. Yet, like any family in "diaspora," the spiritual formation that took place in community has determined our subsequent ways of being in the world. And that old family magnetism keeps drawing us back together—for reunions, for work, for building one another's courage up as we continue to articulate our prophetic calling in hundreds of different contexts.

The truth is, there is a wide and intricately woven network of prophetic communities out there that have yet to fully grasp their calling, but are feeling the first sparks of the Spirit in their midst. And perhaps the widest diaspora of all is those individuals who feel trapped in their isolation while their consciences burn within them; who may feel powerless against the rushing globalization of technocracy and all the dehumanizing forces at large in the world, but who know in their hearts that they must do something, say something against the machine and in defense of life. The word to all of you is the same encouragement that was implicit in the call to Jonah: Wake up to the Voice that is within you. Stand up and speak the word—however small—that is yours alone to speak. Take courage, for you do not walk alone! □

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Beyond Tolerance

Funding for Gay and Lesbian Inclusion

Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro

Speaking in 1989 at a service for Jews with AIDS, Rabbi Alexander Schindler of the Reform synagogue movement noted that “there is another interpretation that we must attach to the Star of David ... an interpretation that any Jewish child with a crayon will tell you: that the Star of David contains, within it, the triangle.” He continued:

For those of us who, a generation ago [during the Nazi era], would have been wearing the pink triangle as a badge of shame and a mark of death; for those of us who today wear it as a badge of honor and resistance: it is time to complete the outline of your Jewish star.

For those of us who have been willfully blind to the geometry of Jewish life, who would keep invisible the presence of the triangle within the Shield of David: it is time to complete the outline of your Jewish star.

Eleven years later, at the April 2000 gathering of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement took another step towards “completing the outline of its Jewish star” by approving rabbinic officiation at “rituals of union” for same-gender couples. Although the resolution was timid—gay and lesbian marriages were denied the label of *kiddushin* (sanctified Jewish marriage), and rabbis who decline to officiate received unqualified support—it nevertheless represented another plateau of “tolerance” for gay and lesbian Jews that has been wrought by a generation of activism.

Funding is now critical if the Jewish community is to move beyond “tolerance.” Resolutions need to be translated into budget lines, rhetoric into resources. “There

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

actually are many local Jewish efforts to express goodwill—print resources, models of synagogue inclusion, and so on,” observes Avi

Rose, co-author of *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay and Jewish* (1989) and Executive Director of Project Inform, a national organization combatting AIDS on many fronts (www.ProjectInform.org). “Carefully focused funding, even in small amounts, can translate goodwill into good deeds.”

But Orthodox intolerance for “the homosexual lifestyle” and Conservative foot-dragging on inclusion issues are likely to block mainstream Jewish funding for years to come. This is the reality that inspired Rose to help create The Shefa Fund’s unique new Pooled Fund for Jewish Community Activism on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Issues, which was capitalized over a two-year period by more than seventy-five individuals and organizations. Last autumn, the Pooled Fund made its first round of \$50,000 in grants to seven Jewish organizations—including four Jewish Family and Children’s Service (JFCS) agencies.

“Our task,” says Shefa’s Sue Hoffman, who organized the Pooled Fund with Avi Rose, “is to work with the Jewish community on inclusiveness—which is generally framed as a ‘continuity’ issue—in order to cultivate a vision of justice. Ultimately, the Jewish community needs to stand up against the exclusion and violence that affect GLBT Jews whether or not there is a perceived Jewish self-interest.” The similarity between anti-Semitic and homophobic oppression, Hoffman observes, makes this

(continued on page 59)



Ark

(for Betsy and Gail)

*The chuppah's quilted
Blues and purples, stars
Held by the world's four
Corners, make them one*

*Less than this living
Liquidly they do
Together, sailboat
On the lake, day's work*

*Over, or nearly
Over, dinner's mess
Yet to be scrubbed up,
Legislature out*

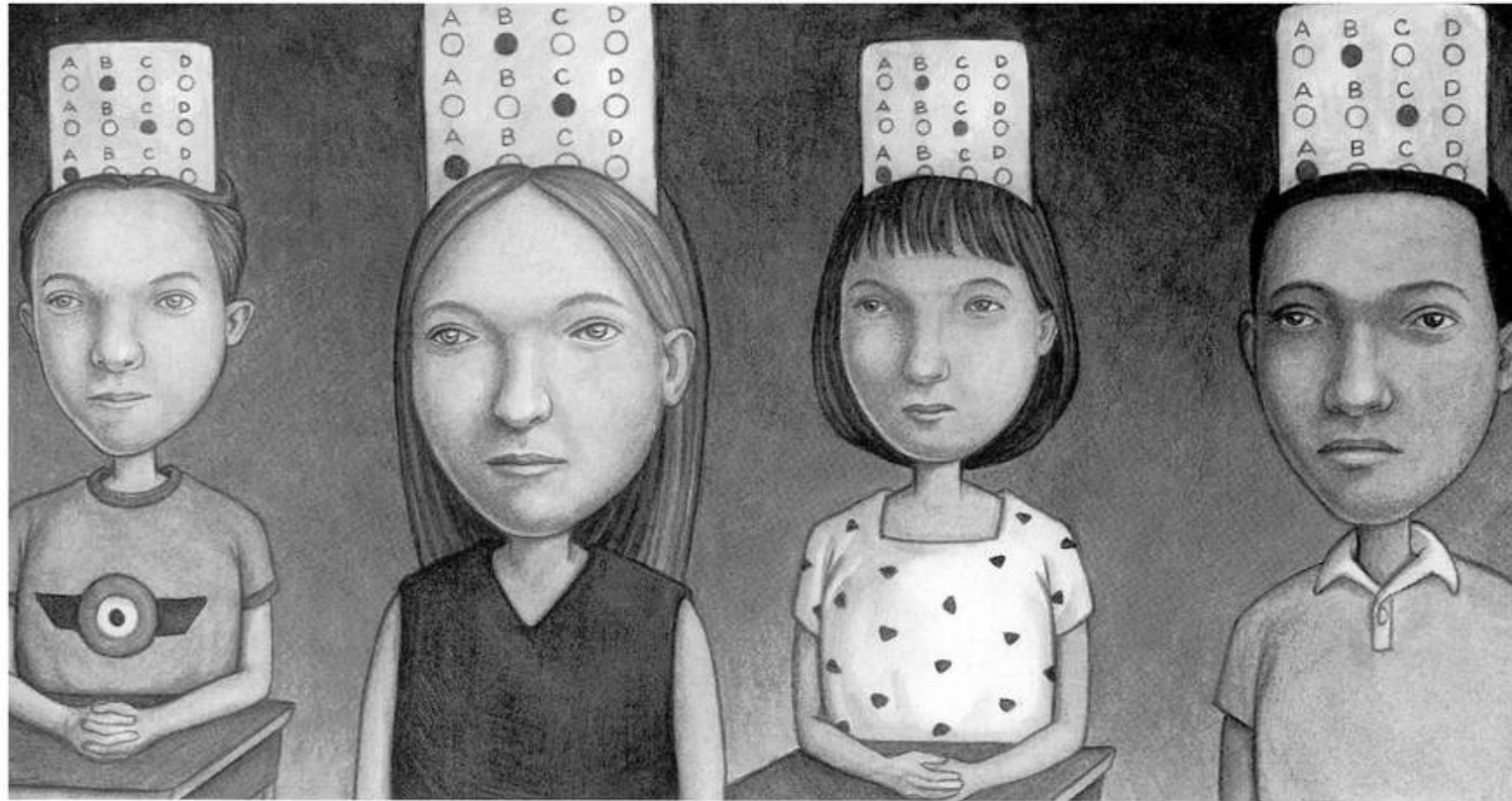
*Of session, no new
Lobbying to do,
The working poor not
Yet left in the cold*

*By men with money,
The day's phone calls made,
New signings scheduled
Up and down the coasts*

*For books she chose as
Publicist so hope
Might make a living
In our midst somehow.*

*When the week's work is
Done two women sing
Their shabbos prayers,
Light cupped in their hands.*

—Greg Miller



EDUCATION

The New Crisis In Education

Who Is Cheating Whom?

Svi Shapiro

Recent evidence on the extent of cheating among students in public schools provides chilling testimony to the current moral climate of education in the United States. A recent survey by the Josephson Institute of Ethics of nearly 21,000 middle and high-school students found that 70 percent of high school students admitted to cheating at least once on an exam in the previous twelve months; 45 percent of these students agreed with the statement, "A person has to lie or cheat in order to succeed." Over a third of the students questioned would be willing to cheat if it would help them get into college. In another survey of high school students (the twenty-ninth "Who's Who Among American High School Students"), 80 percent of students admitted to cheating in order to get to the top of their class. More than half said that they didn't view cheating as a big deal.

Svi Shapiro is director of the Ph.D. program in education and cultural studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has recently edited Strangers in the Land: Pedagogy, Modernity, and Jewish Identity (Peter Lang, 2000).

Such information hardly comes as a surprise to those of us who have been studying and struggling with the effects of the testing mania that has been sweeping the country during the past ten years. Indeed it seems to be the inevitable consequence of the "high stakes" testing in which more and more of a student's life—whether he or she completes courses, is promoted, graduates, gets into college—comes to depend on the results of a standardized test.

In the context of this increasingly dog-eat-dog world of public education, the incidence of professional employees cheating has also increased. In the past two years schools in New York, Texas, Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Kentucky, and Maryland have investigated reports of improper or illegal attempts by teachers, principals and other administrators to raise test scores. In Texas a deputy superintendent was indicted on sixteen counts of criminal tampering after central administrators and principals boosted scores by changing the identification numbers of students whose failing grades they did not want counted. In New York City cheating was so pervasive that it led to the resignation of a school superintendent.

Why are adults cheating? High stakes testing means that poor test scores put teachers' and administrators' jobs on the line. Employment, salary increases, and promotions are more and more dependent on demonstrating rising scores. The one-size-fits-all approach to testing ignores the way that income and economic circumstance interact with achievement; it means that those who work in low-income schools are at an enormous disadvantage in producing the kinds of test results that can secure their jobs.

While the advocates of testing see it as the means to improve the quality of education in this country, this cheating epidemic reveals something quite different. Far from increasing the depth and extent of what students know or understand, the emphasis on tests produces a far more instrumental and manipulative view of education among both students and educators. For students, educational chatter about knowledge and understanding is just "sweet talk," little related to the daily grind of schooling and the preoccupation with winning, losing, and getting ahead. Education becomes increasingly a high stakes game in which success is defined almost entirely by one's ability to test well through whatever means necessary. For educators, the extraordinary extent and pervasiveness of standardized tests in American schools puts a choke hold on all other educational goals and purposes. In this environment education becomes the intellectually thin process of memorization and regurgitation of predigested information. Classroom instruction is more and more given over to "test prep." In this context schools offer little that can be taken as a source of personal meaning, as a stimulus to critical thought, or as the catalyst for imaginative interpretation of human experience.

The intellectual destruction caused by the current situation is, I believe, becoming clearer and more widely recognized. But perhaps, as the surveys on cheating show, what is even more worrying are its moral consequences. The obsessive focus on testing and the invidious comparisons testing generates among students, teachers, and schools become the catalysts for a corrosive morality in which nothing really matters aside from getting the desired results. When children see adults casting aside educational goals—even cheating themselves—to produce high test scores, they are in danger of losing whatever moral compass they have.

Our students are learning well the values and priorities of our culture. The need to demonstrate immediate success in school through the rise of test scores mirrors the drive to show rapid gains in company profits or stock values. In a society where the Dow and the NASDAQ are watched compulsively as the vital signs of individual and social well-being and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* is the number one show on TV, what parents and legislators expect from teachers and principals is not much different from what greedy and insatiable stockholders expect from managers and workers. Not surprisingly, the human and ethical consequences of such



thinking are devastating. In the workplace, the drive for immediate gains leads to indifference toward the communal and human effects of lay-offs, the violation of environmental standards, and the brutality of inhuman working conditions. In our schools, indifference to the price paid for success corrupts the educational process. Initiatives like that of California Governor Gray Davis, who will pay teachers \$150 for each test score in their class that goes up, are all but certain to produce consequences that are intellectually and ethically degrading.

Recently, a student in one of my classes asked me how we could abolish cheating. Somewhat flippantly I answered that we might start by calling acts of cheating "helping" instead. Humor aside, my intent here was to try to have my students think about how certain human acts are classified and designated. What is the "deep structure" of cheating in social and cultural terms? In many ways one can see it as the product of both capitalist and masculinist values and attitudes. Certainly, as the feminist writer Elizabeth Dodson Gray has pointed out, the typical school classroom in America aims to construct a "culture of separated desks"—a place where students are expected to pursue their tasks in isolation from their peers. School, she notes, is the place that values the long-distance runner, the individual who, in constant competition or comparison with his or her peers, is able to distinguish herself from the others. He or she is the one who is able to succeed at the constant process of doing the required work, performing well or adequately in the endless round of tests and examinations, and accumulating the points and grades that have come to represent education. Gray describes the process this way:

We conceptualize an education as a solitary and autonomous experience. To sit down as a first-grader at a separated desk in one of our school systems is as solitary an experience as for a runner in a track event to put his or her feet in the blocks and take their mark. We are to start running our own course, start learning our letters and math by ourselves, start competing with others for grades, start better jobs in the real world that come after the educational world, the real world of adulthood.

Of course, she continues to note, this educational model allows for little or no cooperative work. Learning, knowledge, and understanding are viewed as the achievements of individual and autonomous actors. Each of us runs our own course in competition with others and any act of helping or sharing with others is defined as "cheating." It is a process that strongly reinforces what are thought of as typically masculine social values—individualism and self-sufficiency—at the expense of learning that is a shared or collaborative venture. Each person is to look out for their own success, and to jealously guard the pieces of information or knowledge that give them an edge in the zero-sum game of classroom achievement. Even as adults, many of my

students painfully remember the need, as young children, to cover their completed classroom assignments with their hands, either to ensure that others should gain no advantage from their assumed knowledge, or worse, to guard against classmates seeing incomplete or erroneous work. The notion that school is a place that sorts out those who are successful as autonomous, self-sufficient, *separated* individuals is seared into their memories. For these students, looking to others for help often meant risking identifying oneself as incapable, stupid, or a cheat.

It should be clear from this that there is nothing inevitable



about the notion of cheating in the classroom. Cheating is a *social construction* that is the product of a world where children are made into "possessive-individualists," each the sole proprietor of their own learning and knowledge, jealously hoarding what they know or understand in the face of fellow students who are their competitors for the rewards that accrue to those who are successful in the schools' "sorting game." Other, very different models of learning which reward collaborative and cooperative activities are eviscerated by the culture of separated desks that prevails in our schools.

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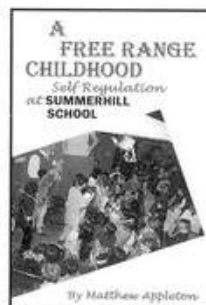
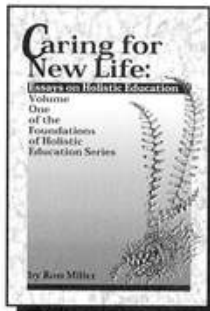
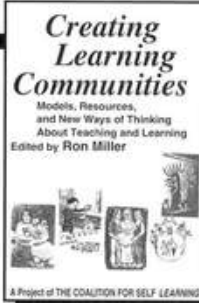
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EDUCATION

Of course the salience of cheating rises as high stakes competitive practices become increasingly central to our schools. As standardized testing increases its grip, so the ethic of winning, getting ahead, and beating out others must more and more pervade the classroom. In this context of high pressure, insecurity, and fear, cheating is the inevitable, if unwanted, stepchild of our actions. Only the morally blind or hypocritical could imagine that cultures that rest on such competitive drivenness would not produce the will to succeed or survive at almost any price. This is as true about the sweatshop working conditions of a global economy with its race to the bottom to find the cheapest workers as it is among schools pitted against each other to find the one that can “perform” most effectively. Of course, as the locus of cheating moves from individual students to individual classes, schools, or even school systems, it is now teachers or school administrators who must demonstrate that they have what it takes to show themselves somehow superior to another.

Unlike the world of Garrison Keillor where everyone can be above average, no such thing is possible in the world of separated desks. Students, classes, and schools must be judged and ranked in a hierarchy of achievement. It is probably not too surprising to find that cheating across



classes and schools is more pronounced in the places where children of the poor receive their education. Despite its promise of more educational equity (“everyone will have to meet clear basic standards”), increased testing, in fact, only compounds the misery of disadvantaged urban schools. It becomes a cruel hoax on minority children who are now saddled with more barriers and hurdles to cross in order to graduate. A new report by Linda

McNeil notes, for example, that Ross Perot’s school accountability system, introduced in Texas in the mid-1980s, has led to a precipitous decrease in the proportion of Hispanic and Black youngsters graduating from public schools. Cheating in these circumstances might better be seen as a form of resistance to the way the deck is stacked in schools against poor and minority children.

It seems clear that no set of human relationships—whether on an intimate or macro-level—can hope to survive without honesty in our language and behavior. Good faith is surely a starting point for any sustainable human connection. Without its presence, our interactions rapidly degenerate into the most sordid and venal behavior. Yet we must also face the fact that dishonesty itself may be a reasonable, if not acceptable, response to circumstances that are corrupt and illegitimate. This, it seems to be, is what is happening in our schools. We are building a system so filled with irrationality and unfairness that cheating is becoming a predictable response.

The current cheating scandals thus might also encourage us as a culture to reflect more seriously on what we are doing to our kids and to the adults who work with them, and might lead us to a very different vision of education. Instead of the deadening grind of memorizing disconnected information we can imagine an education which bears some relationship to the concerns, interests, and dreams of students. In place of the “authority” of bland textbooks and the tyranny of “test prep” materials, we can instead advocate for classroom practices that encourage a critical questioning of the stories that construct the reality of our identities and our world. Such a vision would replace the image of students spending countless hours filling in the bubbles of their test sheets with that of a classroom alive with the dialogue of animated and diverse voices looking, not for the “correct answer,” but for answers nourished by imagination and the insights of lived experience. Finally, with such a vision, we would be able to imagine a classroom in which learning and success are not governed by the moral economy of the bell curve. Instead, knowledge would be understood as the product of the shared and cooperative efforts of human beings. Such knowledge would not be a commodity with which we leverage our individual success, but an important human resource through which, together, young people might seek to understand their world and construct a meaningful human existence. □

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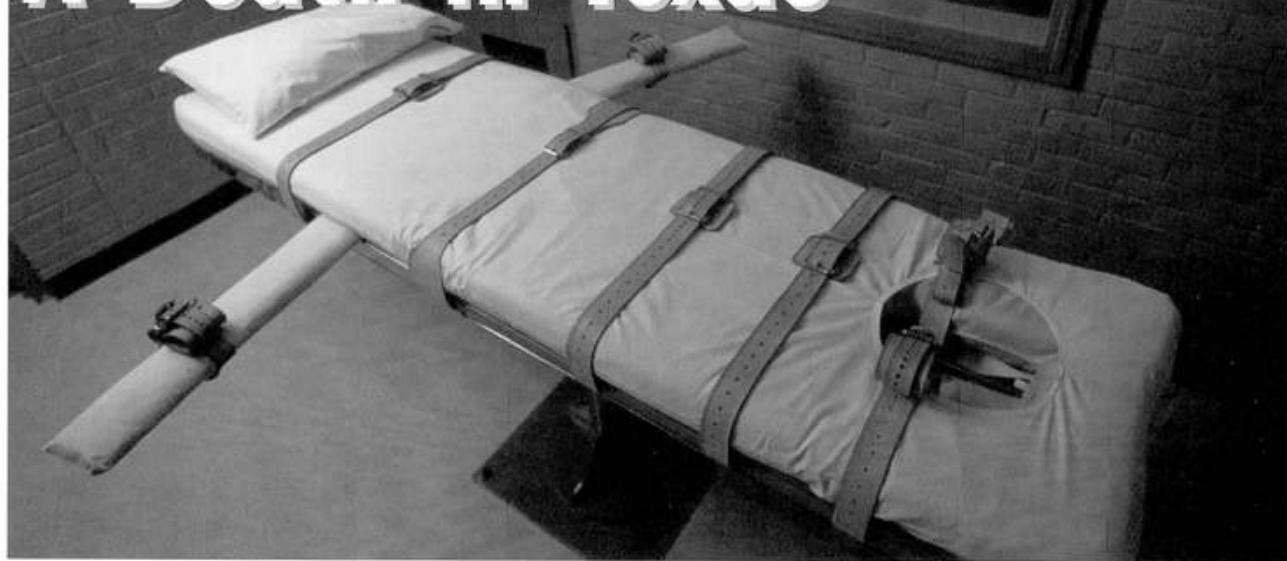
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A Death in Texas



Steve Earle

“Hey, man.” Jonathan Wayne Nobles grins at me through inch-thick wire-reinforced glass, hunching over to speak in a deep, resonant voice through the steel grate below. A feeble “What’s up?” is the best I can manage. The visiting area in Ellis One Unit is crowded with other folks who have traveled, in some cases thousands of miles, to visit relatives and correspondents on Texas’s Death Row. They sit at intervals in wooden chairs surrounding a cinder block and steel cage that dominates the center of the room. There are cages within the cage as well, reserved for inmates under disciplinary action and “death watch” status. Falling into the latter category, Jon must squeeze his considerable bulk into one of these phone-booth-sized enclosures.

It’s an awkward moment for both of us. In the ten years we have corresponded we have never met face to face. The occasion is auspicious. Jon and I will spend eight hours a day together for the next three days and then another three days next week. Then, the state of Texas will transport Jon, chained hand and foot, eleven miles to the Walls unit in downtown Huntsville. There he will be pumped full of chemicals that will collapse his lungs and stop his heart forever. This is not a worst-case scenario. It is a certainty. The only action pending in the courts on Jon’s behalf is an unprecedented petition to have Jon’s vital organs harvested and donated for transplant before his execution. The

supposedly “non-violent” lethal injection process literally destroys the lungs and renders all the other organs too toxic for transplantation. Neither Jon nor his attorneys have any faith that their motion will prevail. There is no doubt in my mind (or Jon’s for that matter) that Jonathan Noble has precisely ten days to live. And I, at Jon’s request, will attend the execution as one of his witnesses.

Over the next few days a routine develops. I arrive at Ellis at 8:30 in the morning. We usually spend the first two hours talking about music, politics, religion—subjects that we have covered thoroughly enough in letters over the years to know that we have widely divergent views and tastes. We fill the long awkward silences that seem inevitable in prison visiting areas with trips to the vending machines for soft drinks, candy, and potato chips. I pass Jon’s goodies to the guard on duty through a small opening in the steel mesh.

Inevitably, we move on to life behind bars, drugs, and recovery—topics where we share considerably more common ground. We are both recovering addicts who got clean only when we were locked up. Jon began reading about recovery and attending “twelve step” meetings in prison years ago. I can remember a time, back when I was still using drugs, when the “recovery-speak” that filled his letters made me extremely uncomfortable. Now it is a language that we share—sort of a spiritual shorthand that cuts through the testosterone and affords us a convenient, if uncomfortable, segue to the business at hand.

There are arrangements to be made. If Jon’s body goes unclaimed, as is the case with half of the men executed in Texas, he would be buried in the prison cemetery on the outskirts of Huntsville. Called “Peckerwood Hill” by the

Singer-songwriter Steve Earle works with many death penalty abolition groups including The Journey of Hope. His latest CD, Transcendental Blues, contains the song “Over Yonder (Jonathan’s Song),” written for his friend Jonathan Nobles.

locals, it is lonely space filled with concrete crosses, adorned only with the interred inmates' prison numbers. Those executed by the state are easily identifiable by the "X" preceding their number. There are, however, no names on the stones. Jon doesn't want to wind up there.

Instead, he wants to be buried in Oxford, England—a place he's never seen. One of his pen pals, a British subject called Pam Thomas, has described it to him in her letters. He likes the picture Pam paints of the springtime there, when the bluebells are in bloom. Jon says that Pam is working on permission from the landowner. I, for my part, have a Plan B on the back burner. A Dominican community in Galway, Ireland has offered Jon a final resting place. At some point in the proceedings it dawns on me that I have spent the last hour helping a living, breathing man plan his own burial.

One thing Jon and I don't talk about much is the movement to abolish the death penalty. In fact, Jon is suspicious of abolitionists. We were "introduced" by a pen pal of his and an acquaintance of mine. She had heard that I sometimes corresponded with inmates and asked if she could give Jon my address. I said "sure." Within a month I received my first letter. It was a page and a half long in a beautiful flowing script that made me more than a little jealous. It contained a lot of the usual tough rhetoric and dark humor I had learned to expect in letters from men and women in prison. After several readings I realized that all of the jailhouse small talk was merely a medium, a vehicle for one pertinent piece of information—that Jonathan Wayne Nobles was guilty of the crimes he was charged with.

Jon Nobles was found guilty (almost entirely on the strength of his own confession) of stabbing Kelley Farquar and Mitzi Nalley to death in 1986. He also admitted struggling with and stabbing Ron Ross, Nalley's boyfriend. Ross lost an eye in the attack. Jon never took the stand during his trial. He sat impassively as the guilty verdict was read and, according to newspaper accounts, only flinched slightly when District Judge Bob Jones sentenced him to death.

When Jon arrived at Ellis he quickly alienated all of the guards and most of the inmates. He once broke away from guards while being returned to his cell from the exercise yard and climbed the exposed pipes and bars like an animal, kicking down television sets suspended outside on the bottom tier. Not exactly the way to win friends and influence people in the penitentiary. On another occasion he cut himself with a razor blade, knowing that the guards would have to open his cell to prevent him from bleeding to death. He just wanted to hit one officer before he passed out.

But somehow, somewhere along the line, in what is arguably the most inhumane environment in the "civilized" world, Jonathan Nobles began to change. He became

interested in Catholicism and began to attend Mass. He befriended the Catholic clergy who ministered in the prison system, including members of the Dominican Order of Preachers. He admired the Dominicans so much that he set his sights on becoming one of them. He eventually achieved that goal, becoming a lay member of the order and ministering to his fellow inmates, even standing as godfather at inmate Cliff Boguss's baptism. He later helped officiate at the Mass that was celebrated the night before Boguss' execution.

When I mentioned in a letter that I had found a bag of pot in my oldest son Justin's laundry, Jon suggested that I bring him to Ellis. He believed his word might carry a little more weight than mine, coming from the other side of the razor wire. I was tempted, but in the final analysis I couldn't bring myself to drag my firstborn through the gates of Hell.

I watched this transformation in the letters that I received. There is no doubt in my mind or my heart that the Jonathan Nobles that sat on the other side of the

glass from me in September of 1998 is a different man than the one that the State of Texas sentenced to die almost twelve years ago. The greatest evidence of this fact is the way that Jon is treated by everyone he encounters, inmates and prison officials alike. A prison clerk, displaying obvious, genuine regret, interrupts our visit. She needs Jon to sign some papers. Jon does so and then informs me that the documents allow me to pick up his personal property and distribute it to a list of people detailed in a note that the clerk will hand me on my way out. He winks and says that he has left something special to me. Inmate Richard Bethard on his way down the line to visit with a family member stops to talk and Jon introduces us. Bethard beams, saying that he is one of my biggest fans. The guard patiently waits until the exchange is over before escorting him along to his assigned cubicle. Such socialization during inmate transfer is a clear violation of policy at Ellis, but a lot of the rules have relaxed for Jon. He says that it's like the last week of the school year. I believe that it's more likely that he has earned the genuine respect of everyone at Ellis.

The scene is repeated all afternoon. One visitor is a prison employee, who three years earlier went out and bought the *Dead Man Walking* soundtrack CD so that Jon could hear my contribution, a song called "Ellis Unit One," about a corrections officer suffering a crisis of conscience. There is an elderly woman who has moved to Huntsville from England to be near the twenty-six inmates she corresponds with. She is a recovering alcoholic, and when Jon tells her that I'm in the program she offers to take me to a meeting that night. At this point I could use a meeting so I make a date to meet her at a local church at 7:00. Richard Bethard's codefendant Gene Hathorn stops by. Hathorn, it so happens, is one of my other correspondents at Ellis. "Hey

*I realized that
Jonathan Wayne
Nobles was guilty of
the crimes he was
charged with.*

Jon, I hear you got a date. Is it serious?" Jon visibly stiffens. He and Hathorn were friends once but something happened years ago, something Jon is reluctant to talk about.

"Serious enough that they're going to kill me."

Hathorn moves on without another word. I excuse myself to go to the bathroom. The truth is I simply need a break.

On the way back I run into Father Stephen Walsh, a Franciscan friar from Boston who makes regular trips to Ellis to minister to its Catholic inmates. He will serve as Jonathan's spiritual advisor. In that capacity he will wait with Jon in the holding cell over at the Walls until he's escorted into the death chamber itself and will administer the last rights. Fr. Walsh introduces me to Bishop Carmody, of the East Texas Diocese in Tyler, who like me has been asked to witness on Jonathan's behalf. He is a native of County Kerry, Ireland, but has lived in the States for forty years, twenty of them in Texas. Being a sometime resident of County Galway, a little further up the island's west coast, I find his accent familiar and comforting. He has never witnessed an execution before and admits to being just as scared as I am. "With God's help," he says, "we'll get through this thing together, Stephen."

Every visit ends the same way. A guard gives us a five-minute warning, and Jon hurriedly dictates a list of "things to do" which I must commit to memory, as visitors are not allowed to bring writing instruments and paper into the unit. Then Jon presses his palm against the glass and I mirror his with mine. Jon says, "I love you. I'll see you tomorrow." That is until Wednesday, October 7 rolls around. It's hot and humid, even at 8:00 AM as I thread my rented Lincoln through the drive-thru of a fast food restaurant near my motel. As I pull up to the window, a pretty Hispanic girl in her early twenties takes my money and hands me my breakfast: an egg and sausage taco and a

medium Dr. Pepper. She smiles and says, "You don't recognize me, do you?" Before I can place her myself she volunteers, "I work at Ellis." Of course—behind the reception desk. I received Jon's property from her last night. "I just wanted to say I'm sorry. Jon's a good guy."

I glance at her nametag. "Thank you, Delores. I'll tell him you said that. It will mean a lot." I guess that she is probably around the same age as Mitzi Nalley was when she died.

Over the last few days the other witnesses have arrived in Huntsville. I had dinner the night before with Dona Hucka, Jon's aunt. She is the only blood relative to make the trip. She has driven all night to be here. Pam Thomas is in from England as well. Both are already on the unit when I arrive. Jon's fifth witness is the director of chaplain's services for the Texas Department of Corrections, Rev. Richard Garza. We take turns leaning close to the glass while a prison employee takes Polaroid snapshots of each of us with Jon. The prison provides this service for the nominal fee of eight dollars each.

10:00. There isn't much time left. At 12:30 we will be asked to leave the unit and Jon will be transported to the Walls. In the death chamber we will be able to hear Jon over a speaker in the witness room, but this is our last opportunity to speak to him. Jon divides the remaining time between us more or less equally. I go first. Jon looks tired; the stress is showing for the first time. He leans down and motions me closer. I realize he's assessing my condition as well. "You all right, man?" I tell him that I'm okay. Jon is not convinced.

"I'm worried about you. You don't have be Superman or nothin'. This is insane shit that's goin' on here today. You don't have to be strong for the women if that's what you're thinkin'. They're big girls. You need to take care of yourself."

"I know, Jon. I'm all right. I went to a meeting last night



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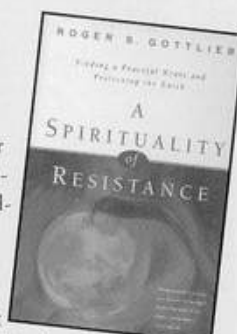
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CRIMINAL JUSTICE

and my manager's here now. I've also got a couple of friends up from Houston who have done this before."

"Witnessed?"

"Yeah." That seemed to make him feel better.

"OK, but if you need to cry, it's all right, go ahead and cry."

"When this is all over I'll cry."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Jon shifts gears suddenly. Back to business. He looks both ways to make sure the guard isn't watching. "Take this." With much effort he pushes a tiny slip of tightly rolled paper, the diameter of a toothpick, through the impossibly tight mesh. Somehow he pulls it off. "That's my daughter's phone number in California. Dona read it to me over the phone last night. They're going to strip search me and I can't take anything to the Walls and I'm afraid I'll forget it. Give it to Father Walsh. Then I'll have it when I make my last phone calls."

I poke the paper in the watch pocket of my Levi's. There were a few other requests. He wants me to call his foster mother and his sister after the execution, and send flowers to two women who worked for the prison who had been kind to him over the years. I promise that I won't forget. "All right, bro. Take care of yourself and your kids. Tell Dona to come back." Hands against the glass one last time.

"I love you, Jonathan."

"I love you too, bro."

Noon. I head back into Huntsville. My manager, Dan Gillis, arrived last night and not a moment too soon. Suddenly, driving has become difficult. It's weird. I'm simply not as coordinated as usual and the world has taken on a kind of surrealistic patina. I need someone to drive for the rest of the day. Also waiting at the hotel are two friends from the abolition movement, Karen Sebung and Ward Larkin. Both have witnessed executions and they have made the trip to support me and assist in any way they can. We talk over arrangements for the transportation and cremation of Jon's body, which, as it turns out, Dan has already taken care of. I make a couple of phone calls and check my messages. Then I shower, shave, and put on a pair of black jeans, a blue short-sleeve shirt and a black linen sport coat.

4:00. We leave the hotel and Dan drives us to Hospitality House, a guest residence operated by the Baptist church for the families of inmates. Dona and Pam, as well as Pam's friend Caroline, are staying there. Bishop Carmody and Rev. Garza are already there when we arrive. We are assembled here for an orientation session to be conducted by Rev. Robert Brazile, the chaplain at the Walls unit. He and the warden will be the only two human beings inside the cham-

ber with Jon when he dies. He goes through the execution process step by step so that "we will know what to expect" and, though it's obvious he speaks with authority, I'm not listening. I can't concentrate so I just nod a lot. It doesn't matter. No matter how well or poorly the witnesses are prepared, they are going to kill Jon anyway.

5:05. Rev. Brazile answers his cell phone and it's Fr. Walsh. He is over at the Walls with Jon and wants the phone number. The one that Jon passed me through the ... oh my God. I can't find it. I was sure that I transferred the slip from my other jeans into my wallet when I changed clothes but it's simply not there. Dan runs to the hotel and checks my room, but it's hopeless; it was tiny. Rev. Brazil relays the bad news back to Fr. Walsh. I feel awful.

5:30. We arrive at the visitors' center across the street from the Walls unit. Karen Sebung accompanies me as far as the waiting area where we witnesses are searched, then Dona and Pam are escorted to another room by a female officer. When they return a large man enters the room and introduces himself as an officer of the prison's Internal Affairs Division. He informs us that if we should feel faint, medical attention is available. He also

warns us that anyone who in any way attempts to disrupt the "process," as he calls it, will be removed from the witness area immediately. Bishop Carmody sits down next to me and asks when I was last in Ireland. I can't remember. Nothing about my body is working right. My feet and hands are cold and the side of my neck is numb. The bishop is telling me a story about his childhood in Kerry but I can't get the thread of it. I am suddenly fixated on the idea that somewhere nearby Ron Ross and Mitzy Nalley's mother are undergoing a similar process. They are waiting for the closure that the State of Texas promised them twelve years ago. I sincerely hope that they get it.

5:55. The corrections officer returns. "Follow me, please." I haul myself to my feet. We walk across the street and through the front door of the old gothic prison administration building. We turn left as soon as we enter and find ourselves in the waiting area of the governor's office, where we are asked to wait once again. There are two reporters already there. The other three members of the press pool, along with the victims' family members, have already been escorted to the witness area, which is divided by a cinder block wall. The procedure has been carefully planned and rehearsed, so that the two sets of witnesses will never come in contact with each other.

6:00. A corrections officer enters the room. I hear him tell the Internal Affairs officer that "they're ready." We walk through a visiting area similar to the one at Ellis, then out into the bright evening sun for a moment and turn left down



*I tell him that
I'm okay. Jon is not
convinced.*

a short sidewalk. Another left and we enter the first door of two set side by side in a small brick building built into the side of the perimeter wall. We enter the tiny room in single file. Father Walsh appears from somewhere inside the death chamber to join us. The reporters enter last and the door is locked behind us. I can hear the reporters scratching on their notepads with their pencils. There is only room for three of us on the front row, Dona, myself, and Pam. Dona grabs my left hand and squeezes it hard and then realizing she may be hurting me, she whispers an apology and relaxes her grip a little. She already has tears in her eyes.

Jon is strapped to a hospital gurney with heavy leather straps across his chest, hips, thighs, ankles, and wrists. His arms are extended at his sides on arm boards like you see in the blood bank and they are wrapped in ace bandages. At either wrist clear plastic tubes protrude from the wrappings, snaking back under the gurney and disappearing through a plastic tube set in a bright blue cinderblock wall. I think I see movement behind the one-way glass mirror on the opposite wall—the executioner getting into position. Jon is smiling at us, his great neck twisted uncomfortably sideways. A microphone suspended from the ceiling hangs a few inches above his head. The speaker above our heads crackles to life and Jon speaks, craning his head around to see the victims' witnesses in the room next door.

"I know some of you won't believe me, but I am truly sorry for what I have done. I wish that could undo what happened back then and bring back your loved ones but I can't." Jon begins to sob as he addresses Mitzi Nalley's mother. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I wish I could bring her back to you. And Ron ... I took so much from you. I'm sorry. I know you probably don't want my love, but you have it."

Turning to me he seems to regain his composure, somewhat. He even manages to smile again. "Steve, I can't believe that I had to go through all this to see you in a suit coat. Hey man, don't worry about the phone number, bro. You've done so much. I love you. Dona, thank you for being here. I know it was hard for you. I love you. Pam, thank you for coming from so far away. Thanks for all you have done. I love you. Bishop Carmody, thank you so much. Rev. Garza and you, Father Walsh, I love you all. I have something I want to say. It comes from I Corinthians. It goes..." and Jon recites the lengthy piece of scripture that he agonized over for weeks, afraid he would forget when the time came. He remembers every word.

When he finished reciting he took a deep breath and said, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." The warden, recognizing the prearranged signal he and Jon had agreed on, nodded towards the unseen executioner and Jon began to sing.

Silent night/ Holy night ...

He got as far as "mother and child" and suddenly the air exploded from his lungs, making a loud barking noise,

deep and incongruous, like a child with whooping cough—"HUH!!!!" His head pitched forward with such force that his heavy, prison issue glasses flew off his face, bouncing from his chest and falling to the green tile floor below.

And then he didn't move at all—ever again. I actually watched his eyes fix and glaze over, my heart pounding in my chest and Dona squeezing my hand. We could all see that he was gone. Dead men look ... well, dead. Vacant. No longer human. But there was a protocol to be satisfied. The warden checked his watch several times during the longest five minutes of my life. When time was up, he walked across the room and knocked on the door. The doctor entered, his stethoscope's earpieces already in place. He listened first at Jon's neck, then at his chest, then at his side. He shined a small flashlight into Jon's eyes for an instant and then, glancing up at the clock on his way out, intoned, "6:18."

We were ushered out the same way we came, but I don't think any of us are the same people that crossed the street to the prison that day. I know I'm not. I can't help but wonder what happens to the people that work at the Walls, who see this horrific thing happen as often as four times a week. What do they see when they turn out the lights? I can't imagine.

I do know that Jonathan Nobles changed profoundly while he was in prison. I know that the lives of other people who he came in contact with changed as well, including mine. Our criminal justice system isn't known for rehabilitation. I'm not sure that, as a society, we are even interested in that concept anymore. The problem is that most people who go to prison get out one day and walk among us. Given as many people as we lock up, we better learn to rehabilitate someone. I believe Jon might have been able to teach us how. Now we'll never know. □

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INTERVIEW

A CONVERSATION WITH Jesse Ventura

Mark Jacobson and Jack Newfield

Former professional wrestler Jesse “the Body” Ventura surprised the political establishment when, as the Reform Party candidate, he won Minnesota’s 1998 gubernatorial election. Since becoming governor, his plain-spoken blend of libertarian and neo-conservative politics has earned him consistently high ratings in the state. His election indicates to some that third-party candidates may be more viable than the mainstream media suggest.

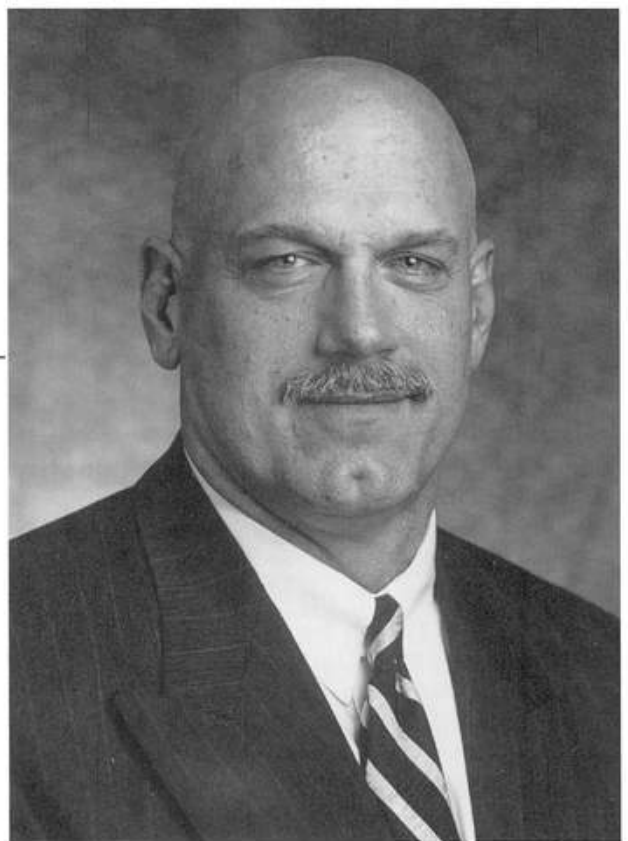
TIKKUN: Is there more acting in wrestling or politics?

VENTURA: I’d say they’re about equal. And at least in wrestling you generally know who the villain or the hero is. In politics you’re not always sure. You can have a hero in front of the camera or in front of the public who might be a very bad villain behind the scenes. With politics you have to deal with “in front” and “behind.” In wrestling it’s mostly just in front of the camera.

TIKKUN: From a practical point of view, do you see a difference between the Democrats and Republicans, the way they act?

VENTURA: Well, I see the Republicans as more outspoken and vicious. The Democrats are more behind-the-scenes, sneaky. The Republicans will blatantly take you on and blatantly alienate themselves from you. Yet behind the scenes they want to align with you. And you look at them and go, “Why do you attack me every time I turn around?” As for the Democrats, well, it could be just the situation here in Minnesota. The last election, the Democrats took a shellacking. And so they were smart enough to realize, “Wait a minute, we can’t sit on our far left wing here. We’ve got to make a conscious movement to the center and we’ve got to make a conscious movement toward this popular governor.” The Republicans seem to have a real ego problem. They won’t make moves. I have a much more difficult time, believe it or not, with the Republicans than I do with the Democrats. And yet I sit fiscally far more with the Republicans than I do the Democrats. Socially, I sit more with the Democrats.

Mark Jacobson, currently a contributing editor at New York Magazine, is the author of two novels: Gojiro and Everyone and No One. 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.



TIKKUN: Do you think it’s a useful thing politically to have a degree of physical courage for political leadership?

VENTURA: I think it can be used to your advantage, certainly. It gives you confidence in yourself and who you are.

TIKKUN: Do you think the absence of physical courage can be a severe liability in leadership?

VENTURA: I don’t know. Courage isn’t just going into battle or things of that nature because anyone who does that is terrified and scared when it happens. It’s a matter of survival. There’s people that have great physical courage, but it doesn’t mean they’re necessarily mentally qualified to do the job.

TIKKUN: Do you think some element of spirituality is a plus in a public leader?

VENTURA: It shouldn’t be. But I don’t believe an outspoken atheist could ever get elected, even though it shouldn’t matter.

TIKKUN: Do you have a spiritual side or streak?

VENTURA: Yes.

TIKKUN: Care to talk about that for a minute?

VENTURA: No, that’s nobody’s business. It has no bearing on how or why I do this job. There’s certain parts of my privacy that I won’t allow people. And just because you’re elected doesn’t mean that the public has a right to be there. We were designed to have a separation of church and state, and that gets very cloudy at times. There should be a distinct separation. And that’s why I believe that an atheist could never get elected.

TIKKUN: What do you think of John McCain’s dustup with the religious right during the primary?

VENTURA: I think he’s entitled to say his opinion. I mean you have influence coming into politics in every direction,

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JESSE VENTURA

not just a religious direction. We just had a major story here in Minnesota that lobbyists spent \$43,000 per legislator. That's more than a legislator's salary. Now if that's not a wake-up call to the public of what is indeed running our government, it ought to be.

TIKKUN: Why is it so difficult to be an independent political figure right now? Is it just the way the system is set up, or the influence of corporations?

VENTURA: No, it's the two parties. They're the evil, because they do everything to destroy the rise of a third party. Look at what they've done now; [candidates have to poll] 15 percent to be in the debates.

TIKKUN: Aren't they both under the influence of the same corporate money element?

VENTURA: The two parties, absolutely. Lobbyists go to both, why would they want to have to do it a third time? They prefer just the two, the norm that they have. And gen-

erally third parties tend to try to get that [corporate] element out of them. So subsequently that corporate element will work with the other two parties to keep the third party movement down.

Third parties are also very destructive to themselves because they always get all the fringe people. You get a lot of wild-eyed fringe characters who gravitate to the third party movement, which then gets lumped in with this type of people. But I see the third party movement today as being very centrist.

TIKKUN: Is that an impossible situation?

VENTURA: No. Because being centrist they eventually have to come over to my position. You have the far left and the far right battling each other, and in order for them to compromise and come to an agreeable position they have to come and sit in my position. And then I can tell the public, "See, that's where I was all along."

Jesse Ventura

Mark Jacobson

The Jesse Ventura narrative is as close to a Preston Sturges movie as modern politics gets these days. Born July 15, 1951 as James Janos in Minneapolis, son of an Army tank destroyer and an Army nurse of Slovak extraction, Ventura, once a radio host and mayor of suburban Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, is the first former wrestler who regularly entered the ring wrapped in a feather boa to become the governor of a state. Running on Ross Perot's Reform Party (which he recently left following an ego clash with the pint-sized founder), Jesse stuck it to the arrogant lethargy of business-as-usual two-party politics—beating the dull "Skip" Humphrey, favorite son of favorite son Hubert, and unbearably slick Republican Norm Coleman.

Minnesota has had thirty-seven governors since the reign of Herbert Sibley (1858–1860), but Ventura, a Navy Seal before he began applying sleeper holds on Hulk Hogan, is the biggest at 6'5", 270 pounds (up from the days when he was, according to his autobiography, "buffed out to 220 pounds of ripped, raw Navy killer"). While most executives manifest their power by sitting behind giant desks, Ventura needs no such ploys. The Body's famous body is his desk, his portable pull of macho rank. This said, it is difficult to accommodate, while sitting amid the dark wood panelling of the 100-year-old statehouse, as children on field trips skim giggling across the buffed marble floors, that this man, looming over you in a black jacket, black turtle neck, black jeans, black cowboy boots, is actually the Governor. Asked what part his outsized physicality plays in his improbable political success, Ventura says, "it has its effective uses."



Indeed, Jesse watchers say Ventura can occasionally be downright, er, scary. "You know," says a capitol regular, "sometimes he gets that look. It can make you nervous about being alone in the room with him, especially if there's tension." Beyond this, there is dark gossip that he is suffering residual effects of the steroids he was urged to take while wrestling—that he could "blow" at any time.

Nonetheless, most Minnesota politicians find Ventura easy to work with. "I've had no problem with Jesse. I find him very smart and willing to compromise. He's given me unprecedented non-interference," says State Attorney General Mike Hatch, a Democrat.

Others feel the "non-interference" is excessive. "A lot of times you'll call up there," says a local political operative, "and nobody will be there. Ventura is out doing a book tour. He's on Chris Matthews. He's getting his life story made into a Broadway play. It isn't a good situation because it takes the executive branch out of the system of checks and balances. It is like a cult of personality."

Yet underneath it all, Ventura remains charmingly awe-struck at the serendipity that put him in the statehouse. In this way, he may be as unique a politician as he claims to be. Whether Ventura's position affirms that wacko sector of the American Dream which says that on any given day a wrestler can be elected over a son of privilege, or is just more proof that America has gone to Hell in an MTV/Slamboree handbasket, only time can tell. But, opposed to the usual pap we're supposed to swallow, The Body at least engages the heart and mind. □

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TIKKUN: Do you think that individualism in America is really a thing of the past?

VENTURA: I think in regular, everyday life there's still a lot of room for individualism. In politics it's more difficult. I face it everyday in the fact that I don't have this big piece of political machinery to back me up. I'm now the most veto-overridden governor in Minnesota history; I wear that as a badge of honor, because it shows that I didn't have the political machinery over there to automatically rubber stamp a veto of mine and save me the supposed "embarrassment" of being overridden. But being overridden on a veto doesn't embarrass me. To me, that's the way the system's set up. I did my job; if they need to override it, that's their prerogative.

TIKKUN: Do you think the upcoming election represents a failure of the American political system? Are these the two blandest possible candidates?

VENTURA: I would classify them as second to third generation career politicians.

TIKKUN: What would happen if Colin Powell and you had run?

VENTURA: I have no doubt in my mind we would've won. I will even tell you, and I'm not saying this to be bragging, I believe that I could have entered the race in July and still won it. And that's what scares me: the fact that if I did, I would. And I don't want that job. I don't want the responsibility of it.

TIKKUN: Ever or now?

VENTURA: Ever. The president came here and I saw the bubble that he lives under. I couldn't bring myself to live in that bubble. I mean, for him to go to the Dairy Queen they have to block off streets. I'll be forty-nine this summer, and I would never want to give up my freedom. Because, see, the president's really an oxymoron; he's the leader of the free world, but he himself has no freedom. He's in a prison. It's a luxurious prison, don't get me wrong, but it is still, indeed, prison. I can get in a car and drive to the lake this weekend. My security doesn't like it, but I can. But the president of the United States can't take that liberty. And that's why I didn't want it, and I believe that's probably why General Powell didn't want it. I hate to speak on the general's behalf, because he has his own viewpoints, but I kind of get the feeling that that's one of the reasons that he didn't. He got his freedom finally after a long career in the military, and I think he's really enjoying his freedom and wouldn't want to subject himself to that.

TIKKUN: There seems to be a deep yearning in the country for a centrist, non-political leader, whether it's you, Powell, or the way McCain appeared in the primaries. It feels like there's a base of 40 percent of the country that would jump.

VENTURA: It's more than that. I'll tell you why it's more than that. The voter turnout is dropping and that's a wake-up call that tells you the public is frustrated. The public believes what they're gonna get is what they're gonna get and they

don't have a say-so. And it's going to continue. I think this is going to be one of the lowest voter turnouts.

TIKKUN: Do you feel a kind of social or moral responsibility to do something about that? And what can you do?

VENTURA: You can only speak out on it. When I was at the White House last time for the China thing with Dr. Kissinger and President Carter, President Ford and all that, we went up to meet the press afterwards. When I was done speaking to the press, a lady came up to me on the side, some correspondent who's been there a long, long time.

And she said, "I've been here thirty-two years and you have to run for president." And I looked at her and said, "No, I don't. It's my choice." And she said, "No, your country's calling for you. You have to do it." I said, "Well, I'm as patriotic as anyone but I've already given six years in the military, four years as a mayor. It'll be four years as a governor. That's a total of fourteen years of public service. I don't have to do anything." But I understood

what she was saying. I think a lot of it is coming out with the young people because they have been brought up now with computers, television, and all this stuff. And I think they see through—call it the masquerade—of what politics has evolved to. They've seen through the "Well, they're going to tell us what we want to hear to get elected."

TIKKUN: What do you want to be doing in four years?

VENTURA: I don't know. I'm living this job very much day-to-day. I mean with a degree, certainly, of what I want to accomplish. I'm not just one day out. We certainly look to the end of the term.

TIKKUN: You've been keeping a national profile going.

VENTURA: I'm just doing what I feel I have to do. See, the difference between me and the career politician is that I make no bones about making money. I'm a capitalist. And if I turn something into a money-making venture, so what? It's not illegal, what I'm doing. You know what I find real ironic is all the grief that I took over writing my book while I was still in office. I took a ton of it, right? Yet, Senator McCain came here on a book tour. He's still in office and there wasn't a peep out of the media. The career politician will do it under the table or he'll do it after. I'm out front and forward.

TIKKUN: Tell us your favorite musical groups; your favorite movies.

VENTURA: Well, it's difficult to pick because music is so much what your mood is on a particular day. My favorite bands would be Led Zeppelin, Rolling Stones, Warren Zevon, you know I like all good solid rock bands; Bob Seeger for his point in time was very good. The Beatles—naturally, I think artistically and lyric-wise there's probably none better than the Beatles. I think for show and barroom style the Rolling Stones would kill 'em in a live performance. Bob

(continued on page 45)

Don't Vote Lesser Evil Politics!

Michael Lerner

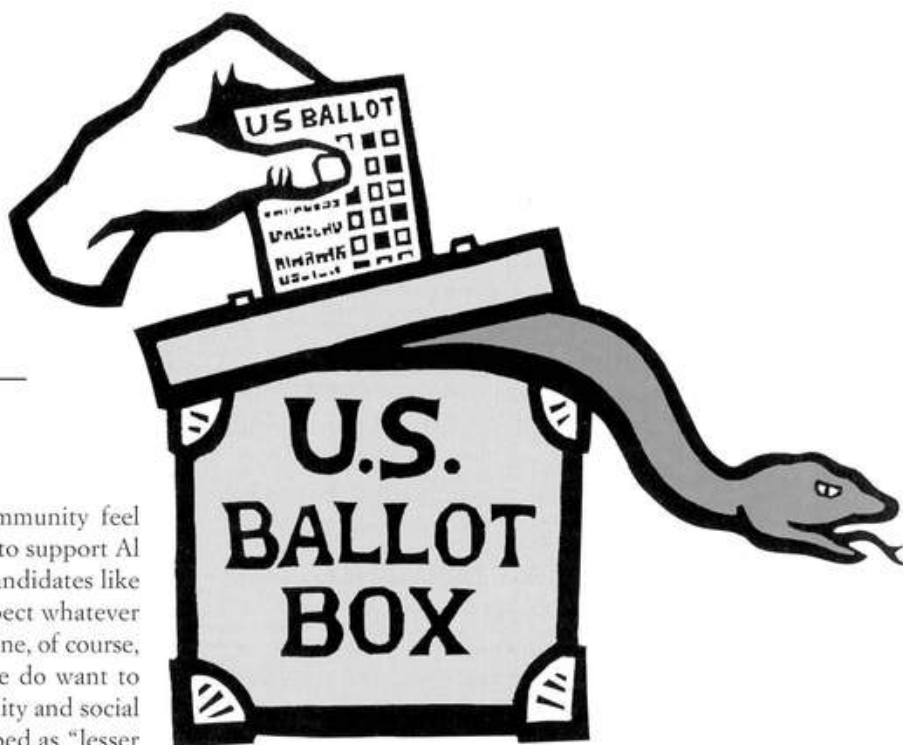
I know that many people in our community feel divided in themselves about whether to support Al Gore or one of the various protest candidates like Ralph Nader or John Hagelin. I respect whatever position you take. And as a non-profit magazine, of course, we do not ever endorse candidates. But we do want to encourage a national debate about the morality and social consequences of what could best be described as "lesser evilism" in politics.

Many people talk about the presidential elections of 2000 with a mixture of indifference, contempt, and despair. They tell us that they are not excited about voting for Al Gore given their perception of his slavish subordination to corporate interests, his cheerleading for the military, his flip-flops and lack of a moral center, and his betrayal of environmental causes for the sake of political self-interest. Yet, although they do not feel that Gore represents their own worldview or that he is likely to fight for most of the things they believe in, they nevertheless feel that they have no alternative: in their eyes, George W. Bush is even worse and would enact policies and make appointments which are dangerous and must be avoided.

Many people on the Right feel a similar tension supporting Bush.

When we challenge lesser evilism we are not addressing or critiquing those who feel that Gore or Bush do in fact represent them. They should enthusiastically support their candidate. By "lesser evilism" we refer to the proposition that you must choose the candidate most likely to win who will do the least harm, rather than choosing the candidate who comes closest to expressing your own views and attitudes.

You are choosing the lesser evil if some candidate who the media and the polls indicate has little chance to win actually represents your own views or comes very close to them on many issues (for example, Ralph Nader or John Hagelin or David McReynold) but you don't vote for that candidate because the media has convinced you that he can't win and



*You shouldn't throw
your vote away by
authorizing someone
you don't believe in
to represent you.*

you are scared of what will happen if the worse of the two "front runners" does win.

So let me make it clear that if, for example, you think that Al Gore or George W. Bush comes closer to actually representing your ideas and attitudes in this campaign than any of the "minority candidates," nothing in what I'm writing here is meant to be an argument against that conclusion. But if that is not the case, then I want to present some arguments for

why you shouldn't throw your vote away by authorizing someone you don't believe in to represent you:

1. Moral and spiritual corruption of our souls.

When we become used to accepting the lesser evil, we begin to give our stamp of approval to a social reality that we in fact deplore. This is a slippery slope that leads us to accommodate ourselves to moral corruption in other aspects of our lives. Many people perceive that the "reality" of our economic marketplace is that people are willing to cheat and hurt others and make environmentally destructive or morally insensitive choices to advance themselves. The more you teach people to make their major electoral choices on the basis of accommodating a reality that they detest, the more likely they are to similarly accommodate themselves to morally insensitive ways of acting in the world of work and in other aspects of daily life.

Powerlessness corrupts. To the extent that we come to believe we have no alternative but to accept the lesser evil, we lose the inner quality of soul that makes it possible to fight for anything against the odds. In short, we become



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idolaters, bowing to reality rather than asking how we can change reality. And that inevitably leads us to accommodate evil everywhere. We may take a cynical attitude toward the current world, but as long as we've adopted the attitude that we can't really fight it and must accept its terms, we have cast our vote in favor of keeping what is.

Not surprisingly, as people become used to making this choice in daily life, they become most angry not at the forces of evil to which they accommodate, but at those who retain their commitment to fight for their highest ideals.

2. Lesser evilism disempowers liberal and progressive forces.

Because liberals and progressives consistently accept the lesser evil argument, the Democratic Party focuses all of its energy on accommodating those who might otherwise vote Republican. Instead of imagining democratic politics as a counterweight to the incredible power of corporations, the logic of lesser evilism turns the Democratic Party into a second wing of the pro-corporate Property Party, ensuring that the major difference between Gore and Bush will be how quickly their knees hit the floor when called upon by their corporate funders.

3. You don't know who can win.

As Jesse Ventura showed in the last election, calculations about who is likely to win can be deeply mistaken. The two leading candidates are shoo-ins because the corporate-dominated media gives them disproportionate time to present their case to us, tells us that anyone who doesn't share the dominant corporate agenda is marginal, and tells us that no one else can be considered a realistic alternative. By not voting your conscience, you are giving the media the justification it seeks to ignore significant alternative views. If your own views get marginalized in future national debate, the media can say "the one time you were consulted—the election booth—you indicated that the issues that you cared about were those that were articulated by your candidate, so why should we give attention to views that have been demonstrated to be so marginal?" You become the author of your own marginalization.

4. You don't know the consequences of your lesser evil winning.

Our country may have lunged further to the right under Bill Clinton and the right-wing Congress elected in reaction to him than it would have under Bush and a Democratic Congress elected to constrain him. Better to vote your conscience than your calculations, since outcomes can be very uncertain.

A good friend of mine was deeply angry at me in 1998 when I questioned his lesser evil choice of voting for Gray Davis for governor of California. Though on most issues there was little difference between Davis and his opponent, my friend assured me that Davis would make a big difference when it came to appointing better judges than his opponent. For the sake of those facing the criminal justice system, I was told, we must vote for Davis.

As it turned out, Davis has become one of the most rabid "law and order" governors the state has seen for many decades. Prisoners' rights have deteriorated and Davis has demanded that judges who do not share his view of tough sentencing resign their judicial positions. Our Democratic legislature would have made a powerful counterweight to measures of this sort had they come from a Republican, but they have been less energetic in opposing the excesses of a governor of their own party. My friend now admits that he was snookered by fears of lesser evilism.

And this happens over and over and over again.

In the Clinton years, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased and the social supports for the poor have decreased. The dominant discourse in our society has become "How do I get rich?" rather than "How do we create a better world together?" This reality was created because in 1976 and then again in 1992 the Democrats selected as their candidate for the presidency men who represented their most pro-corporate wing, knowing that the rest of us would go along with this choice.

But didn't Clinton (some will argue) go in the direction he did because of the Republican ascendancy in Congress? No.

That Republican ascendancy was a consequence of Clinton himself abandoning the idealism he momentarily articulated during the 1992 elections, and instead articulating very similar values to those of the Republicans. I know the dominant media story: Clinton was too liberal and visionary in his first two years in office. For those of us who were there in the heart of the administration's battles, however, the reality was just the opposite: Clinton's health care proposal failed because the protections he put in to satisfy the medical profiteers and insurance industry turned what could have been a clear "single payer" plan like the one that operates in Canada today into a crazy bureaucratic maze which excited nobody.

The story would have been very different in 1994 had Clinton fought a valiant fight for a single payer health care plan and made his commitment to universal health care the central issue of the 1994 congressional election. Had Clinton stood for something clear and mobilized support for that vision, it is unlikely that Republicans would have become the majority party in Congress.

On the other hand, had Bush been reelected in 1992, the mood of the country would likely have led to a continued dominance of Democrats in Congress, and a Democratic

Congress could have blocked the kind of dismantling of the public sector which actually took place in the 1990s, presided over by a Democratic president. The "corporate interest uber alles" mentality of the 1990s might have faced greater restraints in a society with a Republican president countered by a Democratic Congress than by a corporate-cheerleading Democrat (an assessment shared by many on Wall Street who have found themselves unrestrainedly filling the coffers of the Democrats).

Similarly, Bush might have been better for the Jews. It has been the contention of this magazine that it is in the best interest of the Jewish people and of Judaism to have an Israel which has ended its oppression of the Palestinian people. George Bush stood up to Israel's right wing in 1991 and refused to go along with guarantees of loans that Israel sought to facilitate the influx of Soviet Jews. He made the loan guarantee contingent on a halt in West Bank construction. That remarkable act of political courage, in the face of outrage by establishment Jewry (who slavishly subordinated themselves to Israeli Prime Minister Shamir's policies), caused a political shift in Israel and contributed to the electoral victory of Yitzhak Rabin in 1992.

The Clinton/Gore team has never been willing to pressure Israel toward peace. As a result, in the ensuing years the number of West Bank settlers has increased, and the Oslo accord was not fully implemented. Al Gore, whose closest advisor on these issues is the rabidly anti-Palestinian Martin Peretz (the owner and chief ideologue of the *New Republic*), is likely to be even less willing to pressure Israel toward the kinds of steps which could lead to real reconciliation with the Palestinian people. (See David Biale's review in this issue of *TIKKUN* of a recently published *New Republic* book by Yoram Hazony to see just how wild the

Peretz crowd is and then try to imagine them shaping American policy on Israel.)

The general point is this: don't be so sure that you know the consequences of voting for your candidate and whether they will in fact turn out to be the lesser evil. There are moments in history where the differences are so great that I would suspend this argument (e.g., if we were facing a Hitler). Some might even argue that lesser evilism is justified during elections like that of 1980, between Reagan and Carter, where the immediate outcome is so lastingly destructive as to outweigh all other considerations.

But look at 1968; even the election of Richard Nixon looks less clear in retrospect. Nixon in office was mean and repressive (and he personally supervised the federal indictment against me for organizing anti-war demonstrations, an indictment which led to my imprisonment for "contempt of court," caused me to be fired from my teaching job at the University of Washington, and made it impossible for me to get other academic employment). Yet it was Nixon who ended the policy, upheld under the Democrats, of demonizing China (a policy which provided the intellectual foundation for the war in Vietnam); it was Nixon who helped create the Occupational Safety and Health Agency; and it was Nixon who helped push the first environmental laws (which have been significantly weakened subsequently, including under the Clinton administration). The configuration of political forces restraining a Republican president sometimes can lead them to take more progressive steps than certain kinds of Democrats who feel the need to placate their Right.



Create a Public Forum on Lesser Evilism in Your Community

Many people will be struggling with these issues right up to the date of the election. We want to encourage you to form a *TIKKUN* salon in your own community, bring people together to read this editorial and the responses we've gathered to it, and then engage in a full discussion of the issues.

You can invite people to your home, or, if you can, get your church, synagogue, union, college or university to let you hold a *TIKKUN* salon there and publicize it to the community. Ask people to bring food for a vegetarian potluck and create an atmosphere of safety by insisting that people speak respectfully to each other, no matter how emotionally charged these issues are for them. Pick an evening or a weekend date close to the election, and publicize it in as many ways as you can.

And then prepare a topic for the next *TIKKUN* salon (e.g., a discussion about the Middle East peace process or about the politics of cancer, both of which will be discussed in the November issue of the magazine) and announce the topic,

date, and place. You'll find that you are doing a real service for people by facilitating this kind of gathering, because as our society has grown increasingly fragmented and privatized there are very few places where people can feel safe discussing these kinds of issues in a way that gets beyond shouting at one's own television in frustration and anger. So your effort to bring people together to continue the discussion we are starting here is an act of *tikkun*, of healing and repair.

Keep us informed—let us know who came (please get a list of names, addresses, and emails) and who might be open to subscribing to the magazine, reading *Spirit Matters*, or in other ways becoming involved with the *TIKKUN* community. Send us reports on what transpired in these meetings—and we will try to put some of these reports on our website at www.tikkun.org or on our list serve (if you are not on it, sign up by sending an email to: Tikkun-request@list.best.com. In the body of your note write the word "subscribe" in lower case, followed by your email address).



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And don't forget the potential impact on the entire public discourse of having a powerful third party enter the political arena. Congressional Democrats who largely played "dead" rather than confront Ronald Reagan might be far more likely to constrain a Republican president like Bush (for example, blocking any rabidly "pro-life" appointments to the federal judiciary in the same aggressive way that the Republicans have blocked many of Clinton's nominees) if they feared a growing progressive alternative to their Left. If progressives vote for Gore on lesser evil grounds, eliminating the pressure on Democrats from the Left, and Bush wins anyway, the Democrats are likely to feel overwhelming pressure to give in to Bush's programs and nominees no matter how venal.

5. Lesser evilism weakens faith in democracy.

If people consistently vote for candidates in whom they do not believe, they end up feeling they are without representation, and hence our government itself feels less legitimate. Many stop voting altogether. Others feel dirtied by a process in which they have authorized through their vote the actions of an elected official who, acting in their name, supports policies they find morally and environmentally reprehensible.

6. Lesser evilists ignore how policies get shaped.

Whether it is Supreme Court appointees or legislation, the key factor determining what happens in politics is the relative balance between corporate power and popular mobilization for progressive ideals. Democratic senators could block bad appointees to the Supreme Court and the judiciary, just as conservatives have consistently done, but they feel no pressure to do so as long as they know that they can count on liberals and progressives to always vote for them as the lesser evil. For that same reason, a Democrat might make far more conservative appointments than you'd expect, just to placate the Right.

I do not want to underestimate the legitimacy of progressives' concern about Supreme Court appointees. Ultimately, however, that concern is based on the view that progressives will remain demobilized, and will have to count instead on friendly elites to ensure the outcomes they seek. Why should that be the case? The right wing in the United States has built a mobilized political movement, and it is that movement which led George W. Bush to select right-winger Dick Cheney as his vice-presidential candidate.

Couldn't we learn this lesson from them: if we want to put pressure on politicians to respect our perspectives, the best way is to mobilize mass movements, not to throw away our vote by automatically giving it to politicians who actually don't even share our ideals.

7. Voting for a lesser evil entails abandoning and helping to dispirit those who share your principles.

The next time you look around for allies for some visionary idea or moral cause that inspires you, you will find fewer people ready to take risks, because when they stood up for their ideals at election time you weren't willing to support them. Don't underestimate how much your vote for the lesser evil makes others feel depressed about ever changing anything.

In short, it's not some "other" who is keeping us from getting the world we want, but our own internalized powerlessness and depression—what I describe, in *Spirit Matters*, as a pathogenic belief that no one else will ever really share our values or fight for a better world, so we had better not risk doing so ourselves.

It's true that there are those who share the politics of meaning or spiritual politics perspective who find that none of the candidates, including Nader and Hagelin, share our core notion that the most important task is to "change the bottom line" from materialism and selfishness to a definition of productivity or efficiency that would validate love and caring, awe and wonder as central criteria. With respect to the spiritual transformation we seek, they argue, the differences between Gore and Nader are slight. In that case, the vote for Gore is not much different than a vote for Nader or any of the other candidates, since none of them are even in the same ballpark with us on these issues.

This is the kind of evaluation we don't intend to make one way or the other. Our interest is not in which candidate you choose today, but in how your decision to choose affects the choices we have in the future.

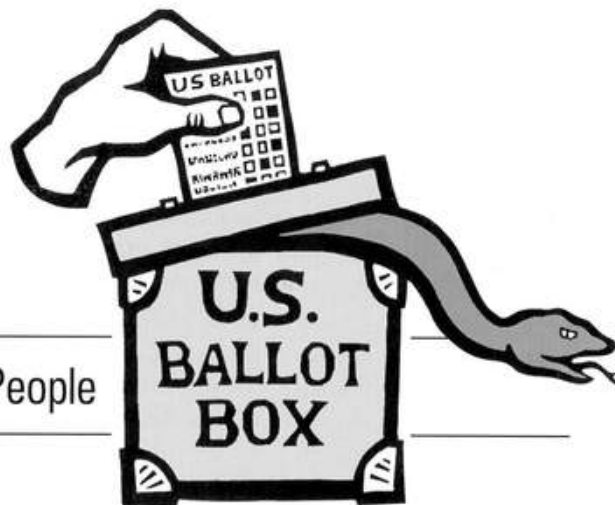
One thing about which we feel fairly certain: we will never win a society we believe in unless we are willing to stand up and fight for it, even if in the short run we lose some of our battles.

I still have great respect for those who believe that this election threatens the dismantling of abortion rights and other important advances of past decades. Though they realize that if Nader gets enough votes, the Green Party will receive federal funding and be able to contend much more seriously in the next election, they don't want to help elect Bush. Some people in this mindset have suggested the following: wait until the day before the election to see what the vote is in your own state. If either of the two leading candidates has a solid lead, you can then vote for a third party candidate without fearing that your vote will undermine the chances of your lesser evil. On the other hand, if it's too close to call in your state (because elections are determined state by state in our electoral system) then you might choose to vote for your lesser evil candidate.

However you vote, we do hope that you will take some time to discuss with others the moral/spiritual issues I've raised here—that discussion might be the most lasting impact of this election. □

Responses to Lerner on Lesser Evil Politics

The Candidates, Abortion & the Court, the People



THE CANDIDATES: AL GORE

Rep. Barney Frank

U.S. Congressman from Massachusetts

Michael Lerner blends two arguments. He begins by arguing that one should vote for the candidate with whom one agrees the most without regard to the consequences. He criticizes those who fail to vote for their ideal candidate "because they are scared of what will happen if some other candidate does win."

But what if the "other candidate" will oppress minorities, or worsen the situation in life of the most vulnerable, whereas the "lesser evil" candidate would try to help these two groups, albeit less completely than you prefer? To say that this is irrelevant is a very stark statement of your right to ignore the consequences of your own actions. Given the perennially imperfect state of democratic politics, it is a license for moral irrelevance.

How can people who are committed to improving the world insist on their right to ignore the results of their actions? Lerner's main defense of this position betrays its logical and factual weakness. He asserts, "To the extent that we come to believe that we have no alternative but to accept the lesser evil, we lose the inner quality of soul that makes it possible to fight for anything against the odds. In short, we become idolaters, bound to reality rather than asking how we can change reality. And that inevitably leads us to accommodate evil everywhere."

No, it doesn't. There is nothing at all inconsistent between deciding to choose the lesser evil at a given point in time, and simultaneously continuing to work so that the next time a choice has to be made, one may be able to choose an even lesser evil, or a greater good. This is in fact the essence of thoughtful, principled participation in politics.

Lerner is simply wrong to suggest that the committed liberals who are working hard to elect Al Gore are somehow deficient in our commitment also to changing American political reality. It is precisely those of us who work hardest at "changing reality" who disagree most vehemently with the argument that we should ignore it when

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election time comes. Take the example of Jesse Jackson, who, unlike Ralph Nader, has chosen to work with great force to improve the Democratic Party. Does Lerner seriously argue that by working hard for Al Gore, Jesse Jackson is "losing the inner quality of soul that makes it possible to fight for anything against the odds."

It is not simply liberal Democratic politicians who are making this fight. The leading advocates for gay and lesbian rights, the right of women to have abortions without gov-

ernmental permission, and the right of society to regulate gun ownership in the interest of public safety all strongly support Al Gore over George W. Bush. None of us think Al Gore perfect. All of us have been working before this year to improve our society and will continue to work very hard for that afterwards. Neither empirically nor logically does it make sense to argue that those of us who will be supporting Al Gore in part because we are "scared of what will happen if ... [George Bush] does win" have in any way been corrupted

or lost our willingness or ability to fight for a reality that will mean better choices the next time around.

As a morally serious man committed to fighting for social justice, Lerner does not seem comfortable with his assertion that we should vote for the ideal candidate without regard to the consequences, so he spends most of his essay in an effort to show that liberal values will not be worse off if George Bush wins. It is to his credit that he realizes that he cannot convincingly make the case for helping Ralph Nader unless he shows that a resulting win for Bush will not damage liberal values. But the case cannot be made and Mr. Lerner's effort is an example of polemical necessity being the mother of intellectual invention.

Among the consequences of a Bush win are those that have convinced the Human Rights Campaign, the National Abortion Rights Action League, Sarah Brady, and others to be passionately committed to a Gore victory.

It is not the case that Gore is the lesser evil. There are two aspects to the Gore versus Nader debate. On economic issues, Nader is in many respects better than Gore. But Gore is significantly better than Bush, and since one or the other



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of them will win, I believe that support for raising the minimum wage, protecting Social Security, having a real prescription drug program for older people through Medicare, and blocking large tax cuts for the wealthy are reasons to vote for Gore. And with regard to abortion, gun control, and gay rights, Gore is not only far better than Bush, he is far superior to Nader, who has simply ignored these issues throughout his distinguished career.

These issues are especially relevant to the weakest part of the "it makes no difference" view—the Supreme Court. It would be honest for Nader and his supporters to argue that their dislike of Al Gore and the current state of the Democratic Party is so great that they are prepared to live with Supreme Court appointments that will move that institution significantly to the Right. It is completely inaccurate to argue that it really won't make any difference whether Gore or Bush makes Supreme Court appointments over the next four or eight years.

Bill Clinton's two appointments, Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, have been solid supporters of the rights of women to choose abortions and of the rights of gay and lesbian people to be free from discrimination. On gay and lesbian rights, the Court is now five to four on the negative side; on abortion rights it is five to four positive. No one seriously believes that the Supreme Court appointments to be made over the next four years will have a negligible impact on both of these issues. The age and health of the current justices make it overwhelmingly likely that between two and four appointments will be made by the

next president, and they are likely to be evenly drawn from each of the ideological sides.

One of the great paradoxes that I find in today's debate is the willingness of many on the Left to disregard the views of the people most affected when it comes to their own electoral interests. It is not simply the leading advocates of gun control, gay rights, and abortion who are strongly for Gore. While James Hoffa of the Teamsters has not endorsed Gore, partly because of his own anger at the administration's support for his opponent in the last Teamster elections, and the UAW is also holding out, the rest of the labor movement is enthusiastically for Gore.

Even those industrial unions which are very unhappy with Gore's trade posture understand that there are enormous differences between Gore and Bush on a whole range of economic issues, and they are not prepared to ignore the consequences of a Bush win. Why do Nader and his followers give so little credence to the strong support for Gore from those who have fought hardest on this range of issues? Is Lerner arguing that the Human Rights Campaign, the National Abortion Rights Action League, Handgun Control, and John Sweeney have somehow suffered some "corruption of the soul" and lost their willingness to fight for fundamental change?

Rather, it is the case that as part of the very tough, principled fight they are all engaged in, they understand that a Gore presidency rather than a Bush presidency means important gains for the people and causes they represent. This does not mean that they will, on the day of Al Gore's inauguration, stop fighting. It does mean that they are committed not simply to verbalizing their ideals, but to acting on them in the most effective way possible.

THE CANDIDATES: RALPH NADER

Medea Benjamin

Green Party candidate for U.S. Senate in California

Rebecca Kaplan

Green Party candidate for Oakland City Council

When we surrender our vote to fear rather than hope, we give up on the notion that we can improve the world. Therefore, it is a vital act of faith in our collective power when we use our vote to reflect our hopes and dreams. Hope and faith are pragmatic and can guide our public policy and change the future by opening new options. How will a strong third party ever be built in the United States if people don't vote their beliefs? For example, even if Ralph Nader does not win the presidency this November, if he receives over 5 percent of the popular vote nationwide, the Green Party will qualify for ballot status and matching federal funds in 2004—giving the Greens a chance to run even stronger campaigns in the future.

If I am not for myself who will be for me?

If each of us personally does not take a stand and vote for what we believe in, no one will do it for us. One of the strongest forces of oppression is the force of complacency, the belief that things cannot change. The power of *tikvah*, of hope, is what gives us the will to take action to improve the world. We need to believe, and express with our actions, that we deserve better than the choices offered us by the two-party system. If we vote for those whose positions we know are unethical, we will have no one to speak for our views.

If I am only for myself, what am I?

It is time to stand in solidarity with those who have been abandoned by the two-party system—with advocates for racial justice, with poor people who are getting poorer every day and still lack health care, with labor unions whose rights to organize and collectively bargain have been eroded, with those fighting for gay/lesbian/bi/trans rights. Even if we are not personally suffering from the actions of the two-party duopoly, our work for justice requires us to stand united

with those who are. *Kulanu arevim ze ba'zeb*—our fates are intertwined with one another. We cannot allow a system that oppresses and destroys to stand unchallenged.

If not now, when?

Many people voted for the “lesser of two evils” in 1992 and 1996, hoping that the “lesser” evil would at least preserve some basic principles of justice. Instead we got draconian welfare “reform” laws, long jail sentences for people convicted of nonviolent drug offenses, an anti-gay “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in the military, continued devastation of ecosystems and national forests, increased use of the death penalty, and the World Trade Organization. Is it any wonder that the majority of the American public has given up all hope in the two-party system and quit voting? What are we waiting for? How far are we willing to let the “lesser”

evil go before we refuse, resist, and demand change?

We need to get big money out of politics, using public financing of campaigns and a ban on “soft money” to end corporate control. We must give voters better representation by changing our electoral system from “winner-take-all” to proportional representation—a system used by most of the world’s established democracies. The Green Party is not afraid to say what it stands for, because we believe that millions of us are tired of a government that is simply “of the corporations, by the corporations and for the corporations,” and are ready for positive change. So this November 7, please, vote your hopes, not your fears.



Republican/Democrat Party	Green Party
• Support use of the death penalty.	• Plan to abolish the death penalty.
• Oppose meaningful campaign finance reform. Accept millions of dollars from large corporations—giving those firms influence most people do not have.	• Do not accept corporate funding. Support strong campaign finance reform, public funding, and proportional representation.
• Support the power of trade tribunals (such as the WTO) that can overrule labor, environmental, and consumer protection laws. Support the free movement of capital, but restrict the free movement of labor.	• Oppose undemocratic, anti-union, global trade laws. Support the rights of states and nations to protect workers, the environment, and public health. Support community-based decisions and laws.
• Support insertion of genes from pigs, shellfish, and other animals into fruits and vegetables without public notice, labeling, consent, or safety testing.	• Support eliminating genetic engineering of food, and, in the meantime, mandatory safety testing and labeling. Support organic and family farms.
• Support building more jails, giving longer sentences, mandatory minimum sentencing, and spending billions of dollars in Colombia and elsewhere on a never-ending drug war.	• Support drug-treatment programs, after-school programs, decreasing community tension through poverty alleviation, increasing job opportunities, non-violence training and the decriminalization of youth.
• Oppose the restoration of workers’ rights to organize, bargain, and strike. Fail to protect union contracts when corporations merge or spin-off. Unfairly demonize undocumented workers.	• Support the AFL-CIO’s call for a general amnesty for undocumented workers. Call for repealing the anti-worker Taft-Hartley law and restore the right for all workers to organize, bargain, and strike.

THE CANDIDATES: JOHN HAGELIN

Robert Roth

Press secretary for John Hagelin

I was raised in a very political, very progressive Democratic family in Marin County, California—so much so that there were actually three adults in my life: Mom, Dad, and Adlai Stevenson. Adlai’s picture was everywhere. I even wore a button with his stern face to school in first grade. Those were the days when politics mattered, when people cared, when Democrats and Republicans seemed as different as night and day. No more. Not today. Oh, you may be able to distinguish an Al Gore from a George Bush on a few social issues, but on most sweeping big-ticket items, such as health care, crime, education, energy, environment, agriculture, and defense policies, you would be hard-pressed to show me any difference that would

significantly impact the quality of most Americans’ lives.

That is why I agree so very strongly with Michael Lerner in his essay. I believe that a knee-jerk vote for a Republican or a Democrat as a lesser of two evils is, in fact, a wasted vote. I believe that a principled vote for a third-party or independent candidate who you truly believe in is the only productive one. Can a third party candidate win? Absolutely. Jesse Ventura did. Consider that only about 70 million people—one third of all eligible voters—went to the polls in the last election, and that over 115 million people stayed away. Then you see that the seeds have been sown for a dramatic transformation in the political landscape of this country, perhaps even in this election season. It is a matter of mobilizing those frustrated nonvoters. And for that, the first step is the message in Michael’s column. Vote your conscience. Then your vote really counts.

I must admit that I disappeared from national politics for



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nearly twenty years out of deep dissatisfaction with the two main parties. I returned in 1992 to serve as press secretary for John Hagelin in his presidential campaign with the Natural Law Party. I returned because I felt that John's worldview, his policies, and politics would most quickly fulfill my progressive political ideals.

John is a Harvard-trained quantum physicist and the co-developer of one of the most important theories in modern science: the unified field theory. He has also spent two decades working with members of Congress to introduce foundational reforms in campaign finance, health care, crime prevention, energy, and the environment. As a quantum physicist, John sees the seamless unity at the basis of the world's rich diversity, the interconnectedness of everything and everyone, the natural laws that govern life everywhere—the fertility of the soil, the energy in the sun, the power of the immune system to ward off disease, the cognitive development of the human brain. It is this profound world view that informs all of Hagelin's public policies and programs.

Translated into political-speak, that means:

Creating a true health care system. Over 70 percent of disease is preventable, yet we spend less than one percent on prevention. So, in addition to supporting Medicare coverage of drugs for seniors, John Hagelin supports cost-effective, prevention-oriented health care, proven to prevent disease and save money in the best possible way—by keeping people healthy.

Creating energy self-sufficiency. John will end our dependence on foreign oil—cutting our trade deficit in half—and protect our environment through development of renewable, safe, nonpolluting energy resources such as wind and solar, saving hundreds of billions of dollars in health and environmental costs.

Safeguarding our food supply. John supports sustainable, organic agricultural practices proven to produce high-quality, healthy food without hazardous chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He will mandate the labeling and safety testing of genetically engineered foods, and propose a moratorium on the release of these experimental life forms into the environment until they are proven safe.

Ending special interest control. John supports crucial democratic reforms to restore government accountability to the people, including elimination of PACs and soft money, public sponsorship of election campaigns, and prohibiting lobbying by former public servants.

Foreign policy. Our meddling and invasive foreign policy has fostered ill will throughout the world, making America the principal target of terrorism on earth. John will create an immediate shift in U.S. foreign policy away from interventionism and military aid, towards a more life-supporting policy, offering technical assistance in crucial areas like business, entrepreneurship, education, sustainable agriculture, and environmental technologies. This will create a more prosperous, harmonious, and secure family of nations.

Resolving international conflict. Most conflicts today are fueled by generations-old ethnic and religious tensions that will never be resolved through military intervention or economic embargo alone. Only by reducing built-up social stress does any negotiated settlement—for example, in the Middle East—stand a chance of success. That is why John Hagelin supports field-tested approaches to conflict resolution, which demonstrably lower social stress. This approach would include stress-reducing meditation techniques.

James Madison proclaimed over 220 years ago that the purpose of an election is to have a national conversation. That conversation will never happen today—and the revitalization of our political process will never occur—unless we listen carefully to what America's third-party candidates are saying and then act on what we know in our hearts to be true.

ABORTION AND THE COURT

Evelyn F. Murphy

Former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts

If we listen only to the presidential candidates' canned utterances, crafted by campaign policy wonks and spin-meisters, it is easy to see how Americans become Michael Lerner's "lesser evil" voters. I confess, I barely read their daily exchanges. We all suspect these staged events. An attack does not really reflect a candidate's outrage, but rather his strategy to drive up the opponent's negatives. Arcane policy jargon turns us off; the candidates' posturing offends us. It is easy to become cynical, even to opt out of this presidential election.

For women, that could be devastating. The stakes for women have not been as high since FDR's second election,

after which he got the minimum wage—the financial safety net today for millions of working women—passed. So, let's "cut to the bottom line" as business types like to say.

The next president will likely appoint three, possibly four, U.S. Supreme Court justices. The preservation of a woman's right to make her own decision whether and when to bear children hinges on the appointments of these justices. Both candidates know this. Al Gore says he is "strongly pro-choice." George W. Bush is anti-choice. A sufficient number of sitting justices have signaled their qualms about *Roe v. Wade* that, given the right test case, women's rights to privacy under this opinion could be eroded even today. Given the right appointees, *Roe v. Wade* can be undone altogether.

Unless and until Congress passes legislation which codifies *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court will continue to deter-

mine whether or not women's reproductive rights are guaranteed. The next president appoints judges to federal courts, the stepping stones to the U.S. Supreme Court. Five of the current justices on the Court came from federal benches. Either Al Gore or George W. Bush will shape the composition of the Supreme Court not just during his presidential tenure, but for decades afterwards. The composition of this queue to the Supreme Court is too crucial to women to default to an anti-choice president.

Yet, there is even more at stake for women than the Supreme Court's composition. The next president appoints the attorney general, the nation's chief law enforcer. This person is charged with protecting women's access to clinics throughout the country. An attorney general who shares the president's convictions that a woman has a legal right to clinic services will enforce safety and access; one who does not will not be inclined to direct adequate personnel and financial resources to do so.

The next president also appoints the Food and Drug administrator. This person will decide whether or not American women will have access to mifepristone, a safe, nonsurgical abortifacient which will move abortion away from clinics and into the privacy of a woman's home. For years, women in western Europe have used this drug. Conservatives and anti-choice activists have blocked its approval in America. Gov. Bush's FDA executive would hardly dare to defy his president's policy by approving mifepristone.

Another paramount issue for women, now that so many women work—mainly because we have to—is our paychecks. Look at some of the companies in the last ten years that paid out hundreds of millions of dollars to settle gender discrim-

ination and sexual harassment claims—Lucky Stores, Publix, Home Depot, Merrill Lynch, Smith Barney, Texaco, Mitsubishi, and Ingles. The next president will determine how strongly the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces anti-discrimination laws. Under Presidents Reagan and Bush, the commission was financially dismembered. Its enforcement record was paltry. President Clinton restored its budget

and supported its pursuit of egregious discrimination against women workers. While the number of charges women filed throughout the 1990s remained steady at 25,000 a year (twice the level of the 1980s), EEOC findings of probable cause increased threefold.

Workplace discrimination causes serious, long-lasting financial harm to women. As governor of Texas, George W. Bush has been a friend of business.

He gives no hint he would be tough on the nation's biggest employers, who may also be some of the biggest discriminators. Al Gore, on the other hand, has been outspoken in his support for passage of the Fair Pay Act, which would add more teeth to the enforcement bite of the EEOC. Bigger, fairer paychecks for many women need an EEOC that serves notice that discrimination must stop. Only one candidate seems to understand this issue. That is Al Gore.

For women, paychecks and privacy are on the line in this election, making the choice of candidates one of preference, not protest. For hard-headed, feminist reasons, Al Gore gets my vote.



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ABORTION AND THE COURT

Jamin B. Raskin

Professor of constitutional law at American University's Washington College of Law

As a professor of constitutional law, I confess to experiencing a certain smug vindication when the argument is made that, whatever else might be on their minds, progressives must vote for Gore over Bush "to save the Supreme Court." See how important my field is? See how everything rises and falls on the membership of the Court? See how easy it is to invoke the Constitution—which never mentions "the two-party system"—to restore the sanctity of our political duopoly?

But the facile conceit of this sensation does not last very long. To begin with, the whole context of this sentiment is wrong because there is very little to "save." From *Dred Scott*

to *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Buckley v. Valeo* to *Shaw v. Reno*, the Court has almost always played a reactionary role in American life on issues of race, class, property, democracy, and corporate power. This conservative spell was broken briefly during the Warren Court, but the defining minds and spirits of that Court—Earl Warren and William J. Brennan, the greatest justice of the century—were President Eisenhower's appointees. Later, it was Richard Nixon's selection, Harry Blackmun, who authored *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that some would have this election turn on. It was two Reagan appointees—Sandra Day O'Connor, who wrote the majority opinion, and Anthony Kennedy—who provided the margin to save *Roe* in the 1992 *Casey* decision against a group of dissenters that included Byron White, JFK's gift to the Court. Today, the two most durably progressive justices are John Paul Stevens, who was President Gerald Ford's appointment, and the magnificently thoughtful and fair



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David Souter, who was named to the Court by the first—and, one fervently hopes, only—President Bush, who followed the advice of New Hampshire John Sununu.

To be sure, there have been some visionary justices named by Democratic presidents, most notably the great Thurgood Marshall, LBJ's pick, and some fine ones who could develop into major figures, like Clinton's Ruth Bader Ginsburg. But Stephen Breyer, named by Clinton, is probably a fair harbinger of what is to come out of a Gore administration: pro-choice technocratic millionaire lawyers steeped in corporate and administrative law with no experience fighting for justice and little taste for freedom or democracy. This is certainly what we have seen Clinton do in his dispiriting appointments to the federal district and appeals courts. At these lower levels, his moderate corporate picks, at best, restrain some of the more reactionary designs of the right-wing corporate lawyers planted by Presidents Reagan and Bush but do nothing to advance a progressive agenda. In the federal district court of the District of Columbia this spring, a major voting rights case against Congress for disenfranchising the 600,000 residents of the capital city was lost two to one when two Clinton appointees read the Constitution like Justice Scalia instead of Justice Brennan and outvoted the courageous Judge Louis Oberdorfer, who was appointed to the bench by LBJ and actually believes in equal protection and the principle of one person—one vote.

Now, none of this is to deny that any Bush judicial nominee is likely to be to the right of any Gore nominee, especially when it comes to the crucible of abortion rights. This is especially true now that right-wing Republicans have adopted as their motto "no more Souters." But this new reality of a Republican litmus test for the Court teaches not the necessity of progressives embracing lesser-evil thinking but of pressing the Democratic Party to earn the votes it expects from union members, civil libertarians, and racial minorities. Our motto could just as well be "no more Breyers." Ironically, it was Ralph Nader who took to the floor of the Senate Judiciary Committee and warned us about Breyer based on his conservative views about business monopoly and government regulation. At the time, Nader was derisively dismissed as a has-been by the same people today urging him to be a team player so as to keep seats on the Supreme Court warm for future Stephen Breyers. We need to be mobilized this time around to promote progressive judges and stop the authoritarian ones.

The point is that if the Supreme Court is an important enough institution to base your vote on—and it is—then it must be an important enough institution to try to fight for and define. Yet, the spinners who want us to base the presidential election on the Court do not seem to invite our input when it comes to judicial selections. They think it is enough to invoke the abortion issue to get us all to line up like sheep. But this is a less and less convincing trick. After all, smart Republicans are quite loathe to reopen the abortion issue on the Court since they know it plays politically much better for the Democrats. Thus, we should be thinking a lot more about the right to organize a union, antitrust law, the rights of students, the death penalty, restoring the power of states to create majority-minority legislative districts, and gay and lesbian rights—issues where we need progressive visionaries on the Court.

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Progressives who favor Nader but would vote for Gore in the final analysis to stop Bush from remaking the Court—call them Nader Democrats—should organize and meet with the Gore campaign to ask specifically: what kind of citizens will be considered for appointment to the Supreme Court and the federal bench generally?

Is it just partners at big corporate law firms? Or is it public interest and civil rights lawyers like death penalty foes Brian Stevenson and Stephen Bright, ACLU president Nadine Strossen, Rutgers law professor Linda Bosniak, NYU law professor Derrick Bell, Texas law professor Gerald Torres, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Democracy Harold Koh, Columbia law professor Patricia Williams, Georgetown law professor Peter Edelman, and Judith Winston, the General Counsel to the Department of Education? If the reason you plan to vote for your second choice for president rather than your first is that you care deeply about the dismal state of the judiciary, then it is incumbent upon you to put your wishes on the table. Let us see whether Nader Democrats in swing states are treated with respect in this process before they make up their minds.

If my single vote were ultimately going to make the difference between putting Gore in the White House or the appalling George W. Bush, I would not hesitate to vote for Gore—after meeting with him at length about the things I have on my mind. But in the overwhelmingly likely contingency that my vote is not going to be the tie-breaker, surely I am doing more to advance progressive values—and the prospects of a more progressive Gore administration—by voting to Gore's left, that is, for our greatest citizen, Ralph Nader, who incidentally would make a pretty fine president (his own flaws I leave for another day) and who stands at least as good a chance of winning this election as I have of determining its outcome.

ABORTION AND THE COURT

Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Author, Godwrestling—Round 2

The ethical debates among progressives over “voting for the lesser weevil” (as Sid Lens, *alav hashalom*, used to call it—you can tell what he thought!) and “building the base of a grass-roots movement” are upon us again, with the presidential campaign of Al Gore faltering and that of Ralph Nader and the Greens picking up steam.

Does a vote for Nader, Winona LaDuke, and the Greens build a crucial base for progressive change, or would it cost Gore the election and thus (at minimum) saddle us with a right-wing Supreme Court for the next generation?

I do have a bias—but not an absolute one. In my experience, the most powerful form of social change is building the future in the present. Want to integrate the restaurants? Then just go integrate them; don’t blow them up, don’t try to outlaw them. Either the cops throw you in jail, and if you’ve chosen your line in the sand well people flock to your side and pass new laws integrating the restaurants; or the restaurants themselves shrug and give up.

Want to build a political party that is based on people, not dollars; on communities, not big corporations? That sees empowering labor and healing the earth as intertwined, not conflicting, values? Just do it.

Not everybody is willing to do this tough kind of politics, though it is usually the most joyful, the most like heartfelt prayer, the most whole. And we sometimes see that there are real values to be lost by ignoring the fuzzier kind of politics.

The biggest and clearest loss we face if Gore loses is a friendly hand in the White House for a host of feminist questions, including abortion rights. The issue is, how important is that distinction in the carrying out of actual policy? Can the women’s movement keep abortion actually available, no matter who a president would like to appoint to the Supreme Court? Can an anti-Roe v. Wade appointee be confirmed against the ardent opposition of pro-choice women and men? Will physicians mobilize to force the FDA to make mifepristone really available? In a society that can’t stop the manufacture of ecstasy and heroin, is there any movement ready to start producing mifepristone underground if necessary?

Of course I would prefer a pro-choice president. But a pro-choice president with no pro-choice movement will protect choice less effectively than an anti-choice president with a pro-choice movement. We already see the truth of that—in how many counties in America can you actually get an abortion?

It is not as if Gore’s election would be automatic if progressives would only swallow hard and vote for him instead

of Nader. As I write in July, Gore is behind and slipping fast. Maybe a vote for him is a wasted vote, not least because many people who would normally vote for him are fed up with vagueness. The answer is this: whichever candidate gets your vote, movement-building should get your energy.

The same is true for other issues.

What about taking global *scorching* as a serious planetary emergency, and dumping the Star Wars research in favor of a crash solar-energy program: why not raise taxes on gasoline and subsidize mass transport, bike lanes, and the building of neighborhoods where people can walk to work?

What about democratizing economic globalization (as Michael Lerner says, globalizing Spirit instead of greed)?

What about creating universal health care and reducing health costs by aiming at prevention—especially by redefining many health issues as environmental issues?

On all these, is the Democratic Party going to do the job? What if it had a vigorous, growing, visionary, hard-working Green Party nipping at its *tukbus*? Isn’t it possible that only a new outlook on politics, as TIKKUN has been arguing, can invigorate and draw toward progressivism people who have been drifting to the right in frustration and a sense of stymied politics? Isn’t it possible that even the women’s and gay issues, even in the short run, would be better served by building a community/meaning/Spirit-oriented movement and political party, even if that came at the cost of a lost presidential election?

So here’s a program for balancing values:

Give money and organizing time to the Greens and Nader for the next few months. Start rebuilding the networks necessary for nonviolent civil-disobedient action on feminist and environmental questions, as well as ethical-democratic globalism.

On November 1, see where we stand.

In any particular state where Gore is either sure to win (e.g., Massachusetts) or sure to lose (e.g., Texas), it’s wasting a vote to vote for him. There, for sure, environmentalists, feminists, and progressives should vote for Nader. Their vote will count—toward the 5 percent necessary to get the Greens some public money for the next campaign.

If the polls on November 1 show Gore irretrievably behind nationally, then a vote for him is a wasted vote and one for Nader will matter.

If on November 1 Gore is very close and has moved to the left to counter Nader’s pull, then in undecided states, a vote for Gore may not be wasted.

A sophisticated strategy? Yes, but people are not stupid when they see that their real lives are at stake and other people care.





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THE PEOPLE

David C. Korten

*Author, When Corporations
Rule the World*

The unifying issue that brought as many as 70,000 people to the streets in Seattle to protest the WTO was democracy.

As Frances Moore Lappé says, "Democracy is not something you have, it is something you do. Do it or lose it." The Seattle protestors realized we are losing our democracy and that its loss places at risk every other issue about which we care. I believe democracy is the defining issue of Presidential Election 2000. Indeed I've come to see this election as an American plebiscite on democracy.

There is a document circulating on the Internet with the heading: "66 Reasons Why George and Al Both Sing from the Same Corporate Song Book." There follows a list of sixty-six major U.S. corporations that have given at least \$50,000 to *both* candidates. It includes AT&T, Archer Daniels Midland, Boeing, Citigroup, Coca-Cola, Time Warner, Disney, Microsoft, US West/Qwest, Philip Morris, and fifty-six other Fortune 500 stalwarts. That was a couple of months ago. The list is now surely longer and the amounts larger. Corporate donations for the 2000 general election are running a third higher than in the 1996 elections.

Washington insiders report that each year corporate lobbying in Washington grows more intense, to the point that one begins to wonder whether the CEOs of the largest global corporations spend their time on anything else. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that buying politicians is the best investment most corporations can make. In an article titled "Don't Forget to Nominate Someone," the July 24, 2000 *Business Week* says, "Not only is Big Business coughing up most of the \$95 million that Philadelphia and Los Angeles need to put on the conventions, but it's also shelling out millions to host hundreds of invitation-only bashs that give execs and lobbyists face time with elected officials and power brokers."

While I would guess that most corporations have a preference for George, because his For Sale sign is a bit larger than

Al's, let's be clear. In the end it makes little difference to the corporate welfare kings who wins. They own both candidates.

Democracy was not the only issue that brought people to the streets in Seattle. Other issues included campaign finance reform, corporate welfare, economic justice, genetic engineering, corporate power and accountability, trade rules, racism, financial speculation, environmental destruction, human rights, political corruption, police violence, militarization, worker rights, financial speculation, environmental destruction, inequality, and the corruption and racism of our penal system, among others. So far Al and George have spent more time in this campaign talking about Elián González than they have all these other issues put together—perhaps because they are on the wrong side of so many of them.

Even in the things they do talk about their corporate biases are all too evident. Both put forward proposals that would channel security money into a giant stock bubble without mentioning that when baby boomers start taking their money out for retirement the bubble is certain to collapse. They both talk about ways to direct more public money to pharmaceutical corporations to pay for overpriced drugs, without mentioning the monopoly pricing of drug products that have often been developed with public money. The political charade that passes for a presidential election in America is pitiful, an insult to our intelligence.

Enter Ralph Nader, the most respected and trusted person in America, who for decades has been a leader on every one of the above issues—except for Elián—and has done more to create an America that works for all than any other American in memory with the possible exception of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ralph offers a life-long record of uncompromising integrity, competence, and commitment to democracy and the public interest.

Al and George, in their unabashed pandering to corporate interests, mock democracy, insult our intelligence, and promote corporate rule. It is difficult to image that we will ever have a clearer choice. Let's put it on the line. A vote for either Al or George is a vote that says, "I'm not really all that concerned about democracy." That's why I'm voting for Ralph.

THE PEOPLE

Arlene Goldbard

Writer in Seattle

I endorse Michael Lerner's critique of the "lesser of two evils" approach to the ballot box. As evidence, I offer my own voting record. There has been one election since I turned twenty-one in 1968 in which I regretted my vote for a minority party candidate; and three in which I felt so com-

promised after choosing the marginally "lesser" of two egregious candidates that my next political act was to take a long, hot shower.

In 1968, in a contest between Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, I voted for Eldridge Cleaver, a "protest vote" in every sense of the word. I can't take pride in investing my vote in a candidate who showed himself to be spectacularly unstable, although I'm willing to cite youth and naïveté in my defense. Humphrey lost by very little, but it was the 9 mil-

lion of my fellow Americans voting for George Wallace who turned that tide, not the few who voted for Cleaver.

In 1972, I voted the Peace & Freedom ticket—Benjamin Spock for president—along with 55,000 of my fellow Californians. Richard Nixon beat George McGovern by nearly 20 million popular votes.

In 1976, I voted Peace & Freedom again, this time with Dr. Spock as V.P. The lesser of two evils—Jimmy Carter—won by about a million and a half votes.

In 1980, convinced that electoral politics were being sold to the highest bidder and the figurehead presiding over the sale didn't make all that much difference, I skipped voting for president altogether, eschewing John Anderson, who'd distinguished himself by calling the United States a Christian nation. Ronald Reagan's victory was what made this non-vote an occasion of regret; his ascendancy showed me just how much change a single election could make in the structure and impact of the federal government. But even if all of Anderson's voters and I had chosen Carter, Reagan would still have won by 2.5 million popular votes (and over 400 electoral votes).

In 1984, horrified at the Reagan revolution, I held my nose and voted for Mondale, who lost by 17 million votes.

In 1988, still holding my nose, I voted for Dukakis, who lost by 7 million votes.

In 1992, I voted for Clinton, who received the benefit of my doubt on two counts: he seemed a bona fide member of

my own generation with a few progressive ideas and a decent civil rights record. I can't remember if it was Ricky Ray Rector (the developmentally disabled man whose execution Clinton forced as a way to look tough on crime) or Lani Guinier (the "friend of Bill" ejected from the inner circle at the first sign of opposition, demonstrating just how deep and real his principles ran) who sent me back to the showers, but I definitely needed to be hosed down after this compromise with lesser evil.

In 1996, I voted for Ralph Nader, the non-candidate, along with 685,000 of my fellow Americans. With 47 million votes, Clinton floated to the top over Dole, Perot, Nader, and the Libertarian candidate, Harry Browne.

The way I see it, I lost nothing by voting for the candidate who most nearly matched my own political values. But whenever I heeded the lesser-of-two-evils argument, I lost twice. The first casualty was a sense of myself as having political agency (as opposed to being merely a cog in a monstrous machine). The second loss was a degree of self-respect: persuading myself to a slightly shabby compromise, then learning that it made no difference. From now on, my default setting is going to be voting my conscience, and I don't intend to compromise it unless I am convinced the last vestiges of American democracy are riding on my easy political virtue. □



INTERVIEW: JESSE VENTURA (continued from page 32)

Dylan absolutely, Bob Dylan rates up there for probably the greatest poet-musician in history. Who else ... Jimi Hendrix.

TIKKUN: Movies?

VENTURA: My all time favorite movie is *Jaws*, the original, because I love action, I love adventure. I love *Jaws* because of the fact they allowed the characters to develop. You really got to know them. I like *Full Metal Jacket*, I like *JFK* by Oliver Stone.

TIKKUN: Did that movie make you more convinced that that was a true story or that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone?

VENTURA: I don't buy that Oswald acted alone. I don't buy that a bit. Actually, we'll never really know at this point, they'll never allow us to know.

TIKKUN: Has being governor raised or lowered your paranoia level in general?

VENTURA: I don't have a paranoia level.

TIKKUN: Do you think Janet Reno did the right thing with Elián González?

VENTURA: I think that is truly a no-brainer. The day that we allow politics and countries to get in the way of father/son, mother/son, father/daughter, mother/daughter, we're out of line. Unequivocally the boy belongs with his dad. And just because his dad happens to live in a communist country makes no difference. [We can't say], because



we have an undying hatred of Castro, we now will divide this father and son for political purposes.

TIKKUN: You're against the Cuban embargo?

VENTURA: I'm against it only because it's failed miserably.

TIKKUN: What do you feel about the Iraqi embargo?

VENTURA: I haven't even paid much attention.

TIKKUN: Who are you gonna vote for, Bush or Gore?

VENTURA: Neither.

TIKKUN: Is Ross Perot a hero or a villain?

VENTURA: I'd say that he's neither. I respect Ross Perot for what he did and what he attempted to do in 1992. He wanted to make a mark, and what he did was a very remarkable thing. And I really believe he dropped out of the race because he started to fear he was gonna win. But then he wouldn't allow the party to grow beyond him. If he had simply become a supporter in 1996, if he had gotten behind Dick Lamb who we had all set to be our candidate, we would have gotten an even larger vote total than what Perot got in 1992 and the movement would have gone up. Instead, what Perot did took it down.

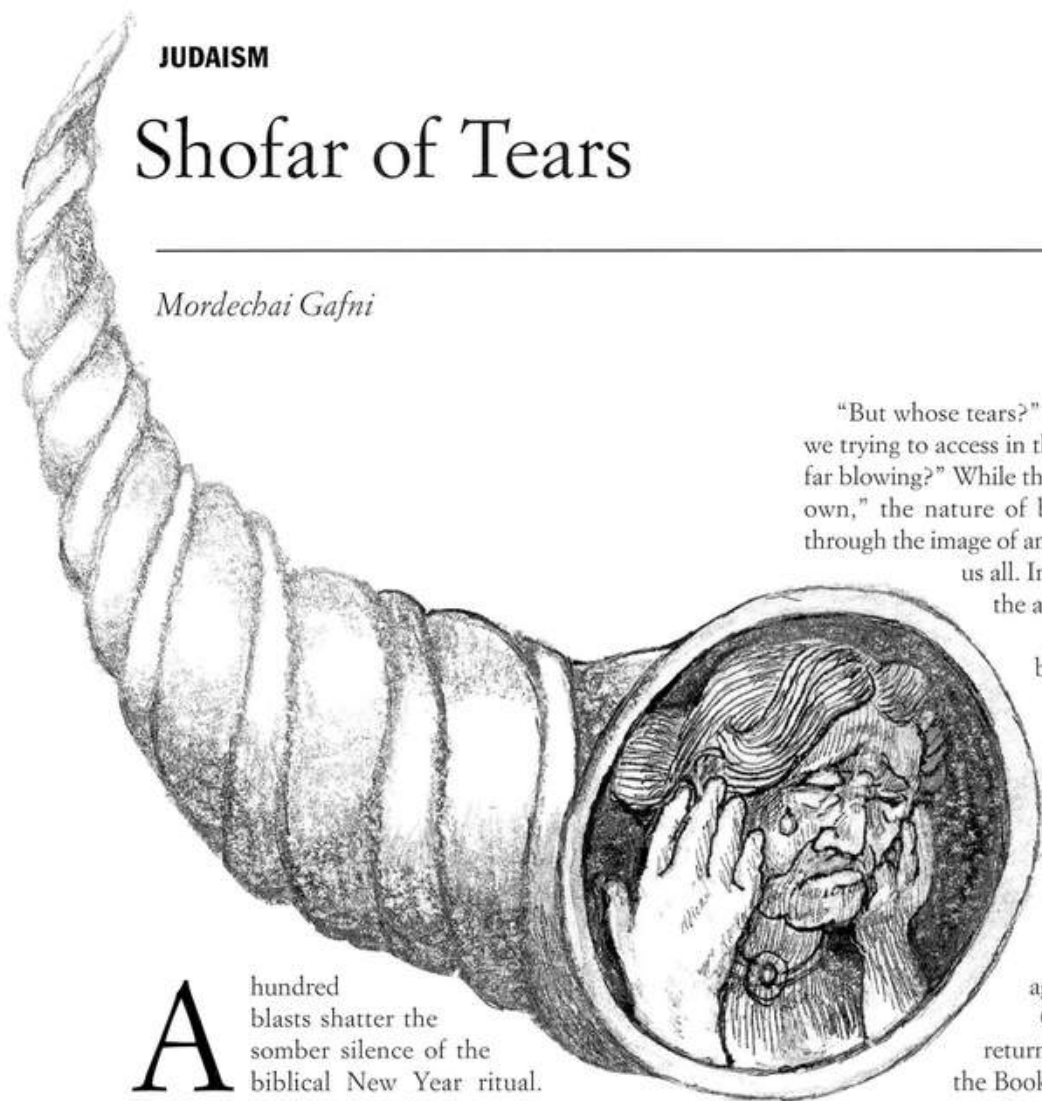
TIKKUN: By his ego?

VENTURA: Yeah, his ego. Today the national party's in shambles.

TIKKUN: Thank you. □

Shofar of Tears

Mordechai Gafni



A hundred blasts shatter the somber silence of the biblical New Year ritual.

The shofar, Rosh Hashanah's major prop, is a ram's horn blown in a strange and evocative combination of notes. In mysticism, the words "*rosh hashanah*"—literally "New Year"—are understood to have deeper shades of meaning. "*Rosh*" means "the beginning," while the word "*shanah*" derives etymologically from "*shinnui*," meaning "change" or "transformation." Rosh Hashanah, in the mystic's pen, then becomes "the beginning of transformation." This transformation, according to spiritual master Schneur Zalman of Liadi, is essentially connected to the shofar. What is the secret of the shofar's sound, the pleading, broken, and yet triumphant notes?

The word for shofar in biblical myth is "*teruah*." *Teruah* is understood by Targum to mean "*yevava*"—crying. The shofar is a crying instrument; a crying that resounds beyond words, beyond the narrow confines of language. These are tears sourced in the limbic brain—in that fantastic seat of intuition and raw emotion, the amygdala. These are transformative tears.

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"But whose tears?" asks the Talmud, "Whose tears are we trying to access in the ecstatic and painful ritual of shofar blowing?" While the ultimate answer is, of course, "our own," the nature of biblical ritual is to access the self through the image of an other, an archetype, who represents us all. In effect the Talmud is asking—who is the archetype for the tears of the shofar?

And here our discussion truly begins. For the Talmud responds—the tears of Em Sisera. Em Sisera, literally translated, means the Mother of Sisera. Sisera, a figure from the early chapters of the Book of Judges, is depicted in the biblical midrashic literature as a heinous villain—a Saddam Hussein/Hitler type character, guilty of every atrocity imaginable against the Israelites.

One day Sisera is late, very late, in returning home from battle. The reader of the Book of Judges knows that his intended massacre has been averted. Sisera's forces have been routed and Sisera killed. His mother cries as she peers out the window. Her handmaidens comfort her, assuring her that her victorious son will soon cross the threshold of the house once again. Yet Sisera's mother continues to cry, understanding, as only a mother can, that she will see her son no more.

Empathy for Sisera's mother notwithstanding—the talmudic masters are virtually inexplicable. Why is shofar blowing—the one ritual described by the sources as partaking of the *sanctum sanctorum*—patterned on the tears of a Hitler's mother? Indeed, not only do we trace the crying of the shofar back to this woman, but we go out of our way to pattern the notes of our shofar blasts precisely after the pattern of her tears. Indeed the reason for the variation of different kinds of blasts in the shofar ritual is because we are not quite sure how she cried, and we want to make sure to get it right! Adds a medieval writer 700 years after the talmudic period—"We blow a total of one hundred shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah because Sisera's mother cried a hundred times."

Why Em Sisera? What in the nature of this woman's tears did the wisdom masters find so compelling?

One approach is to understand the choice of Sisera's mother as a lesson to acknowledge the full humanity of our enemies. As studies of propaganda materials have shown, the enemy is never depicted with a face, and certainly not with a mother's tearful face. This lack of particularity is part of the process of dehumanization which allows us to kill. Sometimes we must kill. Sometimes pacifism is deeply immoral. Yet we can never erase the enemy's face. And the path towards re-imaging the enemy is to imagine his mother's tear-stained eyes.

And yet, poignant and powerful as such a reading may be, it still feels insufficient. One intuitively another layer of meaning, an additional nuance which understands Sisera's mother as expressing a moment in our own souls, a stage of our journey in which only she can be our guide.

I want to share with you a different understanding of the shofar's music—an understanding that found its way into my soul one night—many years ago—in a moment of connection and clarity.

I begin with a mystical passage from the writings of Abraham Kook, the philosopher, mystic, and Chief Rabbi of Palestine.

I am in the midst of exile.
The inner essential I of the individual
only reveals itself ...
to the extent of the higher courage
which is drenched with the pure light of higher radiance
which burns within.

The first line of the quote comes from the Prophet Ezekiel who, before receiving the Vision of the Chariot, the lodestone of the Kabbalah, cries out, "I am in the midst of exile!" Kook understands Ezekiel's statement to refer not only to Ezekiel's physical exile, to the fact that he was standing on foreign shores, but as expressing a far more profound sense of inner fragmentation, an inner exile. The inner exile stems from the inner essential "I" being lost. I've lost my self some place: I'm looking for myself, I'm playing all sorts of roles and many assorted games, but I haven't found myself. This search for the "I" is taken by Kook to be the subtext of the Garden of Eden story. Original sin, writes Kook, is the inability to find the essential "I."

The first man sinned.
He became alienated from his own person-hood.
For he turned to the opinion of the snake and lost himself.
He did not give a clear answer to God's question where
are you,
for he did not know his own soul
because his I-ness had perished
in the sin of bowing to a foreign god.

Original sin is listening to the snake. The snake here is not the fiendish villain. Rather, the snake represents any

external voice or source of authority which is not my own. The snake, however, is paradoxically almost always a positive value, idea, or group that we have co-opted in our process of identity formation.

Clearly the questions at stake for Kook are questions of identity. How do we locate our essential "I"? In the modern Western context books like David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* or William Hollingsworth Whyte's *Organization Man* come to mind. We were familiar growing up with people who defined themselves by their corporation or workplace: a Westinghouse man, a military man, or a General Electric man. In other societies—Israel for example—political parties played a similar role. One was either Left or Right—whether from a kibbutz or a development town—and that was part of one's essential self-definition. While these old identities have broken down somewhat, the vacuum they left has been quickly filled

by other no less insidious false voices of personhood. You walk into a party and say "Hi, I'm Mark, I'm a doctor," or "I'm Pamela, a corporate lawyer." We wait for the earliest opening in the conversation which will allow us to establish our place by almost casually introducing our "profession." We feel like we have little else to profess. We have used competence and training to replace or at least drown out the call of soul and spirit.

If we manage to free ourselves of the professional identity trap, relationships lurk in the wings to seduce us. Our relationships become more than places of commitment, growth, and loving. Our relationships become us. Notwithstanding feminism, the role, "the wife of," remains prevalent in our culture, alongside the newly emergent role, "the husband of." If "of" dies then the "wife of" becomes the "widow(er) of." What is important is that "of" still provides a matrix of identity.

And the most beautiful, and therefore insidious, identity trap is children. The Jewish mother is but one archetypal representation of how we use children to form our identity. My children are me and I am my children is the mantra of this particularly common modern idolatry. When I first began teaching as a too-young rabbi in Palm Beach, an older Israeli couple approached me to talk about their marriage, which was apparently on the verge of dissolution. I sat there trying to look appropriately wise but was utterly baffled by the complexity of their issues and surely did not have an inkling of what I could do to be helpful. That is, until they got up to leave.

As they left, he turned to her—in a familiar voice—and said "Ema..." (Hebrew for Mom) and she responded to his rote referral with, "Okay Abba" (Hebrew for Dad). In our next conversation it emerged that their first child was born just a few short months after their wedding. Their youngest son had left about a year ago for school. And it

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and therefore
insidious, identity
trap is children.*

was about a year ago when their marital issues began to take on a new intensity.

They called each other Ema and Abba—indeed, their whole relationship was based on being parents. Neither of them had done any of the work and reflection necessary to form an identity independent of their children. Consequently, when the children were no longer an active part of their lives, their relationship began to naturally dissolve.

There is a story about the Hassidic master Levi of Berdichev. He used to walk home from synagogue through the marketplace to see first-hand the lives of his disciples. One morning a man rushing to fulfill some apparently urgent task barreled headlong into the master, sending him sprawling. The master, however, was not offended; indeed, he noticed the man's alacrity and apparent perspicacity in pursuit of his goal. So he asked him—"Where, my friend are you running?" "Why I'm running to make a living!" The master, not yet satisfied, queried further, "Why is it so important to you to make a living?" The man was somewhat taken aback—no one had ever challenged that assumption or asked that question. He thought and he thought and then, light bulb!—"For the children, for the children. I am working for the children." The master nodded with a strange smile on his lips and they each continued on their respective ways.

Some twenty-five years pass and the master is walking—a little slower perhaps—as he always does, through the marketplace to synagogue. And again a man running in the opposite direction bowls into him. Again the master gets up and says, "Young man, where are you running?" The young man amazingly gives the same response, "I'm running to make a living." And the master asks—you know masters try and be consistent—"Why is it so important to make a living?" No one has asked the young man such a question before, so he stops and thinks, and then, light bulb!—"For the children, for the children of course." The master lifts his eyes heavenward and says, "Master of the Universe, when will I meet that one child for whom all the generations labored so mightily?"

We use our children to define ourselves. That is wrong. We need to love our children; one of the most gorgeous, beautiful, demarcating characteristics of biblical culture is the love and commitment of parents to children through the generations. Nonetheless, even love can become idolatrous.

It therefore strikes us as particularly significant that in the biblical literature, a literature where name is such an essential interpretive key, our heroine has none. The name of the biblical archetype for shofar tears is "the mother of Sisera." Totally defined as a mother, this woman is the paradigm of using our children to form our identity—so much so that her child, Sisera, even overshadows the woman's own name.

*If you do not take off
your mask then it
becomes a God—the sum
total of your identity.*

We need but one more link to reveal the secret of shofar.

Return to an earlier scene in your life. Did you ever baby-sit? If you have you will recall that there are two distinct kinds of crying that a babysitter might hear. The first is a sort of gentle, sometimes incessant, quiet crying. These are spilt tears, to which we sometimes respond and sometimes ignore. There is, however, a second kind of crying, a heart-rending, earsplitting kind of cry, which rivets our attention and brings us instantly to the bedside of the baby. More often than not we find that the baby's security blanket or teddy bear or some other object of affection has fallen from the crib or been otherwise lost.

When we lose what psychologist D.W. Winnicott called one of our "transitional objects"—those objects we use to give us a sense of place and security in the world—we cry a uniquely poignant and piercing cry. Ideal healthy development—which is indeed only an ideal—requires that we let go of our security blanket and claim our true identity. What we so often do instead is trade up. We exchange our teddy bear or security blanket for a title of professional competence, for a socially acknowledged relationship role (wife or husband of), or even for the title and role of mum or dad. Anything to avoid the terror of having to claim our own identity. Perhaps, we think in our most private subconscious moments, perhaps I do not have a self.

Although they are not our highest selves, these masks of ours are important. The masks we choose are also part of our identity. The biblical imperative, "You shall not make for yourselves molten Gods" is better translated as "you shall not make for yourselves Gods of masks." The Hebrew for molten is "*masecha*"—literally "mask." The implicit notion is that masks have their place but "do not make Gods of your masks." If you do not take off your mask then it becomes a God—the sum total of your identity. Masks, however, are hard to take off—it is enormously painful to stand naked in the mirror and say, "who am I for real?!" Yet that is the essence of Rosh Hashanah—the beginning of transformation.

This is precisely the moment of shofar crying captured by Sisera's mother. She has no other name. Sisera is her life, her self, her identity. She realizes that he is not coming home ... ever again. In one instant her mask has been torn from her face. She is left, in the words of Rilke—"with her face in her hands." She cries the cry of a baby who has lost his teddy bear or security blanket, a heart rending, painful, and potentially liberating cry, the cry of shofar. This is the experience we are called to on Rosh Hashanah. We are invited to the liberation of tears which wash away our pseudoselves, revealing underneath—if we dare but look—the self just waiting to be noticed and loved. □

Aaron's God— And Ours

A Yom Kippur Reflection

Sarah Polster

Last fall, I was asked to share my thoughts on the Torah portion (*parsha*) for Yom Kippur at my synagogue's High Holiday services. I said yes without quite remembering what the *parsha* was about, and when I opened my Chumash to refresh myself on Leviticus 16, it momentarily knocked the wind out of me.

No scholar of Torah, I am the most typical of contemporary Jews—raised in a secular environment by parents who retained a strong cultural attachment to Judaism while thoroughly rejecting its religious teachings. Though I had been indoctrinated into Judaism through compulsory attendance at Sunday school as a child, before joining my current shul I had not spent serious time in a synagogue since I was thirteen and my parents offered me my freedom (*sans bat mitzvah*) from even this token Jewish commitment.

Like many of us set free as children from religious strictures our parents (legitimately) found confining, I have spent much of my life trying to reinvent a spiritual framework spacious enough and subtle enough to lend context and meaning to my life's joys and sorrows. Not until well into my adulthood did it even occur to me to look for it in Judaism. And like many liberal secular Jews raised to read religious texts literally and suspiciously, I have found that the most daunting stumbling block in my return to Judaism has been the Torah itself and specifically the image of a harsh, judgmental, petty, abusive, and quixotic God that springs from many of its pages. I read with anger and incomprehension as the God of Torah time and time again seems to engage in senseless acts of murder and cruelty. My visceral response is "this is not the God I know."

The Torah portion we read on Yom Kippur—Leviticus 16—is one of those passages. This *parsha* must be read in the context of an earlier portion, Leviticus 10, which tells us that God killed two of Aaron's sons right before Aaron's eyes, because in their offering of incense during an elaborate ritual involving animal sacrifices they somehow

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of Torah time and time again
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"offered before the Lord alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them." Though commentators have offered numerous explanations of what "alien" or "strange fire" might actually have been, and how it could have caused these deaths, these explanations are oddly lacking in conviction—the commentators themselves appear baffled by these deaths. In Leviticus 11 through 15, God not only makes no comment upon Aaron's loss, but lectures Moses and Aaron on the dietary laws and laws of purification. And Aaron—except for refusing to eat the meat of the animal slaughtered when his sons died—has also been silent. Then in Leviticus 16, God invites Aaron to return to God's presence to atone for his sins and the sins of his household, and gives elaborate instructions about how to bathe and dress for the occasion, what animals to sacrifice, and how exactly the sacrifices should be offered.

In this parsha is just about everything that I find repugnant in Torah, and yet it is the reading we are called to attend to on the holiest day of the year.

I have learned not to gloss over the kinds of discomfort that texts like this engender in us, but to use that discomfort to reengage the texts with fresh eyes. In particular, I have taken to heart Rabbi Michael Lerner's advice that we find in Torah both the true voice of God speaking profoundly and timelessly through the human beings who wrote the Torah and also the distortions of God's voice that these human writers introduced—distortions that are inevitable products of the times and cultures in which these writers lived and the personal pain and limitations they were subject to.

So how do we tease out the true voice of God in this parsha? If we know a loving and compassionate God who invites us into partnership with Him in the ongoing, unending task of creation, where is God's voice in these instructions to Aaron, his grieving priest, about how safely to approach Him in the wake of a searing and inexplicable loss for which Aaron holds Him responsible? And what are the sins of Aaron and his household—and let us remember that we are Aaron's household—for which Aaron and all of us are called to atone on Yom Kippur?

If your experience of the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is anything like mine, as you identify all the ways in which you have fallen short this year, and the ways in which you have caused pain, you have been struggling between the competing tugs of grief and blame. You surface something you have said or done that you regret, that you are ashamed of, and it makes you wince. You mourn for the person you could have been, but are not. Then in the same breath, you blame it on somebody. Not my fault, you think. And for a moment you actually feel not so bad—you're still regretful, but you're not so ashamed. And if you can muster up a good head of anger at whomever you've just blamed for your shortcoming, you feel even better still. And if you believe this somebody to be very much more powerful than you are, you feel almost totally absolved, perhaps even righteous. But somewhere the sense of powerlessness this leaves us—powerlessness to be the people we were put here to be—lingers underneath as a source of profound, if unconsidered, grief. So here we are on this holy day, with this mixed bag of regrets and blame and grief, hoping to approach God and through that encounter to recover our sense of possibility and to find the strength and the wisdom to begin the new year afresh.

So who is this God we're hoping to approach on this day? Is it literally true that God is the killer of Aaron's sons, an all-powerful unrepentant murderer who is here strong-arming Aaron and all of us to account for our sins? Or did a grieving people, trying to find an explanation for the inexplicable, simply blame God for the death of these young men and then cower in fear to approach this cruel and all-powerful deity, which they themselves had constructed? Was

this the sin for which Aaron was called to atone? Reading this way, perhaps God's instructions to Aaron regarding bathing and dressing and the enactment of ritual are the invitation of a compassionate God who knows our grief and fear, who knows we want to blame him for our losses and shortcomings, who also knows the power of His presence and how overwhelming it can seem, and who nonetheless wishes to see contact restored. If this is our understanding of God, then in this passage we can see him seeking to heal the rift, to provide a safe way for frightened, angry people to reenter his presence and come to know him again.

Reading this text with a loving and compassionate God in mind, I was reminded of a story a friend told me about her recovery from a time of grief. Stephanie suffered a devastating miscarriage during her first pregnancy and in its wake spent an hour on the phone with her best friend Kay lamenting the loss of her baby while Kay listened patiently. Kay had just emerged from a sabbatical year of silent prayer and meditation, part of her own growth as a Christian minister. Stephanie, who is a minister herself, was particularly lamenting her inability to pray since her miscarriage, and her sadness over her loss of contact with God. A few days later, a small brown paper package arrived in the mail, in which Stephanie found a simple beige linen jumper, soft and long and roomy. It came with a note from Kay, which said: "I have prayed in this dress every day for a year. You don't have to pray. Just wear this dress. It is full of prayers." And Stephanie wore that dress, and wept in it, and let the prayers in that dress pray for her when her mouth and her heart could not. She said of both the dress and the prayers: "they were spacious enough to gather up my fear and grief and anger."

Consider God's instructions to Aaron about preparing to enter the shrine: "He shall be dressed in a sacral linen tunic, with linen breeches next to his flesh, and be girt with a linen sash, and he shall wear a linen turban. They are sacral vestments; he shall bathe his body in water and then put them on." Let us imagine these garments gathering up his fear and grief and anger, and allowing him to feel clothed—which is to say, safe—before God, rather than raw and naked in his loss.

Dressed in God's compassion, but still angry and fearful, Aaron enters God's dwelling place, where he reenacts the same ritual of animal sacrifice during which, the last time it was performed, he watched his sons die. But the ritual of slaughter is familiar to Aaron, and God is explicitly careful to ensure that this encounter will be safe for Aaron, twice spelling out ways in which Aaron can protect himself from getting closer to God than a human can handle. Aaron performs this ritual with practiced hands but a new mindfulness.

What strikes me about this passage is its unrelenting physicality. Put yourself in Aaron's shoes.

Still blaming God for the death of your sons, you are to bathe, dress, and enter God's dwelling place, alone. You are

(continued on page 54)

From Sukkah to Ma'akeh

The Halachah of Housing

Jill Jacobs

Damian*, age eleven, recently moved into a transitional housing center in Manhattan. Though obviously bright and gifted at math, he cannot read. Because of his family's frequent moves, he has never stayed in any one school long enough to learn the basics. By now, Damian is so frustrated and embarrassed by his inability to read that he resists efforts to teach him and shies away from situations that require reading. While he is adjusting well to his new school, it is unclear how long he will remain there before his family moves again. Maryse*, a resident of a city-owned apartment in Central Harlem, lived without heat or hot water for three months last year. After vandals broke into her building and cut off the heat supply, the city failed to respond to repair requests. While waging her battle against the city, Maryse became depressed and unable to work. Now that her building has finally been repaired, she is working again and has even discovered her voice as a writer.

Maryse and Damian are typical of the dozens of children and adults I have encountered while working with two organizations that advocate for the rights of tenants in Central Harlem. Though not homeless, both Maryse and Damian have spent much of their lives in inadequate or impermanent housing. The instability of their housing situations has created even larger educational, psychological and economic problems.

As a Jewish community, we are well aware of the problem of homelessness. Many synagogues operate or support shelters. We send children and teenagers to deliver food to those on the street. Rarely, however, do we consider the needs of those who are housed, but whose housing is so inadequate or temporary that it is virtually impossible for them to lead a fully functional life.

Housing issues tend to be extraordinarily complicated, and there is little consensus about the best option for low-

*Names have been changed.

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income housing. Cities have experimented with everything from housing projects to vouchers to mixed-income housing. To complicate the situation further, the lines between permanent and temporary housing are often blurred. Transitional housing centers, such as the one in which Damian lives, provide residents with social services and aim to help them to find permanent apartments; however, because of the lack of affordable housing, particularly in cities such as New York, many families spend years in such centers. The same is true of shelters and housing projects. Additionally, while such housing is supposed to protect inhabitants from the dangers of the street, these residences often prove to be more dangerous than the street. Recent controversial decisions in cities such as Chicago and San Francisco to raze some of their largest and most crime-ridden housing projects have brought public attention to one of the paradoxes of public housing. On the one hand, public housing offers emergency shelter for those who might otherwise be homeless. On the other hand, enormous housing projects impose new dangers on their residents.

A close reading of Jewish sources offers some help in untangling these complicated issues. This help must come by way of analogy, because biblical laws of poverty are surprisingly silent on the question of housing. Aside from a brief citation in Isaiah 58:6-7 "This is the fast I desire ... to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin," the Bible (as well as later rabbinic sources) tends to focus on our responsibility

to give money and food to the poor but generally ignores the question of shelter. Yet homelessness as a metaphor is a repeated theme in Jewish sources. We can use the metaphor of the Jews as a homeless people as well as other texts that hint at housing issues, as a guide to creating a Jewish housing policy.

After telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the Bible repeatedly enjoins the people of Israel not to impose their own experience on others. The first set of laws that the people receive after the revelation includes the injunction, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20). Later, the text forbids keeping slaves for more than seven years because "you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you" (Deuteronomy 15:15). The message is clear—we have experienced oppression and suffering and should not impose the same experiences on others. By extension, the Jews' extended homelessness during the exile from Israel should compel us to protect others from homelessness.

Two biblical laws lead us toward a more specific understanding of the nature, purpose, and appropriate construction of housing. For one week a year, we are commanded to live in sukkot, temporary shelters that offer only partial protection from the elements. These sukkot are sufficiently strong to house us for the week, but fragile enough to remind us of the forty years of homelessness the Jews experienced between the Exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the land of Israel. In regard to permanent housing, the Bible requires that the roof of every house have a *ma'akeh*, a guardrail that prevents falls. Through these two sets of laws, we can begin to understand the nature of housing and to formulate a response to debates about low-income housing.

The sukkah derives its significance from the contrast between it and the permanent house to which one is accustomed. Without the existence of a permanent house, the designation of the sukkah as "permanent" for seven days would have little meaning. The sukkah, by definition, does not offer its residents full protection from the outside world. According to the mishnah, "For the seven days of Sukkot, a person makes his sukkah into a permanent residence and his house into a temporary residence. When it rains, at what point is one permitted to go inside? From the time that the food will be spoiled [by the rain] (Sukkah 2:9)." Living in the sukkah should not be a hardship; therefore, residents of the sukkah must have another place to go when conditions in the sukkah become unbearable. The sukkah must meet basic needs during the specific period for which it is ordained, but should not be construed as a permanent residence. Those living in the sukkah must always

have a safer place to which they can return. In the same way, a shelter or transitional housing facility must meet basic needs for a short period of time, but should not be considered a long-term solution to the housing crisis. We need to acknowledge that, like a sukkah, these short-term solutions cannot offer all of the protections of a permanent house. Therefore, even while we offer emergency controls against homelessness, we cannot consider our work complete until we guarantee permanent housing solutions.

The commandment in Deuteronomy 22:8 to build a roof guard rail, or *ma'akeh*, emphasizes the supreme importance of human life. One whose house does not have a *ma'akeh* risks being held responsible for the death of one who falls from the roof. The *ma'akeh* thus teaches that we are responsible even for the indirect consequences of our actions. One cannot build a house and then abdicate responsibility for what happens there. The builder's primary concern should be the people who will inhabit or visit the house and the builder thus must take any precautions necessary to guarantee the safety of these people. The commandment of the *ma'akeh* also teaches that the purpose of a permanent house, unlike a sukkah, is not simply to provide shelter; the house must offer full protection to all who enter it. This protection must continue even long after the original builder has left; therefore, a landlord cannot ethically abandon a building and consider him/herself free of responsibility for the tenants who remain there. Those who construct housing projects that fail to protect the safety of the residents must assume responsibility when gangs and drug dealers take over. When cities rebuild and "gentrify" poor neighborhoods, city government has a responsibility to ensure that current residents do not lose their homes. Middle and upper-income tenants moving into these areas have a responsibility only to move into previously vacant apartments and not to displace existing tenants.

To the discussion of acceptable housing the twelfth-century scholar Moses Maimonides adds an important corollary: "One who rents a house to another is obligated to construct doors and to fix broken windows, to reinforce the ceiling, to fix broken beams, and to make a bolt and a lock and similar things which are produced by artisans and which are essential to dwelling in houses. The tenant is obligated to put up a *ma'akeh* and a *mezuzah*" (Mishneh Torah 6:3). This definition of a permanent, habitable residence stands in stark contrast to the rabbinic descriptions of the sukkah, which is exposed to the elements and whose roof cannot be solid. The landlord has specific obligations to make the residence habitable. Even if the tenant is desperate enough to accept a home that does not have sturdy walls or a secure lock, the landlord is responsible for providing these things.

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A landlord must operate according to an ethical standard, not according to what the market will bear.

What is surprising about Maimonides' statement is that he shifts the responsibility to build a ma'akeh from the builder to the tenant. Presumably, he would maintain the biblical mandate for a builder to erect a ma'akeh but, in the case of a pre-existing building, he assigns this responsibility to the tenant. If so, we can read his statement this way: the builder should provide solid walls, strong windows, effective locks, and a ma'akeh, but when the builder fails to do this, or when a building has fallen into disrepair, the landlord and the tenant divide these responsibilities. While the landlord must make the building habitable, the tenant also must take responsibility for his or her own safety and spiritual well-being. The landlord's role comes first, as it would be impossible to attach a ma'akeh or a mezuzah to a building without a steady roof or a door. The landlord's actions make it possible for the tenant to empower him or herself to assume responsibility for the continuing safety of the building.

Such relations between landlord and tenant take place within a larger social context. Rashi, the eleventh-century commentator, questions the juxtaposition in Deuteronomy 22 of a series of seemingly unrelated laws. The commandment to shoo away a mother bird before taking her eggs immediately precedes the law of the ma'akeh; the law immediately following the ma'akeh prohibits the mixing of different seeds on a single plot of land. Rashi suggests that this series of laws illustrates the principle that one mitzvah leads to another—one who follows the law regarding the mother bird will merit building a new house; one who constructs a ma'akeh will be granted land on which to plant.

In accordance with Rashi, we can read this series of laws as an instruction manual for establishing a society that respects the dignity of every individual. This society must begin with a commitment to respecting the dignity of even the most overlooked creature. The next step toward creating a permanent society—defined as a society sufficiently secure in its stability that it literally sets down roots—is the establishment of permanent houses. It is not acceptable for permanent residents of a place to live in sukkot. Stable housing must precede other indicators of permanence such as farms or long-term job commitments. Therefore, we must begin from the assumption that every person deserves decent housing, regardless of income, background, or ability to work. Only when every member of society has an adequate and permanent place to live can we begin to deal with productivity issues. Just as it would be impossible to expect people to establish farms before they have places to live, it is impossible to expect people to commit to jobs or job training programs before we meet their basic needs. As Maryse learned, it is difficult to concentrate on work and otherwise to live a productive life when one's housing is in jeopardy. This year, New Yorkers rightly protested Mayor Rudy

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Giuliani's plan to evict shelter residents who do not find jobs within thirty days; it is ludicrous to think that those without permanent shelter can commit to permanent jobs.

The examples of the sukkah and the ma'akeh teach us a number of Jewish principles about housing. First, true housing is, by nature, permanent. Second, the purpose of a house is to protect those within it. Third, the relationship between landlord and tenant should be one of partners. Finally, stable and protective housing is a necessary condition for the establishment of a just and permanent society.

These principles have particular bearing on a number of contemporary housing issues. When shelters are necessary, they should protect the safety of those who stay in them. This means that those who operate shelters have the responsibility not only for erecting a building, but also for guarding those who sleep there from theft and violence. Furthermore, our goal should always be to place people in permanent housing rather than allow shelters to become de facto permanent residences. Projects, however, are not appropriate permanent residences because they lack a metaphorical ma'akeh; just as an open roof invites falls, projects put their inhabitants in harm's way by demeaning them spiritually. Projects also are insufficient housing because so few of them have involved future tenants in the planning process, and thus have violated Maimonides' requirement for a tenant/landlord partnership.

Perhaps the housing option that best reflects Maimonides' dual emphasis on the responsibilities of the landlord and the tenant is one in which tenants manage their own buildings. Programs such as New York's Tenant Interim Lease Program (TIL) and St. Louis' Cochran Gardens allow tenants to act as their own landlords. In New York, TIL, which turns buildings into co-ops, has been a particularly effective option for residents of city-owned buildings at risk of being sold to for-profit landlords. When a for-profit landlord buys a cluster of buildings, s/he generally raises the rent as much as permitted and often moves tenants from one building to another or into smaller apartments within the same building. Managing their own buildings offers tenants the chance to control their rents and to guarantee stability for themselves. However, managing a building is difficult work. Therefore, we should also look for viable and empowering options for tenants not interested in full management responsibility.

As Jews, we need to commit ourselves to creating a society that provides dignified, affordable and permanent housing to all of its members. This means devoting communal and personal resources to policy issues, setting communal standards for the responsibilities of Jewish landlords, and formulating ethical principles for determining where to live. The memory of our own homelessness, as well as the examples of the sukkah and the ma'akeh, should compel us to understand the fundamental nature of decent housing and to devote ourselves to creating a society that guarantees permanent housing to all. □

AARON'S GOD—AND OURS (continued from page 50)

to perform a ritual in which you get so much blood on your hands that it drips from your fingers, and then splash the curtains and the altar and the Ark with it. You are to burn so much incense that you can barely see for the sweet-smelling smoke. It probably makes you cough; it probably makes your eyes water and your throat burn. Standing amid the blood and dung and carcasses of the bull and the goat you've slaughtered, you are to confess your sins while resting your hands on the head of a live goat.



You are to send this goat—a witness to the entire ritual—running into the wilderness with all your sins heaped on his head. And then you are to emerge from the shrine, strip off your bloody clothes, bathe again, put on full priestly regalia, and rejoin your people.

What happens here that restores Aaron's and Aaron's household's right relationship with God? What happens is that God reminds Aaron who God really is. To understand this, we must put aside our knee-jerk repugnance for ritual sacrifice, which had a very different meaning for Aaron than it does for us today. The equivalent for us, I think, would be to take a week's paycheck and set it on fire. It is about giving up to God some basic element of our sustenance, without which we could not live. But even as we are repelled by the image of animal sacrifice, I think we can nonetheless appreciate the power in such a ritual, a ritual that was Aaron's familiar way to approach God. In performing this ritual, Aaron finds himself once again intensely in the presence of the true God—a God who guides him into doing what will release him, and makes the process safe.

Then, there is the innovation for Aaron in this ritual—his confession of sin; never before today has this been part of the ceremony. And the final way in which God reminds Aaron who he is: God makes no comment upon his confession. He simply invites Aaron to speak his sins aloud and then offers him a way to let them go. It is Aaron's letting go of sin, not God's judgement of sin, that sets Aaron free and returns him and his people to joyful participation in a covenantal relationship—which is to say, a two-way relationship—with God.

This is the sort of relationship into which God is inviting us on this holy day—not one in which we are judged, but one in which we are released. Yom Kippur offers us the opportunity to let go of the attitudes and behaviors that create estrangements of all kinds—including estrangement from God—and enter into renewed contact and renewed possibility. □

INTERVIEW

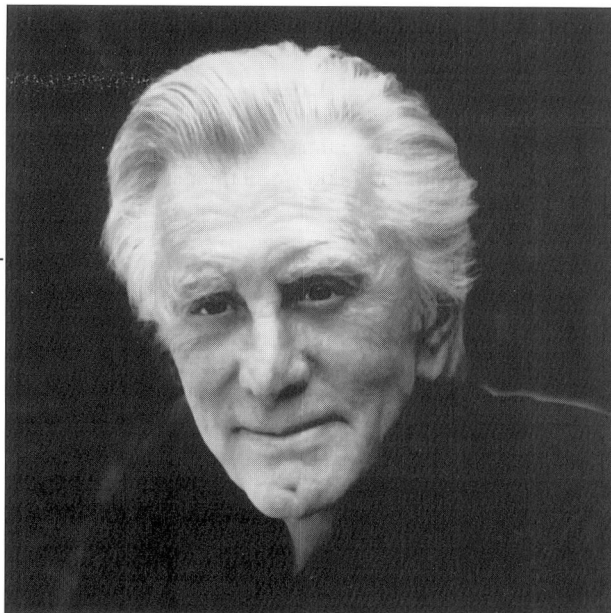
A CONVERSATION WITH Kirk Douglas

Peter Gabel

Kirk Douglas is best known as an actor who has appeared in more than eighty films, including such classics as *Spartacus* and *Lonely Are the Brave*.

Born Issur Danielovitch, the son of Jewish immigrants, in Amsterdam, New York, Douglas is now eighty-three. In spite of a stroke that has impaired his speech, he continues to speak and write about the ethical core of Judaism and the importance of devoting one's life to a social purpose beyond oneself.

His eloquent articulation of the universal need for meaning and his personal rediscovery of Judaism as a source of spiritual wisdom, expressed in his recent book, *Climbing the Mountain: My Search for Meaning*, speaks to many of the central concerns we address in *TIKKUN*. This interview was conducted by Peter Gabel.



DOUGLAS: The pain of people who think being Jewish is like a disease.... My tikkun is helping Jewish people feel proud, not feel ashamed. I understand that shame, because I went through a period in which you got along much better if you were not Jewish. I was often in the company of people who said very degrading things to Jews.

When I went to Russia, I tried to find out where my parents came from. It was a little shtetl in Belarus, near a city...

INTERVIEW

and to approach the coming year seeking a greater level of spiritual depth and meaning.

DOUGLAS: You know, it's interesting how people celebrate New Year's Eve. I never quite got it. You must get drunk, whereas Rosh Hashanah is a time for introspection, where you sit back and look at your life with others and really think about it.

The first book I ever wrote was *The Ragman's Son*, my autobiography. I wrote it because I wanted to take inventory. I tell the story of giving a sailor a ride, and, as he got in the car, he looked at me, flustered, and said, "Do you know who you are?" I thought about it. And I said to myself, "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?"

Really, in my writing, whether it's a novel or a book for children, it's all inventory, looking within myself for things.

TIKKUN: Tell me about your book for children.

DOUGLAS: It's called *Young Heroes of the Bible*. You know, with all that has been happening to children, I wanted them to have an insight into how adventurous the Bible was, and that children play a key part in it. Most of the translations are so bad, they insist on the Word and all that crap. But the stories were really simple and profound. The Torah has everything—fratricide, incest, adultery, murder.

I talk about Joseph, that spoiled brat. People say, "How can you say that?" and I say, "Well, suppose you were Joseph's brother and your father gave him a coat of many colors and not you?" I'd say, "I'd like to punch him in the face!" But my point is that in spite of that he became a great man.

See, there are many ways of doing something good in the world. Beware of the person who says, "My way is the only way."

TIKKUN: I understand you've recently gone to Israel to dedicate two playgrounds, one in the Jewish quarter, one in the Arab quarter, in the hope that the children will some day play together in peace.

DOUGLAS: Yes, I have contact with many people in Jerusalem. Just yesterday, I spoke with someone there, and we had an argument. He criticized the Pope, who had just made his apology about the Holocaust. I said that, no matter what, the Pope is doing a wonderful thing. He is trying to bring all the people together.

I have said many times that my studies have made me realize it's all the same: Muslims follow Mohammed to reach the same God, Christians follow Jesus to reach the same God. We Jews follow Moses, but it's all the same God, the God of Abraham. There is just one inexplicable Power over everything.

You know, I think the most terrible thing happening to the Jews today is happening in Israel. The Jews in Israel are not that Jewish, they are so secular, and the ultra-Orthodox are just as bad as Hamas—I think the secular Jews have to be more understanding, and the ultra-Orthodox have to be more understanding; you worship God whatever way you wish, but you should feel proud of your heritage.

Why do we hate each other? If there is a God, He must be laughing, saying, "Maybe I made a mistake!"

TIKKUN: My view is that we're killing each other because the longing for meaning is suppressed, not validated. Instead, people develop crazy forms of meaning, like violent nationalism, to demean the other in order to hold up your own pride.

DOUGLAS: Exactly.

TIKKUN: The discovery of our common spiritual longing is something that people are not encouraged to do.

DOUGLAS: Maybe we are still evolving. It's a slow process. But I think that all Jews, no matter how they worship, whether Orthodox or Reform or Conservative or whatever, should unite in the traditional aspect of Judaism that wants to make the world a better place. There are lots of ways to build a table, but it's still a table.

TIKKUN: One last question. In your book you say, "I know there is something deep down in our subconscious that is struggling to break through, only we are so involved with our mundane activities that we don't hear it."

DOUGLAS: Yes, I think that we all have that desire, deep down, to be good, to do something good for mankind, to help other people. I know some people are thinking, "Well Kirk, at his age, he's just trying to get in good with God," but I say, I don't know about another life, maybe that's all conceit, but I do know that somehow, if you really dig deep, you find that you must somehow help your fellow man. Caring is sharing, and there is such satisfaction, such gratification, in it.

Take my wife. She saw that the schools' playgrounds were in such need of repair, so she established a foundation by selling all of our paintings. She just decided, I'm going to get some money and fix up all the playgrounds. She's fixed up 100 now. She has about 400 to go. And I said to her, "Gee, that's wonderful, how can I help?" And she said, "Get a job, we need the money!" (Laughs).

You know, once in a while, after talking too much, I want to let people know that we take too many things for granted. A stroke has been a great thing for me, because imagine an actor who relies on speech, and suddenly—he can't talk. Well, my wife with her sense of humor (we Jews have survived because of our sense of humor) ... when I say, "I don't think I'll be able to do this movie because I can't talk," she says (thinking about her playgrounds), "When the cameras are grinding, you will talk!" (Laughs).

TIKKUN: Of course, you did it in *Diamonds*.

DOUGLAS: Yes, and did you see *Touched by an Angel* on TV? It surprised me how many people were touched by that show.

Anyhow, I'm still learning. If Jews, like myself, can grasp this idea of "tikkun," we will make the world a better place. My mother taught me that the beggar must give to the poorer beggar. Enough.

TIKKUN: Thank you. □

PERSONAL ESSAY

Shedding Hope



were there, because she doesn't have friends. There were no other relatives, because she'd broken with her family years before. I hadn't seen much of Toby in the preceding year, though we live only two miles apart. I'd grown tired of being called poison and told I should die. Call me touchy. When my mother would sever our connection, she left it to me to resume. If I didn't call, there was silence, and silence made me feel freakish in a different way. There was no winning.

A few months after the party, I'm knocked off my bike by a hit and run driver. I need knee surgery and ask Ellen not to tell Toby. You don't want to be disabled around my mother. If you have a paper cut, she will scream you are hemorrhaging. Ten days after my operation, I'm home and walking without a brace when I call Toby. She won't see me. She will never see me again. The reason is cryptic, her voice accusing and sandpappy: "You know what you did."

I don't, not specifically. Haven't a clue. She ends the conversation without asking about my leg and doesn't call again. Four months later I call her. She meets me for coffee at Starbucks and tells me that my niece had relayed a remark I made at her party, some throwaway line about her being difficult because she had a crummy childhood. Ellen had added kerosene by reporting that I didn't attend her fiftieth birthday party because I didn't want to see my mother. It's true, but I'm surprised Ellen would sacrifice me to goad Toby. I say, "Ellen knew this would hurt you. Aren't you interested in her motives?" She says, "You want me dead."

I call Ellen. She says she's been angry with me for our entire adult lives because I don't spend more time with her family. I say I don't require that she hang with my intimates, that I want to know her, not her menage. We are very different, our interests, the shapes of our lives. She feels my lack of involvement with her family as a rejection, and I understand this, but we are who we are, I say, and I want her to apologize for stirring up trouble with Toby. She won't. We end the conversation angry.

And that is the last contact I have with my mother and sister for four years. They don't call, though I would speak if they did. I don't call, because it feels like taking care of myself.

During this period, Toby takes to calling me and hanging up. She bangs down the receiver if she hears my voice or gets my machine. It's the little things. I know it's my mother, at least some of the time, because the hang-ups arrive on her schedule: seldom late at night when she is asleep or during the early afternoon when she goes out. I figure she's checking on me, and that, in her way, she misses me. Sometimes she lingers for a few seconds as I repeat "Hello." I don't say her name, don't give away her game. I think it's creepy and weird, but creepy-and-weird is our middle name.

Doing nothing is hard, but as time passes I peel off expectations, aware in a way that irritates me that I still have them. After the *Village Voice* goes free, the phone hang-ups taper off and I connect these events. Toby is way too cheap to buy the paper, but I figure now that she can pick it up for nothing, she is checking my name on the masthead. When, last spring, I leave the *Voice* and my name disappears from the paper, the hang-ups don't resume.

You don't want to be disabled around my mother. If you have a paper cut, she will scream you are hemorrhaging.

I become worried. If something bad happened to Toby would Ellen call? My friend Enid—who goes back to summer camp days and has a vivid picture of my sister in her head—wants to play detective. I say okay. She calls Toby and gets no answer for a couple of days. I think, at least the phone hasn't been disconnected, but the fact isn't that reassuring. I call my sister, who at first responds in mono-

syllables. She says that Toby is with her, in New Jersey, recovering from a bad case of pneumonia. As we talk, Ellen begins to sound friendly. I say that maybe the break has been good for us. At least her feelings have been aired. We agree to talk, just the two of us, when Toby is well. Ellen says that Toby is impossible, demanding and raging. My sister's at the end of her tether. I say, "What else is new?" She asks if I want to speak to Toby, and I say no. But strangely, before Ellen can report my call, Toby blurts out, "I think I'll call Laurie and ask her to help me when I get home."

A week later, I meet her at the doctor's. She's in the examining room, sitting on butcher paper, staring into space. I say hello loud, twice, before she turns her head. Ellen has warned me about the hearing loss, but I am not prepared for the other changes. She's become a little old lady, with hollowed cheeks, a yellowed complexion, stooped shoulders. The wrinkled skin on her shriveled arms is slack. I hug her. She's cocooned in anxiety but treats the meeting as if weeks, rather than years, have passed. The doctor enters and says her blood counts and X-rays show improvement, though she still has a way to go. She complains she has no appetite, then asks, in the voice of a five-year-old, if she can have a tongue sandwich. The doc says, "Why not?" and lists the Jewish delis in the neighborhood. She gets dressed, and we inch around the corner to buy fatty, Jewish meat.

Back at her apartment, I help her into bed, bring her food on a tray, dispose of the trash, straighten up the kitchen to her specifications. She is grateful. She doesn't ask about my life. When I mention that I published two books in the intervening time, she doesn't ask what they are about, instead says, "Did you make any money?" She's scared of being sick, and I feel for her, but the fear picks up momentum and then there are only negatives: slights and wounds from the past, each sucked on like a treasured stone, rage

against everyone she accuses of anti-Semitism, all Black people. Toby was disappointed when apartheid ended.

On the fourth of my daily visits, I arrive with groceries. She's dressed, waiting for me to take her down. Although I am exactly on time, she rails against me for coming late. Although I have bought everything she asked for and selected the produce carefully, she curses me, shaking with rage, as she unpacks the food. "How could you pick such big onions? These tomatoes are crap." She says I have killed her by buying a large container of cottage cheese. The scene has a farcical element, I grant, and Toby's saving grace, at other times, is that she can laugh. Now, she only feels done to.

Here she is, with only me to depend on. She knows I will help her, but she knows, too, I don't love her, not in the way love is inspired by kindness, charm, or brilliance. I love Toby because of an intractable biological fact: she is my mother. It's bargain basement, bottom of the food chain love. I wonder if she ponders how she's come to this fate: alone in the world except for two daughters who sigh with resignation when invoking her name. I know she doesn't factor in her role in this destiny. She does not take in her effect on others. Other people are real only in terms of their effect on her.

I try to derail the curse train she is on, but she wants to push me as hard as she can. Test my loyalty. I've been with her part of every day since she got home, and now I lose it. I shout back, say she's alone because no one can stand her. She looks surprised, asks why I am yelling. I say, "Because you haven't stopped screaming since I walked in the door." She denies she's even raised her voice. When she would do this in the past, I would think she was lying. Now I see she's really out of touch.

I stand on her sand-colored carpet. The room is dark, because she keeps turning off lights. I sense the old misery seeping in, but it is only a whisper feeling, like smoke insinuating itself beneath the threshold of a closed door. Things feel different, and it's a change I couldn't have gauged had we not been reunited. As difficult as Toby is, I'd rather have her in my life than not, rather see what is real than want her too much or hate her too much in the void. I no longer have expectations, it seems. Shedding hope makes me tingly, giddy.

I say, "Let's take a walk." She gathers her things as if nothing has happened. We hit the streets, and she comes alive. She's a city kid, born on the Lower East Side, raised in poverty, with four siblings and knowledge of her mother's frequent abortions. She has washed and fluffed her hair, put



I don't love her, not in the way love is inspired by kindness, charm, or brilliance. It's bargain basement, bottom of the food chain love.

on rouge and lipstick. She looks and feels better. She slips an arm through mine, and we head toward Central Park, a block from her apartment. She smiles, remembering a Fellini film that's now playing at the Paris Theater, and her beauty glints out. She repeats her favorite bromide about the two of us: "We don't get along because we're too much alike."

When I think of how I'm like Toby, the traits are mostly negative. But I want to think of something positive we share. We get to the zoo, and she says, "I hate seeing animals in cages." I say, "Me too." We sit on a bench, and a young woman walks by, pushing a stroller. Toby says, "I spent my whole life doing for others," and I think it must seem that way to her, the sense of never feeling safe making her feel subject to everyone. She runs her hand over her thighs and stomach. "I'm too thin. What do you say, we get a

tongue sandwich." I say, "Mom, I like your vanity and appetite." She says, "I'm not vain. I'm never hungry. I just eat for the hell of it." I say, "Then, I must have gotten those traits from Daddy." She says, "Yeah, yeah, on his side they were peacocks and gluttons." □

TORAH OF MONEY (continued from page 20)

educational and inspirational task easier. "The parallels between the 'closet' and Jewish assimilation are too strong to ignore," she says.

During this season of Yom Kippur, GLBT invisibility becomes most apparent and painful, particularly in congregations that include the traditional reading during the *minhah* service of Torah passages about forbidden sexuality. Leviticus 18:22 and the death-dealing Leviticus 20:14 have been major stumbling blocks before the gates of *teshuvah* for the Jewish community regarding its GLBT sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, fathers and mothers.

Still, we are writing at this season deliberately, in the belief that it is neither the Torah nor liturgy that truly fulfills the transformational goals of the High Holidays. As the Talmud (B. Yoma 85b) teaches: "For transgressions against a neighbor, the Day of Atonement does not procure forgiveness until we are reconciled with the neighbor." For the multiple transgressions of exclusion, indifference, and senseless hatred associated with homophobia, only face-to-face encounter can bring atonement—and only funding for outreach and education will effect that encounter.

The Pooled Fund for Jewish Community Activism on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues can be contacted at The Shefa Fund, (215) 483-4004; info@shefafund.org. □

The White Negro Revisited

Josh Ozersky

S ometime in 1953, Sun Records producer Sam Philips had the following thought: "If I could get me a white boy with that black sound, I could make a million dollars." The rest is cultural history—or is it?

Today, black culture is being assimilated (or annexed, depending on your point of view) by white people: white rappers like Kid Rock and Eminem, white designers like Tommy Hilfiger, white actors like Danny Hoch, and white directors like James Toback (*Black and White*). Thanks largely to white purchasing power, hip-hop sales increased by some 31 percent last year, compared to some 2 to 3 percent for rock albums. White rap accounted for two of the top five albums in the country at the time of this writing: Eminem's "The Marshall Mathers Album" is the top-selling album in the country for the fourth straight week, the fastest selling release by a solo artist in history. Kid Rock's "History of Rock," meanwhile, a collection featuring only two new songs, has held on at number three and is already double platinum.

Precedents come easily—*The Man Ripping Off Black Culture* or *Integration Alive And Well!*, depending on your editorial needs—but any historical comparison requires looking back at race relations in the Fifties. It can come as quite a shock. Consider Norman Mailer's seminal 1957 essay, "The White Negro." Published in the *Village Voice*, Mailer's essay announced that the Negro, segregated and criminalized by society, made an ideal model for the would-be subversive.

Mailer's piece was received by its captive audience with much enthusiasm, and understandably. Most people who thought of themselves as enlightened (the very definition of the *Voice's* readership) were appalled by the racial status quo. Jim Crow segregation, both in its southern *de facto* and northern *de jure* forms, was still the law of the land.

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Southern Democrats still formed the most potent bloc in Congress. Even the hopelessly stilted tokenism of Sidney Poitier and Diahann Carroll was ten years in the future. In such an evil time, racially speaking, it is not hard to see the appeal that blacks would have for dissident citizens. Blacks were the possessors of some of the richest and most beautiful music in the world; they were faultless symbols of oppression; and the injustices they currently bore constituted, in sociologist Gunnar Myrdal's phrase, "an American Dilemma" bordering on ignominy.

But none of this spirit applied to Mailer's essay. For Mailer, "the Negro" was little more than a stock character, a razor-toting stereotype who represented society's id. "Hated from outside and therefore hating himself," Mailer blithely wrote, "the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt." Dig it!

Of course, real black people were nothing like that. The existential man, living in the shadow of the atomic bomb and the Holocaust (for so Mailer portrayed him) might well appreciate the example of a marginal "psychopath" whom he might emulate, and so "encourage the psychopath in himself." Negroes were not psychopaths, however, but, for the most part, observant Christians who took both the Old and New Testament at face value. The evolution of American Hip would go in a different direction, with no seats to be found for blacks even at the back of the Magic Bus.

Forty-three years later, blacks are back at the heart of hip-ness. This time, however, complexities abound. For one thing, black culture is far more conflicted, the religious and economic undergirding of postwar Jim Crow culture having fallen victim to time, economics, Reaganism, and the drug

trade. And white culture is much more conflicted about blacks, particularly in light of such post-Reagan spectacles as the L.A. riots, the O.J. Simpson trial, and the nightly parade of perp walks we see on TV. Worse still, blacks have capitalized on this morbid fascination. Hip-hop started out, like blues or R&B, as a local black music, invented in the Bronx for entertainment purposes only. It only attracted a large white audience after a West coast version emerged much later, which promised the very angst and romanticized criminality beloved by white audiences. Ice T and NWA (Niggaz With Attitude) provided white audiences, in other words, with the very things Norman Mailer had claimed they wanted in "The White Negro." DMX is a "psychopath" in a way Chuck Berry never was; Mailer's essay, it turns out, was prescient by its very wrongness.

"The Negro," Mailer wrote,

not being privileged to gratify his self-esteem with the heady satisfactions of categorical condemnation, chose to move instead in that other direction where all situations are equally valid, and in the worst of perversion, promiscuity, pimping, drug addiction, rape, razor-slash, bottle-break, what-have-you, the Negro discovered and elaborated a morality of the bottom, an ethical differentiation between the good and the bad in every human activity from the go-getter pimp (as opposed to the lazy one) to the relatively dependable pusher or prostitute.

Only Mailer could have articulated such a vision at the very moment that Martin Luther King, Jr. was becoming a national figure. But in 2000, a decade of bigger-and-deffer hip-hop acts have given their all to make Mailer's caricature accurate—including the ultimate sacrifice by Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G.

And today's white negroes? The fullest inheritor of Mailer's manifesto is without a doubt Kid Rock, the most self-conscious of the new breed of white hip-hop artists. Kid Rock is as completely reverential toward the "old-school" clichés of blaxploitation and early hip-hop as a Confucian at the temple of his ancestors.

*I'm a pimp!
You can check my stacks!
I'm rollin' a Fleetwood,
That's how I mack!*

Kid Rock brings a hybrid vigor to his homage, however. Artistic imitation has always been a good microcosm of integration, because in aping another culture's musical styles, the imitator invariably adds something of his own. In this case, Kid Rock adds an element of self-parody bordering on wit, and a true instinct for spectacle. Kid Rock's performance on the MTV music awards last year was indeed landmark: he was introduced by his herald, a midwest rapper named Joe C., and presided over a reunion of Run-DMC and Aerosmith, the authors of the very first hip-hop/rock fusion, in 1985. He then appeared in furs behind a line of fan dancers, and announced "My name is

Kid.....Rock!!" before launching into his hard rock/hip-hop hybrid anthem "Bawitdaba." ("The gander freaks, the cars packed with speakers! The Gs with the 40s and the chicks with beepers!" etc.)

But if Kid Rock and lesser acts such as the Insane Clown Posse have adopted Mailer's idea of the black experience (with varying degrees of irony), Kid Rock's Detroit rival Eminem has clearly gone beyond it. Eminem, whose real name is Marshall Mathers, is simultaneously more and less "black" than Kid Rock. On the one hand, where Kid Rock is essentially a white performer paying tribute to black culture, Eminem began his career in the competitive core of hip-hop: the freestyle "battles" in which rival rappers try to outdo each other in impromptu verse. The bardic fury took hold in Eminem, and no less a personage than NWA's Dr. Dre adopted the white prodigy as his protégé. At the same time, Eminem makes no effort to sound black, or to rap about black lifestyle issues. (No artist with as unencumbered a spring as Eminem could manage such a monumental put-on.) In "My Fault," a college student gives a girl at a rave party too many psychedelic mushrooms, leaving him way over his head ("I'm not your dad, quit tryin' to swallow your tongue—want some gum? Put down the scissors, 'fore you do somethin' dumb!"); in other songs, Eminem is closer to a hip-hop Elvis Costello, rapping with dexterity and humor about alienation and white poverty.

*I'm tired of being white trash, broke and always poor,
Tired of taking pop bottles back to the party store,
I'm tired of not having a phone—
Tired of not having a home to have one in if I did have one
on ...*

And other white hip-hop artists are pushing the genre's boundaries as well. Like Eminem, performance artist Danny Hoch is so deeply immersed in hip-hop culture (Hoch grew up in Brooklyn in the 1980s) that it is essentially his native tongue; as a preternaturally gifted mimic, his performances, like the Obie-winning *Some People* and the even better *Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop*, consist of Hoch portraying a multitude of black, Hispanic, and white characters, each one minutely and lovingly observed. *Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop* (coming out as a movie this summer) was a triumph of humanism—inclusive, apolitical, free from the stink of propaganda. It was made possible by Hoch's insider's grasp of city culture—a fact that Hoch makes much of in the piece's introduction: "Fuck the Internet. Hip-Hop is the future of language and culture in the multicultural society."

But is it? Urban hip-hop culture is less than twenty years old, and no doubt much of the heavily stylized gestures and jargon will seem dated in a few short years. (If it isn't already—a rock group called The Offspring had a novelty hit recently with the song "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy).") Even black rap acts seem to be sometimes trying too hard to "keep it real" and falling into the most labored kind of posturing. But at the same time, there's little doubt that at the

moment, hip-hop culture has replaced rock as the official baseline style of contemporary culture, from the advertising agencies to the schoolyards. And the reason for this goes back to Mailer and beyond. Hip-hop serves an irreplaceable function. For a culture which is founded on integration and on fetishizing low or marginal parts of society, hip-hop is all things to all people. For many whites, blacks still represent, *pace* Mailer, a dangerous and more “authentic” underclass than the hated “yuppies” or “boomers” who run society. Others identify with them on class grounds: “It’s just cooler to be oppressed, than the oppressor,” says Danny Hoch in the preface to *Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop*. “Who wants to be the oppressor? Shit, not me.” And on a purely pragmatic level, aspirants to the culture industry understand that there is nowhere else for the official subversive culture to go. “Alternative culture” has few alternatives; without the vitalizing elixir of hip-hop and its underclass energies, there is nothing but a Balkan state of baroque, fin-de-siecle stylistic turf wars.

Hip-hop, finally, offers something that Mailer would never have dreamt of, at least not in 1957. It takes the pathological self-involvement and self-importance which has waxed in America since the 1970s, and which Christopher Lasch condemned in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), and made it cool. Beyond the criminal glamor or postpolitical class appeal, that is the main reason behind hip-hop’s great surge. It’s no coincidence that both Kid Rock and Eminem begin their records with identical announcements: Kid Rock yelling “My name is Kid...Rock!” and Eminem with a song entitled “My Name Is.” (Nor is it any coincidence that

Eminem’s phenomenal success came only after he turned up the volume on his own pathology on *The Marshall Mathers Album*, exaggerating psychotic violence at the expense of much of his previous album’s self-deprecating wit and humor.)

But there’s no dichotomy between self-involvement and “keeping it real.” The exaggerated, megalomaniac individualism of hip-hop grows organically out of the idea of “street cred,” of reputation and respect, the most prized commodity of people with little else but their name. Mailer’s vision, and the vision of aspiring hipsters in the Eisenhower era, was that of a criminal underclass whose morality and folkways stood in direct opposition to the business of American capitalism. But today’s ghetto is the white-hot center of conspicuous consumption, and the transcendent ideals to which hipsters aspired—Zen, jazz, freedom from the market—are as out of date as Bill Haley. The Y2K white negro is a “devil without a cause”—voracious, ambitious, and unconflictedly all about the benjamins. And unlike his ancestor, he runs as smoothly in the grain of society as any Organization Man of the Fifties ever did. He’s Babbitt with a bullet, the man of the hour. It would be a miracle if he wasn’t a success. □

Response to Ozersky

Danny Goldberg

I commend Joshua Ozersky for listening to rap, which is more than most members of the intellectual and political elite are willing to do, but his conclusions are disappointingly condescending and tone deaf to the emotions and aesthetics at the heart of both rap and rap’s audience.

Norman Mailer’s *White Negro* and Elvis Presley’s career are interesting prisms through which to look at rap music, but they are scarcely the first American examples of whites emulating black culture. In the 1930s the biggest radio comedy was *Amos ’n Andy* in which white performers crudely imitated black accents. In the 1920s, Broadway’s biggest star, Al Jolson, wore blackface referencing minstrel shows that dated back still further. Limited cultural archives in the pre-electronic era make it harder to document, but I think it’s



pretty likely that such cultural anomalies—like all other aspects of the agonizing American problem of race relations—date back to the obscene institution of slavery. It is absurd to talk about black and white cultural relationships

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outside of the historical context of general black and white relationships.

But Ozersky is not embarking on an even-handed analysis of black-white cultural interchange. In fact he's not really that interested in race. His main purpose is to condemn and belittle teenage culture. He writes that "hip-hop takes the pathological self-involvement which has waxed in America since the 1970s ... and makes it cool." Ozersky seems to be forgetting self-obsessed American cultural icons pre-1970s such as John Wayne, Babe Ruth, and Walter Winchell as well as cultural archetypes in non-American cultures such as Spanish bull-fighters, British Shakespearean actors, French intellectuals, etc., who are not usually self-effacing and other directed. The truth is that artists and performers in all cultures and at all times have big egos and some handle it better than others without advantage of decade or nationality.

Ozersky exemplifies a compulsion among many adults to delegitimize the emotions and culture of teenagers. Perhaps it is anger at no longer being a teenager anymore, the loss of a time of unmade decisions, innocence, and open roads. Whatever the psychological origins of this syndrome, this kind of pernicious nostalgia masked as morality accomplishes nothing other than distancing and dehumanizing young people from adult society.

When I was a teenager I was consumed with self-doubt and a terrible feeling of inner weakness and invisibility. Somehow the angry, caustic voices of Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and John Lennon expressed some of my unarticulated feelings and made me feel less lonely and better able to forge an identity. It was not, by the way, because I literally identified with their lyrics. I didn't think it was literally cool for Janis Joplin to get a Mercedes Benz—in fact, I preferred to think she was being self-mocking in that lyric, and I certainly never wanted a woman, in the words of Mick Jagger, "under my thumb." To me the words were symbols, which when combined with the music and intonation became the best available metaphors for my emotions. Yes, I had teenage angst, and I assume that rap music plays the same role in the lives of its teenage fans today, and that they process ugly images symbolically and metaphorically, as I did.

Why do white teenagers relate to lyrics rooted in crime-ridden ghettos? Probably for the same reason rural Americans in the Thirties and Forties thrilled to the fantasy urban gangsters created by Edward G. Robinson, George Raft, Humphrey Bogart, and James Cagney; why balladeers wrote so many songs about Stagolee and Jesse James; and why college film professors who have lived in comfortable suburban settings for their entire lives consider *The*

Godfather to be the greatest movie of all time and *The Sopranos* the apogee of TV series art. It would be interesting for psychologists and theologians to investigate why criminals have such a compelling place in the cultural lives of law-abiding audiences, but again, that's not the subject of Ozersky's piece—he wants to condemn one particular generation's version of this phenomenon.

Of course the argument that other generations and other genres have dealt with criminality and celebrated ego is not a moral answer. Perhaps both Dostoyevsky and Dr. Dre

were wrong to make their audiences identify with violent people. Perhaps the world would be better if art and entertainment talked far less about violence and instead embodied characters who were always moral, compassionate, and self-effacing. Although there is a place for such cultural expression, I think a culture that was solely "positive" would itself be pathological and repressed. Decisions to act morally are only arrived at in the context of the good and evil inside all of us. It is one thing to morally

reject evil impulses; it is another to pretend that they do not exist. Part of the function of art is to allow us to confront the dark sides of ourselves and place them in the correct context.

Tellingly, Allen Ginsberg, the most long-lasting and influential member of the Beat generation, continued to embrace the best of teenage culture until the day he died, often publicly appearing with young rock artists, and not because he was naïve about the often corrosive effects of fame and fortune on spiritual and artistic integrity. This is a primal human dilemma; charismatic priests, rabbis, or yogis confront the same demons, some successfully and some not. One can be a great artist and eschew the marketplace, but culture would be far poorer if all great artists did so.

Rap's distinctive characteristic is its emergence from the black underclass. Its mass popularity humanizes people who would otherwise be dehumanized by most white people, as objects of fear or derision. Like any form of communication, including journalism, rap produces some immoral trash, but overall it is a positive force in helping America along its marathon path towards racial balance.

Meanwhile, like those of us who were inspired by J.D. Salinger's writings forty years ago, teenagers today must struggle with the demons of growing up. It's perfectly appropriate for adults to move away from teenage culture, to ignore it or to dislike it. But to stigmatize teenagers, to trivialize their issues of becoming adults and the emotions or expressions of culture that go with that process, is to disconnect from our own inner selves. In short, condescending critics of teenage culture such as Ozersky should grow up. □

Ozersky exemplifies a compulsion among many adults to delegitimize the emotions and culture of teenagers.

All that Jazz



Ted Panken

- *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, by Scott DeVeaux. University of California Press, 1997.
- *Lost Chords: White Jazz Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915–1945*, by Richard Sudhalter. Oxford University Press, 1999.

These days, the term “jazz” denotes so many layers of reference that even the most articulate of the obsessed would be hard-put to define precisely what the music actually is and what they mean when they refer to it. Executed at the highest level of virtuoso craft, in constant dialogue with the past but constantly on the lookout for new tributaries to explore, the music—whatever it is—occupies a distinctive space, elegantly balancing on the high wire between High Art and Popular Culture.

The musicians covered in these two books under review, which span the years 1915 to 1967, faced no such ambiguities. Jumping off from a mosaic of bedrock vernaculars—march band music, ragtime, classical and twentieth-century European music, Tin Pan Alley, spirituals decorous and sanctified, the Blues, the African notion of rhythmic narrative that survived diasporic dislocation—they evolved the music at astonishing velocity; you can’t find much in today’s vocabulary that wasn’t seeded at some point along that timeline. The

cultural mix of raw materials, honed and given shape by improvisational imperatives, is one quality that makes jazz an art form radical in its essence.

These protagonists navigated radical terrain in several other respects, which pose basic paradoxes that historians and contemporary observers often find perplexing. The innovators of jazz, those who made statements so powerful that subsequent generations could not avoid piggybacking on them in moving the music forward, were African American; yet proficient white improvisers played with wit, imagination, and brilliance of the first rank. Living a good chunk of their lives in segregation times, jazz musicians were able to achieve a degree of interracial fraternity and color-blindness in their mutual relations; they never inhabited anything resembling an insular racial Arcadia, nor was the economic playing field ever not lopsidedly tilted in favor of whites. Less paradoxical, but perhaps the most radical notion is the implicit meritocracy that continues to define the social dimension of jazz, which in the realm of aesthetics is the most democratic of art forms as any bandstand performance comprises a real-time dialogue among the musicians. These days the pool of musicians is ever more diverse, spanning generations dating from World War I to post-MTV, as likely to hail from Australia or Israel or Senegal as from Louisiana or Chicago.

A big reason for this salutary—or dilutive—development is that the primary mode of passing down information is no longer via an oral lingua franca only decipherable to initiates (Wynton Marsalis titled a highly influential 1985 record, *Black Codes From the Underground*); the music’s push into academe has accelerated the process of codification. While counting for the smallest potatoes in the entertainment marketplace (jazz recordings have a lemming-like gestation rate and survival probability, constituting a whopping 1.8 percent of all record sales), jazz is big academic business. Numerous universities teach the language in sophisticated curricular form; so do high schools that can afford to buy instruments, and private cultural institutions like Lincoln Center.

The impact has been immeasurable. Back in 1949, the great saxophonist James Moody created a solo (“Moody’s Mood For Love”) of such enduring popularity that he’s forced to play it almost every time he performs. Yet, he claims that until 1959,

I didn’t know what it was to learn music. As a matter of fact, I used to go around asking, “What are chords?” When you ask someone who doesn’t know, it’s like the blind leading the blind. For the longest time, I just went not knowing, playing by ear. Then finally, when I got with some people that did know, I had to start trying to learn. The musicianship is much better with these younger musicians. Why? Because they have the books and the schools and the teachers and the playalongs. If you feel like you

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want to learn something, you can learn it, from the bottom up. If you get a good teacher, you can play real quick."

Scott DeVeaux belongs to an exclusive caste of musician-educators with academic sinecures (University of Virginia), and Richard Sudhalter is both a professional trumpeter who specializes in classic jazz repertoire and a working journalist of four decades who in the Seventies co-authored a detailed biography of the trumpeter Bix ("Young Man With A Horn") Beiderbecke. Both are skilled communicators, and their books are two of the best amidst an explosion of literature generated in the past quarter century since it began to be evident that the history of the music would fade into obscurity as its originators died unless their testimony was taken down.

The authors share a conviction that to focus on the processes by which musicians built vocabularies and made aesthetic decisions is the most reliable way to reconstruct the warp and woof of jazz history. To that end, they sculpt their heavily footnoted narratives with exhaustive reliance on primary sources—oral histories, published interviews, contemporary newspaper and trade reportage—as well as detailed analyses of improvisations and trenchant accountings of the shifting socioeconomic environment in which musicians operated. Where these comprehensive, groundbreaking studies diverge is in their assessment of race, and its tricky and not always predictable consequences.

Lost Chords is a passionate, panoramic chronicle of the lives, milieus, and music of a congeries of white jazz musicians of the second quarter of the twentieth century, famous and obscure, depicted at a novelistic level of detail and empathy that allows you to feel what it was like to be in their skin. Sudhalter points out things like the omnipresence of Sicilian musicians in early New Orleans jazz, tells you who they were, offers detailed, mimetic critiques of their styles. He clearly

explains how race-based presumptions of recording companies forced white bands as proficient at "hot" music as a waltz to record syrupy pabulum targeted at whites, while black bands who traversed a universal range of styles were pigeonholed into waxing stomps and blues for the "Race" market. He convincingly demonstrates the circular feedback loop of influence between white and black musicians in the formative years of jazz, and elucidates the personal, non-blues-centered aesthetics that white jazz musicians cultivated.

For these and many other virtues, *Lost Chords* is indispensable, yet the reader must ingest it with more than the usual grain of salt. Noting the "divisiveness" that cultural and racial politics of the last decades of the twentieth century have brought to jazz, Sudhalter seeks to redress the wrongs perpetrated by the racialized "black creationist canon ... the continuing notion, especially held among chroniclers and critics, that white musicians, no matter how accomplished and influential, are, in [jazz historian] James Lincoln Collier's words, 'only in it on suffrance.'" Towards this endeavor, throughout the book he alchemizes speculations on the pride of place his subjects hold in the great Jazz Chain of Being into objective statements of fact.

We first encounter this unsettling trope in the Introduction. After noting that "any attempt to look at the music without regard to such seminal figures as [Louis] Armstrong, [Duke] Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Henry Allen, Sid Catlett, Benny Carter and the rest would be folly; their primacy, and the reverence in which they are held, belong to the unquestioned foundation on which the entire edifice rests," Sudhalter immediately imparts equal gravitas to the quirky tenor saxophone virtuoso Bud Freeman, to the surging drummer Dave Tough, and to the Bob Crosby Orchestra—great musicians all, whose absence from the fray, for all their quality, would have had only minimal impact on the music's course. Was the reedman-arranger

Joseph Anthony "Fud" Livingston "certainly ... a composer of infinitely greater range and harmonic sophistication than [Jelly Roll] Morton, while no less skilled at integrating solo and ensemble in original ways"? Perhaps he was. But in examining the oceanic course of jazz through the century, Livingston's legacy is a dried-up brookbed, while Morton's is a mighty river tributary which has fed the imaginative hungers of subsequent generations.

To hold strong opinions on recondite subjects is the essence of a connoisseurship as erudite as Sudhalter's; he makes you work hard to disagree with him. In the relativistic, semiotics-obsessed climate of the day, minds may in good faith find as much value in Terry McMillan as Chester Himes, in Gilbert & Sullivan as in Verdi, in William Inge as in George Bernard Shaw. Where the reviewer perceives a fractious undertone of angry-white-male apologia, another in good faith may applaud a refreshing corrective to reverse racialism. As disingenuous as Sudhalter's tone renders his earnest protestations of pluralistic intent, it doesn't devalue this disorderly opus.

The seventy-seven-year-old Italian American clarinet virtuoso Buddy DeFranco experienced both ends of the spectrum; he spent apprenticeship years with top white bands like Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Barnet, and Boyd Raeburn, and later gigged with Charlie Parker, led a band on Fifty-Second Street with Bud Powell and Max Roach, worked two years in Count Basie's Octet, and for another two led a band on the road with an all-black rhythm section featuring the echt hardbop pianist Sonny Clark and the primal drummer Art Blakey. In a recent conversation, he cut to the chase on the subject:

The only thing I can say about black and white during those days is that the black bands had a swing feeling that gripped you; you could feel it in your hips, in the depth of your emotions. The white bands had maybe a little more polish, but they tried to

simulate that swing, and never really got it. Tommy Dorsey was aware of that. He used to say once in a while, "We don't have a swing band; if you want to have a swing band go and listen to Count Basie and absorb what he does, because that's a swing band." Glenn Miller said the same thing: "I have a commercial band; I don't have a swing band. Jimmie Lunceford and Count Basie are the swing bands."

During the early 1940s, DeFranco was the first clarinetist to come to terms with the specialized approach to jazz known as bebop, which, as Scott DeVeaux remarks, "is the point at which our contemporary ideas of jazz come into focus ... both the source of the present—that great revolution in jazz which made all subsequent jazz modernisms possible—and the prism through which we absorb the past." DeVeaux's elegantly argued, fluently written monograph—well, he throws in occasional buzzwords like "privileging" and "commodified" as terminological nods to the ivory tower—grapples head-on with the role of race as a key factor in the social and musical meanings of this transition. He constructs a convincing portrait of the pervasive de facto apartheid that existed in the music business and in the political economy of the post-Depression Swing Era and through the Second World War that put the black musicians who developed the new language at an automatic disadvantage in the marketplace. He also shows in great detail how the sound milieu influenced their aesthetic decisions. He allows these musicians to speak for themselves as to how they functioned and evolved intellectually, incorporating to a degree unprecedented in such a study a mountain of first-person testimony drawn both from his own interviews and from the invaluable body of oral history on file at the Institute Of Jazz Studies at the Newark Campus of Rutgers University.

DeVeaux focuses on Coleman Hawkins as the link between jazz in its adolescence and the musicians just past adolescence who created the revolution

to which he refers. Hawkins established a well-earned reputation as the tenor saxophonist supreme during a decade with the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Hawkins emigrated to Europe in 1934, where he was able to perform for appreciative audiences as a featured solo instrumentalist with a complex, arpeggiated, harmonically sophisticated style; upon returning to the United States in 1939, he recorded a popular solo, "Body and Soul," that remains an iconic landmark. Neither an entertainer à la Louis Armstrong, a charismatic front man like Cab Calloway, an organized businessman like Jimmie Lunceford, or a canny psychologist like Duke Ellington, Hawkins made an abortive effort at leading a big band. During 1943 and 1944, he was ensconced in New York's small Fifty-Second Street clubs recording for an array of small labels that popped up at the conclusion of a two-year recording ban necessitated by the military's requisition of all shellac supplies for weapons manufacture. He led combos which often featured cutting-edge younger players oriented to an instrumental, art-music sensibility, such as Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Oscar Pettiford, and Max Roach, who along with contemporaries like Charlie Parker, Kenny Clarke, and Bud Powell, were pursuing harmonic and rhythmic complexities in Harlem jam sessions—DeVeaux dissects the social and musical dynamics of each environment in fascinating detail.

By summer 1944, Gillespie and Parker were on the road with a now legendary dance orchestra led by Billy Eckstine, a highly influential black singer with a suavely masculine persona; DeVeaux contrasts the difficulties faced by this inspirational band with the success of the excellent band led by white clarinetist-vocalist Woody Herman, who had the means to buy



Coleman Hawkins

modernist arrangements from Gillespie through a lucrative recording contract and access to network radio slots and classy engagements unavailable to Eckstine because of race. By the conclusion of *The Birth of Bebop*, Gillespie and Parker have recorded bop masterpieces like "Shaw Nuff," "Ko-Ko," and "Dizzy Atmosphere," which seized the hearts and minds of an entire generation of young musicians.

This is an academic work, and DeVeaux hews closely to a methodology that presents Hawkins—who was a major part, but only a part of bebop's nascence—as the paradigmatic figure of the period; one occasionally longs for some model-breaking Sudhalterian sprawl. But *The Birth of Bebop* is what it is—the most informed and lucid social history about the period—and it is not likely to be surpassed.

In these days of inexorable cultural leveling-down, when jazz values of craft and freedom seem more elusive and more essential to reclaim than ever, *The Birth of Bebop* and *Lost Chords* provide valuable insights into what jazz was in the years when it was central to the zeitgeist. □

Short Takes

A Look at What's in Other Magazines and on the Web

Here TIKKUN continues our conversation with American intellectual, political, and cultural media.

Columbia Journalism Review

Either dying or dead, serious photojournalism is suffering an insidious shift in editorial predilection. Commissions of extended photo-essays are fewer. Longtime champions of the art, like *Life* magazine, have vanished. And rather than dispatch their own photographers, editors now routinely acquire photographic illustration from stockpiles and syndicates. In a personal screed in the July-August *Columbia Journalism Review*, Russell Miller, a journalist and biographer of the Magnum photo agency, attempts to explain all this in terms of "the burgeoning cult (curse?) of celebrity" and the rise of life-style journalism. Very well, but this does not adequately explain the art's sudden demise. After all, tabloid journalism was refined and perfected some sixty years ago, catering to a public no less infatuated with celebrity affairs then than now. This fault aside, Miller does make a compelling case for the still-frame and its awesome, unequalled power to rivet, transfix, appall, shame, and infuriate.

Newvillage

Is there a viable alternative to globalism? Emphatically yes, says Michael H. Shuman, co-director of the Institute for Policy Studies and director of the Institute for Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Washington, D.C. His sprawling article in issue two of *Newvillage*, the journal of Architects/Designers/Planners for Social

Responsibility, deconstructs the white-hot notions of free trade and economies of scale that underlie the mega-economy. Communities that export jobs and import goods, and those that rely on distant, monolithic corporations, are vulnerable to market shifts. Small and local is the way to go. The idea is not new; greenmarkets and locally owned shops are traditional neighborhood stabilizers, but Shuman is thinking bigger. Citing a "remarkable right-left consensus" against corporate welfare, and a growing consumer willingness to buy and invest locally even if it costs a little more, he imagines a day when banking behemoths will devolve back to strong local institutions, when farm wastes will be used to make ethanol in nearby refineries (freeing local drivers from petroleum dependency while reducing pollution), and when nearby windmills and solar panels will provide electricity. Green dreams? Maybe not; the way Shuman tells it, it seems possible, almost inevitable.

Dissent

Conventional wisdom posits: "More nonvoters voting would mean substantially more voters who are liberal-leaning, which would mean, in turn, substantially more liberal politics and politicians." Not so, protests Ruy Teixeira in the Summer 2000 issue of *Dissent*. And why not?

(1) the nonvoting pool, while not a faithful representation of the entire population, is hardly a monolith of the disadvantaged; (2) partisan biases by class ... are not overwhelming, so the relatively poor and less educated nature of the nonvoting pool doesn't make it as liberal as people generally suppose; (3) non-

voters' policy preferences ... are remarkably similar to voters'; (4) nonvoters are particularly likely to ... surge in the direction of the candidate who appears to be winning; and (5) it is a great deal easier to change an election outcome by switching the preferences of existing voters than by adding new voters

The left might expand its base more efficaciously, Teixeira says, by appealing—"unfashionable as it may be"—to the white working class, a group whose problems, hopes, dreams, and (most importantly) electoral worth, heretofore overlooked, could well bolster, consolidate, and give identity to an otherwise multifarious left.

Web watch:

As the Internet becomes more commercial, the progressive webophile finds the onslaught of celebrity gossip and corporate hard-sell increasingly disheartening: "Quiz: Hollywood Hunks!" shrieks the Microsoft Network start page. But click on www.CommonDreams.org and start your online day with a roundup of breaking news and thoughtful articles on topics of interest from publications around the country. The archive holds past articles by writers such as Noam Chomsky, Wendy Kaminer, Nat Hentoff, and Marian Wright Edelman. With links to a vast collection of progressive, minority, international, mainstream, and alternative newswires, websites, online publications, and radio stations, as well as the usual search engines, weather and travel information, maps, and TV listings, this efficiently designed page can completely replace the ad-drenched offerings of big browsers. □

Work 101: The Survey Course

David M. Stone

■ *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* by Joanne B. Ciulla (Times Books, 2000).

Recently, a former editor at a New York-based online news site wrote an Op-Ed about what it was like to show up for work, essentially on a “volunteer” basis, for days after the cash-strapped venture had been forced to lay her off and stop the paychecks:

there was a peculiar balance of our personal needs and our workplace needs. The world of work doesn't produce many weeks like this, weeks when you work not for money, but because you feel needed and because you feel a certain tie to a community that you had thought was held together entirely by everyone's financial interest.... You feel concern for the people involved, a desire to help, a sense of providing something of value. Why, when there was a monetary price on our work, were these feelings so much harder to come by?

Do we work to live or live to work? Is our primary waking activity as adults primarily about the money and the leisure time it earns us? Or is it really about the social organization and human connection, the sense of creativity and accomplishment we feel when we engage in something called “work”?

In *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*, Joanne B. Ciulla searches widely into ancient and modern history, moral philosophy, religion, economics, and social psychology to explore this very conundrum.

Ciulla doesn't claim to have all the answers, especially to what common sense tells us is the highly subjective question of how and why each of us participates in the labor market. But by the end of this relatively small book, she does aim for some very elusive targets by explicitly raising really big questions like, “What is the meaning of life?” and “What really constitutes a good life?”

After her breezy, informative, and eclectic survey, Ciulla's reach for the transcendent seems somewhat abrupt, especially since some key developments

our paradigm of boot-strap entrepreneurship, Horatio Alger, was once an ordained minister who only escaped prosecution for pedophilia by agreeing to leave both the pulpit and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts? I certainly didn't. Ciulla reveals that his second career as the author of inspirational books about “handsome boys” committed to their own self-improvement was borne not only of necessity, but also sublimation.

The author is both far-reaching and witty in her breadth of sources, from

The author is both far-reaching and witty in her breadth of sources, from Jesus to Jerry Seinfeld, from Dilbert to Eldridge Cleaver.

here on earth seem to have eluded her lively gaze. That is surprising because it's clear that the author knows a lot about a lot. Professor Ciulla holds the Coston Family Chair at the University of Richmond's Jepsen School of Leadership Studies, which she herself helped design. A former fellow at both Wharton and Harvard Business School, she also consults for a variety of corporations and organizations.

By taking on our most fundamental assumptions in *The Working Life*, she provides herself a launching pad for an engaging journey back and forth through history, ideas, and the company organizational chart. Along the way, she provides a number of thoughtful insights and even startling revelations. Did you know, for example, that

Jesus to Jerry Seinfeld. While she certainly trots out the usual suspects among contemporary workplace references, like Scott Adams' *Dilbert* and Studs Terkel's *Working*, she also comes up with novel juxtapositions. Who would have thought, for example, to cite both Judith Martin's “Miss Manners” and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* on the forced quality of workplace “socializing”? But as Ciulla sees it, the former can essentially be understood to affirm the latter's view that “it is better to be a ‘field nigger’ than a ‘house nigger’ because [one] does not have to suffer the indignities of polite interactions with people he or she doesn't like.”

From ancient fables to medieval guilds, Catholic sin to Calvinist work-ethic, “blue collar blues to white collar woes,” Ciulla considers work from a variety of interesting angles. She surveys, for example, what thinkers over

Now an independent television producer in New York, David M. Stone served as communications director to U.S. Senator Harris Wofford between 1991 and 1995.

the centuries have said about the opposites of paying work—unemployment, leisure, and even slavery—seeking some fresh insight into what is and isn't honest labor. Early on, we learn that “even though Aristotle was writing in the golden age of Greek sculpture, he did not think that sculptors should be citizens, because sculpting involves strenuous physical labor.” We learn that “in Biblical Hebrew, the words for work and slavery are identical. The German word *arbeiten* [work] originally meant pain and trouble. In English, *labor* has been used to describe the pains of birth since the sixteenth century.”

In mapping out how work went from “curse to calling” and back again,

gets us organized into various kinds of communities and social groups. And perhaps most important, work tells us what to do everyday.”

What is work? Ciulla herself might be the first to ask, what is it about writing a book that makes it “work” rather than a mere hobby? Financial compensation, however small? In fact, having subsidized nine years of graduate teaching as a waitress, bartender, and cook, Ciulla has a first-hand appreciation that how people pay the rent may not be one and the same as their “career.” Scholarly profession notwithstanding, she suggests she understands what it means to work on your feet or with your hands. Is Ciulla serious, then,

smart political reporter from Pittsburgh went around talking to “real” working people—steelworkers, carpenters, and construction workers—who still did physical, sometimes dangerous, labor. For many of them, retirement couldn't come soon enough. After a couple of decades, the burdens of their jobs had often had such a grinding impact on their health that those who could almost always did retire long before the age of sixty-five. Whatever psychic deficit may exist for Dilbert-like knowledge workers, the clean, well-lighted office remains a notable improvement for most of us.

After examining the idea of work itself from a variety of perspectives,



the structure of the book veers between the chronological and the thematic. We go from ancient history—of the Western world, that is—to modern times. But along the way, Ciulla asks the most basic questions. Why work? First and foremost for the vast majority of us, to make a living. But what if we didn't have to bother making a living? As our former website editor recently discovered, most of us would still work

when she writes, “I began to wonder if work has really improved since the beginning of the century or if it is just clothed in fancy terms and done in cleaner, better-lighted places”? As I learned during a political campaign I worked on in Pennsylvania, “cleaner, better-lighted places” are no small thing. A key issue in the election was a proposal to raise the Social Security retirement age. Of course, to profes-

Ciulla spends a large section of the book exploring the history of employer-employee relations, especially in the United States. Ultimately, Ciulla seems to believe that the biggest problem in modern labor-management relations is that “the transaction is not honest.” For the past century, she tells us, new waves of scientific management theories have simply sought to extract greater productivity from employees. Theories of a

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and loyalty from workers which, in an economic crunch, is rarely returned by the profit-driven employer. "The one good that came from the 1990s," she says, "was that people began to see their jobs for what they were: first and foremost, economic transactions in a fickle global economy."

But something important is missing in this wide-ranging survey: timeliness. An academic of true interdisciplinary interests, Ciulla is acutely aware of mainstream media culture, citing TV shows of the 1990s like "Seinfeld," "Cheers," and "Everybody Loves Raymond." How is it that someone who—like many of us—has probably been doing an increasing amount of her own work and social interaction online would have almost nothing to say about the Internet's extraordinary impact on the modern workplace over the past half-decade?

Could it be that recent events in a digital world that is increasingly moving at "Internet time" have so quickly overtaken the process of launching this old-fashioned analog manuscript into the bookstores? Even discounting the extraordinary hype that has too often characterized the explosion of the online economy, it's stunning to note that the word "Internet" does not even appear in the index for *The Working Life*, and "World Wide Web" has but a single citation.

After years of nearly constant media coverage of the web start-up world and IPO mania, Ciulla's cultural archetype of hard-charging management consultants or investment bankers who work "seventy-hour weeks, make their fortune, and retire at forty" with \$10 million seems nearly a decade out of date. In today's "24/7" wired world, the new archetype is the young web entrepreneur who routinely works ninety-hour weeks and fully expects to make his \$100 million and retire at thirty.

Of course, that's the fragile edge of a bubble—a fantasy as much as an economic phenomenon—that has already burst with this past spring's swoon in

technology stocks. But one glance at any recent issue of the paradigmatic new economy magazine *Fast Company* suggests that Ciulla is missing some important changes, at least in professed attitudes about her own interest in creating both meaning in work and a healthier balance between what is "merely" work and other commitments such as family, leisure, and per-

*Free agent e-lancers
lack the benefits and
security of the old days,
but those were
disappearing anyway.*

sonal growth. In fact, the boosterish monthly rarely has any articles that aren't about building nonhierarchical, socially-conscious ventures that provide workers with a sense of personal fulfillment in the workplace and healthy relationships outside of it.

The idealized world portrayed in *Fast Company* may not reflect the reality for most workers, and especially not for those who lack higher education or technology skills. But to walk around most business districts these days is to see the displacement of more than just the gray flannel suit by khakis and denim—or even tee-shirts and Birkenstocks. Ironically, such new economy perks as casual dress, funky offices, and stock options seem to reflect the same kind of desperate effort by employers to maintain employee productivity and loyalty as did the "scientific management" techniques of the old-fashioned industrial behemoths. But *The Working Life* seems to leave the workplace story largely in the early 1990s, when mass lay-offs and "casual Fridays," Total Quality Management and telecommuting still seemed newsworthy.

Things will certainly change when the U.S. economy slows down again and today's continuously tight labor

market, especially for technology experts, begins to slacken. But in 2000, the inherent mismatch between workers and management has begun to even out a bit because of both the demands of the Internet for qualified employees and the capabilities of the Internet for spreading information about the job market. Just look at the advertisements for online job sites that make an explicit mockery of loyalty to any one workplace: The young children in Monster.com commercials who stare blankly into the camera, making ironic statements like "I want to be a yes-man" and "I want to rise to middle-management." Or the one-foot-out-the-door hotjobs.com users who seem gleeful at allowing employers and co-workers to believe they'll actually be around past the next pay period. Like many advertisements, the image may not be real, but it is telling: "The organization man" is a sucker. Your only loyalty should be to "the brand called you." Indeed, a recent *Business Week* cover features young business school grads who've already changed jobs three times in the first year out of school. Once upon a time, that kind of disloyalty would have raised serious questions for future employers. Not anymore.

No doubt, it's a lot of puffery. Dot-coms are now going bankrupt and laying off workers everyday. Most online job sites are little more than digital classified ads. But there is something real changing here, too. The ready ability to collect information quickly about job leads—and the ability to perform many functions independently, regardless of physical location—has given workers with the right kind of skills choices they never had before. True, free agent e-lancers lack the benefits and security of the old days, but as Ciulla herself points out, those were disappearing anyway. If nothing else, it's fair to say that because of the Internet, a class of valued workers now has both the facts and the flexibility to change jobs and bid-up the value of their services. The

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10,000 vacant local and legislative offices—virtually every elected post in the country. But his opponents, including former Lavalas allies, contested the results and boycotted run-off elections on July 9, which international observers from the Organization of American States also refused to monitor. As of this writing, President Préval rules by decree.

Despite severe economic constraints and the meltdown of parliament, the Préval administration has made significant efforts to improve the lot of the average Haitian. New roads have been paved and new schools built. The capital's central square on the Champs de Mars has been renovated and lit, so that in the evenings the parks are now full of children playing soccer, or studying under street lamps. There has even been some movement toward the privatization of state industries that is a continuing criterion for American aid to Haiti. Nonetheless, in economic terms the average Haitian is worse off today than ten years ago—or, for that matter, thirty years ago. With Esperanza?

Ten years after becoming Haiti's first democratically elected leader, Aristide will once again be running for president at the end of this year. But he is a different man today in many respects. In the 1980s, as a young Salesian priest in Haiti's blossoming grassroots ecclesiastical movement—or *ti kominite legliz* in Creole—Aristide shouted down the corrupt Duvalier dictatorship, railed against the Catholic bishops appointed by Papa Doc, decried Haiti's elite and referred to the United States often, and loudly, as that "cold neighbor to the north."

Since then Aristide has given up the priesthood, taken a wife, and begun a family. He heads a foundation that provides a space for democratic debate and, among other projects, he initiated a bank that provides low interest loans for poor people. After his return in 1995, he took as his electoral symbol a table surrounded by four figures, transforming his own angry metaphor

for exclusion into a metonym of reconciled society. We read in *Eyes* that today Aristide meets with all levels of Haitian society—street children and financiers of the coup regime have sat on the same cushioned seats in his home. *Eyes* does not tell us how the radical liberation theologian became a politician willing to sit down and chat with those who once paid to oust him. It doesn't offer a path to those who would follow in his footsteps and avoid the pitfalls. That absence cries for a sequel.

Still, experience resonates in Aristide's words when he calls up the old Haitian saying, "*tankou wozo nou pliye, men nou pa kase*," like reeds, we bend but do not break. Aristide made hard concessions in order to return to power. At times he seemed to have very little leverage. Yet he was able in 1995 to disband the Haitian army—the same army which had ousted him only a few years earlier. *Eyes* is in some ways the product of such hard-won victories. Aristide has learned to bend—a disappointment to some of his followers on the left, although never enough for his detractors. He is more patient in his optimism, more judicious in his public outrage, and more receptive to compromise—something he warned against ten years ago in *Parish*.

And while *Parish* excluded Americans in its opening salute to "my brothers and sisters of nations that exist—or subsist—in the deepening shadow of the greater state to our north," *Eyes of the Heart*, published in English, but not yet in French, seems aimed above all at an American audience: America, Haiti's largest trade partner and aid donor; America, which harbored Aristide in exile and sent 20,000 troops to end the military dictatorship; America, where refugees fled by the tens of thousands during Haiti's coup years only to be summarily returned—and where even now they wash up by the boatful; and America, where some of Haiti's most notorious killers have found safe haven.

The voices Aristide brings out in

this book are those of street children, peasants. Although this book is from them, it is not for them. It is really for the outside reader, one who has perhaps been to Haiti, or somewhere else that inspires outrage about misery and injustice. It is for anyone who questions why in a world that grows richer by the second, so many still slip through the cracks. Above all, this book is for those who wonder about their own role. For, as Aristide writes, "neither the problems nor the solutions begin and end in Haiti." □

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transaction, as Ciulla would put it, is now more "honest" or, as others might say, "incentivized."

At the same time, because of the Internet, serious concerns about industrial and corporate work environments that Ciulla raises—especially worker autonomy from managerial intrusion into their "private" lives—have taken on dangerous new forms. Despite its Y2K publication date and subtitle about "The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work," *The Working Life* doesn't even imagine the kind of "Big Brother" style intrusion by employers on their employee's personal privacy that the web makes possible. As the *New York Times* and many other publications have recently pointed out, companies are using increasingly sophisticated "intelligent agent" software to scan employee web-surfing and online communication for inappropriate references to gender, race, sexuality, business practices, and other sensitive matters. It is a wonderful topic for Ciulla, but one left unexplored. While she can and does cite Rousseau's *Emile*; she remarkably has nothing to say about workplace email.

So we will have to wait until her next book to see how Ciulla brings her wide-ranging intellect to bear on these cutting-edge issues. And given the accessible writing and insightful thinking she demonstrates throughout *The Working Life*, I for one look forward to downloading it. □

Bending without Breaking

Aristide Returns

Catherine Orenstein

■ *Eyes of the Heart*, by Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Edited by Laura Flynn. Common Courage Press, 2000.

In the twenty-first century, the globe has never been richer—or poorer. Today the combined income of thirty-two of the world's most heavily indebted countries is roughly equal to that of the world's richest man, Bill Gates. Their present value of debt to GNP is higher than 80 percent. As the gap between prosperous and poor nations grows, the less fortunate are increasingly beholden to wealthy benefactors for their room and board—the foreign aid that constitutes the budgetary bulk of many third world nations. In exchange they are obliged to carry out the chores and remedies that the world's lenders dictate: privatization, deregulation, structural adjustment, and the other tenets of the free market. These policies are supposed to offer them a better chance in life. Nonetheless, the numbers of the world's poor are rapidly growing.

Thus we face a crisis of imagination, says Haiti's former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, "so profound that the only measure of value is profit, the only measure of human progress is economic growth." In his new book, *Eyes of the Heart*, Aristide offers a critique of the global economy, and questions

the wisdom of its masters, from the point of view of those who suffer under it. Adapted from speeches given since he handed over the presidency to René García Préval in 1996, *Eyes of the Heart* alternates between historical anecdote and a series of parables from the poorest and smallest of Haiti's citizens, which is to say the poorest and smallest citizens of the world. They remind him, and us, of the consequences of measuring value only in dollars.

In the 1980s, Aristide tells us, Haiti opened its markets in accordance with free trade policies prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and lifted its tariffs on imported rice. At the same time the United States government increased subsidies to its own rice industry. American rice flooded the Haitian market, washing out the Haitian peasant farmer in a matter of a few years. While in 1986 Haiti imported 7,000 tons of rice, by the 1990s the country was importing hundreds of thousands of tons of rice, the main staple food of the country. As import prices then began to rise, Haiti's peasants found themselves at the mercy of the market. Farmers fled the countryside. The longer-term results of the World Bank's rice experiment in Haiti

soon became evident: urbanization; the erosion of food security; and increased dependency on foreign donors. Thus Haiti learned, says Aristide, "that for poor countries free trade is not so free, or so fair."

Opponents of the World Bank and IMF policies in Haiti called them a "death plan." Yet, with 60 percent of the national budget already dependent on foreign aid, can Haiti afford to defy the world's lenders? It is a choice, Aristide says, between death and death. Or is it? Throughout *Eyes*, children provide a constant reminder of the urgency of escaping that catch-22—and a key to the means.

Four-year-old Florence visits Aristide's house, where she sees a pool for the first time in her life. The word "pool" is beyond her experience. She calls it a "bucket." So Aristide teases her: Is it big, or small? To which Florence replies, "It is beautiful." In another anecdote, two Americans teach English at Lafami Selavi, the home for street children that Aristide founded in 1986. "Give me water," they teach the children. But when they get to Bertony, he says, "Give me



Catherine Orenstein is a New York-based journalist. She has made numerous trips to Haiti since 1990. In 1995 she was a member of the United Nations human rights observer mission to Haiti.

chocolate!" The foreigners want to know why he did not ask for water. Bertony replies, "Who told you I was thirsty?" Like Bertony and Florence, Haiti has also been taught what questions to ask, what answers to give. But, the children suggest, there is a way out: when presented with the wrong choices, invent new ones. Haiti must, in Aristide's words, find a third way.

Eyes of the Heart is not an appeal to charity, but a nod to the resourcefulness, resilience, and humanity of the poor. It is not a treatise against trade, but a testimony to the predatory way that global economics can play out—if we don't keep watch. Aristide's mission is to change our vision: to see the global economy not in terms of dollar value, but in terms of human value, and to see the poor not from the perspective of profit, but through the eyes of compassion. As a critique of the global economy, *Eyes* inverts our gaze, and brings to our attention the less-heard, the invisible—those who in fact comprise the vast majority of the world's population. It is an important window on the local realities of the global economy.

However, *Eyes* is more philosophy than concrete methodology, and many readers will wish for more of the latter. After all, who better than Aristide to offer it? Few leaders in recent history have embodied so much popular hope, and fewer still have had so rigorous an education in the politics of power from Haiti's slums to its national palace to the boardrooms of Washington D.C. What would Aristide, with his unequivocal expertise in grassroots struggle, suggest to other third world leaders and activists? *Eyes of the Heart* doesn't offer up any solid answers. Nonetheless it suggests a coming to terms with the possibilities, and the limits, of grassroots power.

Eyes is Aristide's ninth book. It follows most recently *Dignity* (1995), *Theology and Politics* (1993), and *Aristide: an Autobiography* (1992)—a memoir of his childhood, formal training as priest and psychologist, and rise

to the presidency. But *Eyes* reads like a sequel to a much earlier book, *In The Parish of The Poor*. Published in 1990 before Aristide became president, *Parish*, like *Eyes*, is a collection of public addresses—sermons collected and edited by journalist Amy Wilentz. Also like *Eyes*, it was presented as a letter to those beyond Haiti's borders. But in its tone, *Parish* is significantly different

Few leaders in recent history have embodied so much popular hope, and fewer still have had so rigorous an education in the politics of power.

from *Eyes*, and that difference suggests the impact of the past decade on Aristide, and on Haiti.

Parish painted a hard vision of Haiti as it emerged from a long dictatorship, using parables to articulate a history numbed by cliché and hyperbole, and peeling the layers from Creole words and proverbs—whose multiple meanings preserved expression, dissent, and resistance during decades of repression. But *Parish* also described a village called Esperancia—"hope"—in Haiti's not-so-distant future. It was not a vision of great wealth, but rather a modest goal of poverty with dignity, where families still worked hard, but had enough to eat.

At the time, it seemed that Esperancia was just around the corner. In 1986 the thirty-year Duvalier regime had fallen, and a massive grassroots movement blossomed in its wake. Thousands of Haitians took to the streets, waving branches of leaves in the air to symbolize the uprooting of the old system. A succession of military dictatorships could not find purchase in the new, invigorated social landscape. And

when Aristide campaigned around the country riding a donkey, citizens painted the Haitian flag on anything that would stand still long enough—houses, trucks, tree trunks. "Alone we are weak, together we are strong," Aristide called out; "United we are *Lavalas*"—the word, meaning a great flood, which he took for his political movement. In *Parish*, Aristide captured the urgent, revolutionary temper of the day:

The rich of my country, a tiny percentage of our population, sit at a vast table covered in white damask and overflowing with good food, while the rest of my countrymen and countrywomen are crowded under that table, hunched over in the dirt and starving. It is a violent situation, and one day the people under that table will rise up in righteousness, and knock the table of privilege over, and take what rightfully belongs to them. Brothers and sisters, it is our mission to help them stand up and live as human beings. That is what we have all been working for all these years in the parishes of the poor.

Haitians had only to stand up—as he directly urged in a later passage—disobey the rules. But over the next ten years, Aristide's own example served as a warning of the consequences when you do.

Aristide campaigned for the presidency in 1990 with radical promises to raise minimum wage, strengthen national industry, and tax the wealthy, who traditionally escaped this burden. He won two-thirds of the vote, but he was never able to accomplish his mission as president: an elite-backed military coup ousted him in September 1991, after only seven months in office. In the following three years the military regime raped, tortured, and killed thousands of his supporters. Well over a hundred thousand Haitians took to the seas or crossed the border to the Dominican Republic. The grassroots movement ground to a standstill. And as a condition for his return to Haiti, via an American

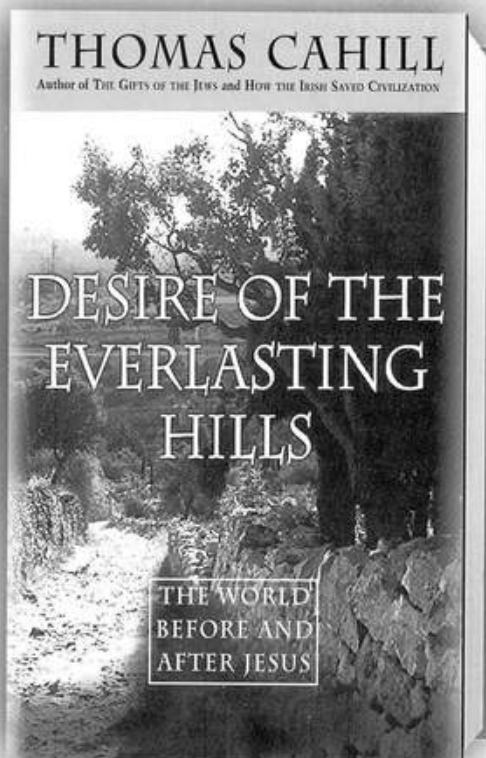
invasion in September 1994, the United States along with the World Bank and the IMF demanded that Aristide abandon his social justice platform in favor of the free market. Although he stipulated measures to protect the poor, he also agreed to a series of unpopular economic reforms, including the drastic reduction of tariffs on virtually all imports, civil service downsizing, and the privatization of Haiti's state-run industries.

Civilian rule was restored, but not without profound consequences for Haiti's grassroots movement. During the military years the Lavalas leadership in Haiti, as well as the solidarity movement abroad, fractured. Some called for the leaky international embargo to be tightened; others countered that it hurt the poor while the rich got fat on contraband. The hard left opposed any compromise with the anti-democratic sector—the generals and their wealthy backers—which, they argued, would only serve to legitimize killers. But a reform faction saw reconciliation between Lavalas and the coup supporters as necessary and desirable, and diplomatic negotiation as the only means of resolving the coup. Finally, the prospect of foreign intervention stood between those who supported an American invasion on humanitarian grounds and those who saw it as a new form of imperialism, necessitated by the United States government's feeble efforts to restore Aristide by diplomatic means.

Few political alliances could survive such discord without defections and this is precisely what befell Haiti's restored government. The Lavalas political platform split several ways, setting the scene for Haiti's stalled democracy today. A parliamentary battle over legislative elections in April 1997 led to the prime minister's resignation and ultimately, as lawmakers' terms ran out with no replacements, to the closing of the legislature in January 1999. On May 21 of this year, Aristide's party, the Lavalas Family, swept a long-awaited vote for over

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Zion Uber Alles

David Biale

■ *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul*, by Yoram Hazony. Basic Books, 2000.

A specter is haunting the Jewish world. It is the specter of postzionism. To exorcise this specter, *The New Republic Books* has published, and Martin Peretz, the editor of *The New Republic*, has endorsed, Yoram Hazony's *The Jewish State*. Peretz is joined on the book jacket by no less than Elie Wiesel, Natan Sharansky, William Kristol, and Emil Fackenheim. This must be a very dangerous spirit indeed to call forth such any array of luminaries in support of its exorcist.

And what exactly is this postzionism that so threatens the State of Israel? It is, to quote the author, the work of virtually all of Israel's cultural establishment, which is now devoted to

discrediting virtually everything that was precious to Israel's founders: from historians obsessed with exposing the invidious character and crimes of the Labor Zionist settlers; to artists with their ghastly assault on traditional Jews and the defense forces; to novelists fixated on the Arab claim to the land and images of Israel's future annihilation; to a court system bent on replicating Canadian [sic!] legal institutions; to screenwriters and dramatists issuing one savage attack after another against the country's heroes.... Israeli culture has become a carnival of self-loathing, offering little from which one could construct the renewed Jewish civilization that was to have arisen in Israel....

Now, there is some truth in Hazony's indictment, even though he conflates responsible debate over Israel's past and future, to which many of those who call themselves postzionists have made important contributions, with more extreme positions. As this writer argued in the last issue of *TIKKUN* in a review of the film *Kadosh*, elements of the secular Israeli Left manifest tendencies towards extremism that mirror quite nicely the extremism of the Right. But the extremism of Left and Right has to be understood in the context of over thirty years of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and its corrosive effects on Israeli life. This is a context that Hazony never mentions because, as a former aide to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Occupation for him is a Liberation, offering the opportunity for "true" Zionism. In fact, Hazony's position is institutionally tied to the Likud since the Shalem Institute, of which he is the president, is funded by one of the Likud's biggest American backers, Ronald Lauder.

In his wholesale attack on the carnival of self-loathing, Hazony finds anti-Zionism under every bed: in the novels of A.B. Yehoshua, the poems of Yehuda Amichai, and the historiography of Gershom Scholem. Note that I have said "anti-Zionism," for this is the charge Hazony levels at all real or imagined critiques of Israel or failures to celebrate its heroes, in much the same way as the McCarthyites in the 1950s conflated any critiques of America with Communism. This is a man who understands the meaning of the phrase, "party line." He focuses an

inordinate amount of energy on the intellectuals at the Hebrew University. In his words, despite efforts "to bring the Hebrew University in line with the 'practical' needs of the Zionist enterprise ... history, philosophy and other basic disciplines, as presented at the Hebrew University, for the most part continued to militate toward a pure universalist ethics, the social-contract state, [and] an anti-nationalist politics" The treason of the professors, which is Hazony's main subject, is a result of the fact that "[the Hebrew University's] humanities and social sciences faculties had never been subjected to the kind of serious reshaping that would have moved it to a new intellectual course." There were certainly regimes in the past century that knew how to bring their intellectuals into line, but, sad to say, for Hazony, Israel's was not one of them.

And for that, in Hazony's mind, the Jewish state has paid dearly. He reconstructs the Zionist narrative as a battle between two men: Theodor Herzl and Martin Buber. In Hazony's history, Herzl understood the need for Jewish power while Buber wanted to spiritualize Zionism and turn it into a



vehicle for individual redemption alone. Buber opposed the exercise of political power and sovereignty and was therefore no different from Hermann Cohen, the liberal German Jewish philosopher who opposed Zionism. Herzl's heirs were Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion, while Buber's disciples, such as Scholem, the American rabbi Judah Magnes, and the philosopher Hugo Bergman, founded the Hebrew University. Their students, in turn, would be instrumental in unseating Ben-Gurion from power in the early 1960s. For Hazony, it was Ben-Gurion's final defeat in 1965 that marked the end of Zionism and the beginning of the triumph of the anti-Zionists, namely, Buber and his disciples. The Hebrew University won and Israeli culture today is completely under its thrall. And Hazony has no doubts that this cultural victory is decisive: it was the power of ideas that created the Jewish state (he is strangely contemptuous of the practical Zionists who drained swamps and settled the land) and it is now the power of ideas that is destroying it.

This is a monomaniacal, Manichean history of Zionism, with Buber playing a role far out of proportion to his real influence (not to speak of the role of the Hebrew University). While it is true that Buber was something of a guru to the German Zionist youth movements, by 1938, when he came to the Hebrew University, his importance had waned considerably and he was quite marginal even among those who had formerly been his disciples. Hazony's treatment of Scholem is a case in point. From his account, one would get the impression that Buber and Scholem were in complete agreement about Jewish history and Zionism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Where Buber was, as Hazony correctly says, opposed to a Jewish state, Scholem came to favor it, as long as it restrained the messianic energies that might lead to disaster. Scholem endorsed what he called "the return of the Jews to history," by which he meant the return to the realm of pol-

itics. And, even though Buber argued naively for a binational state, to say that his position led to a "state devoid of any Jewish purpose and meaning" is one of the most bizarre charges Hazony makes against a philosopher whose whole life was a search for "Jewish purpose and meaning."

For Hazony, the real differences between thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem—to name just three whom he conflates—are insignificant since they deviate from his party line: Zionism means one thing alone and anyone who defines it differently is perforce an anti-Zionist. But what *does* Zionism mean? Here, oddly enough, Hazony becomes quite vague. He repeatedly refers to the "interests of the Jewish people and its state," but nowhere does he explicitly define those interests, not to speak of acknowledging that others might legitimately define them differently. For a man who believes in the power of ideas, he provides us with precious few. But there are enough hints—and they are sufficiently disturbing—to make one wonder whether those who endorsed the book actually read it.

The victory of the intellectuals, he says, found its political expression in the Oslo agreement. Peace with the Palestinians is manifestly not one of the "interests of the Jewish people." Shimon Peres' vision of a New Middle East, in which there would be regional economic cooperation and open borders, he dismisses as "bizarre." Here is his reaction to Yossi Sarid's call for an "era of normality ... a space where one could breathe normally:"

To breathe normally. There could be no better metaphor than this one for what Ben-Gurion's opponents had wanted: A state whose heart and lungs no longer strained with the effort of battle; and therefore a state of mind no longer preoccupied night and day with grand and pressing purposes.

Only an Israel permanently at war will fulfill the vision of Herzl and Ben-Gurion, which is perhaps why Hazony

dismisses as insignificant Herzl's utopia, *Altneuland*, which portrays a Jewish state at peace, and why he even regards as anti-Zionist Hadassah's plan in the 1920s to create kindergartens with Jewish and Arab children. Hazony advances no security or even historical arguments for keeping every inch of the territories (a position he evidently endorses since he speaks of the "Greater Land of Israel Movement" in heroic terms). His implicit position is pure and simple: peace with the Palestinians or the other Arabs will negate the real purpose of the Jewish state, which is to strain "with the effort of battle." Unfortunately for Hazony's argument, the desire for "normalization" was just as much a part of Herzlian Zionism as the desire for sovereign power. Indeed, Herzl saw them as linked. To deny the urge towards normality—as boring as it may be—is to deny one of the fundamental impulses behind the Zionist movement.

As if this isn't enough, there is more. Hazony dusts off a little-discussed theory in Herzl's *Jewish State* in which Herzl argues that the Zionist movement can act for the whole Jewish people, even though it was not democratically chosen to do so. (The theory is based on a principle from Roman law that allows someone who is not the owner to rescue a house on fire.) While Herzl's theory made some sense in a time when the Jewish people, scattered among many nations, had no centralized institutions, it is a very dangerous principle once a state has been created. By applying Herzl's so-called "guardian state" to the present State of Israel, Hazony is on a very slippery slope, for this doctrine is akin to Lenin's theory of the Bolshevik Party as the "vanguard of the proletariat," a necessary device, perhaps, to make a revolution, but a recipe for dictatorship afterwards. Hazony contrasts Herzl's theory with Rousseau's notion of a social contract, that is, a state implicitly representing "all its citizens." The latter phrase is a favorite of the postzionists since they argue for

greater equality between Jews and Arabs. Hazony never explicitly states that he is against equality for Israel's Arab citizens, but the "guardian state" theory he has embraced is, to say the least, a dangerous one for anyone interested in maintaining a democracy.

In fact, throughout the book, Hazony is dismissive of those who want a state that is both Jewish and democratic. The two, he seems to believe, cannot be reconciled, a position which he shares with the more radical of the postzionists but also with right-wing extremists like the followers of Meir Kahane. But if democracy is intrinsically antithetical to "Jewish interests," then does Hazony have another system of government in mind? He fails to enlighten us, except to assert that anything smacking of "universal values" cannot be Jewish. For example, he mocks the artist Mordecai Ardon as a follower of "Franz Rosenzweig's anti-Zionist universalism." It was Ardon who designed the stained-glass windows in the National Library which show different roads, each inscribed in a different language, leading to Jerusalem and ending in a field in which spades float over the broken guns of the nations. If this image is anti-Zionist, then so was the prophet Isaiah, from whom it is taken. Following Hazony's logic, Isaiah, no doubt an early incarnation of a German Jew, failed to understand "the interests of the Jewish people" and should have been purged from his position as advisor to King Hezekiah. Needless to say, only a degenerate culture would include such a figure in its canonical Book.

What models might Israeli culture turn to in order to regenerate itself? Hazony is much enamoured of the art of the early Bezalel Institute: "Moshe Matus's *Building Tel Aviv* (1931) ... shows muscular men dragging a new city out of the earth with their hands, and Abraham Melnikoff's *Roaring Lion* (1934), a massive lion of Judah sculpted in memory of the fallen Jewish soldier and pioneer Joseph

Trumpeldor, similarly expresses the majesty and power of the Jewish restoration, even in the midst of tragedy." Here is heroic art to inspire a nation, but Hazony doesn't seem to notice that certain political regimes, which need not be named, sponsored similar art at that time.

Purges of the universities, a country permanently at war, a state that knows the "interests" of the Volk rather than representing all its citizens, and the replacement of degenerate art with "muscular men"—we have seen all of these before in the century that just ended and we have a very precise vocabulary for such states. Is this the vision that Elie Wiesel, Martin Peretz, and Natan Sharansky really endorse? Whether or not they do, their willingness to associate their names with such a book speaks volumes about the desperation of those who can't imagine Israel at peace.

Whatever one may think about the various advocates of postzionism, one thing is clear: an Israel at peace will necessarily and ineluctably evolve in the direction they prescribe. Israel is rapidly becoming multicultural and

multi-ethnic in ways that its founders never envisioned (as the joke goes, in fifty years, the majority of Israelis will be Orthodox—Russian Orthodox). It will have to confront the needs of all its citizens, even if it does not give up its historically justified Jewish character. And, Israel will also have to deal with the consequences of the Occupation. For, whether or not a Palestinian state finally emerges, there remains a great danger that it will be nothing but a bantustan and that relations between Israel and the Palestinians will descend more and more into apartheid. These are the kind of issues that the postzionists are not afraid to raise, even if it enrages Hazony and his American backers. The age of heroic ideologies is over, notwithstanding the nostalgia that many understandably nurse for them. The Jewish people still need a state, but it will be a more normal, which is to say, more fragmented, less heroic, state whose vitality will continue to derive from intense intellectual debate and unfettered cultural creativity. Desperate rearguard actions like this one will not reverse this inevitable historical process. □

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Indulging in Mystery

Binnie Kirshenbaum

■ *Little Miss Evil*, by Lev Raphael. Walker Books, 2000.

For those of us who indulge, we know exactly how sublime it can be to curl up on the couch with a good mystery novel. True, these are not books that will change your life or unsettle a philosophy. They do not inform on matters of great political importance or explain the ways of the universe. Rather, they are simply fun, not unlike doing a crossword puzzle. The best of them are entertaining, mind-tickling, satisfying, and you often pick up some nice facts along the way.

In Lev Raphael's new Nick Hoffman mystery, *Little Miss Evil* (the title comes from the Bette Davis film *All About Eve*), I learned that there is a walnut museum in Dordogne, I figured out exactly what it is a bibliographer does, and I was introduced to *Ashkelon*, "hypnotically melismatic Moroccan Jewish and Arabic singing by an Israeli cantor," all in the course of trying to uncover who-done-it.

"It" in this case is both the requisite murder and a series of troubling and anonymous threats made against the reluctant detective, Nick Hoffman. He is a witty, sharp-tongue professor of composition at a large Midwestern university and the foremost Edith Wharton bibliographer. (Another nice thing about the genre is that it does not

discriminate. The mystery detective comes in all flavors: white, black, Asian, Hispanic, male, female, Jewish, Christian, rabbi, priest, and atheist). Nick Hoffman happens to be Jewish and gay, and we find him not only in the middle of danger, but in the middle of a sexual identity crisis. He finds himself physically attracted to a woman, Juno, who could very well be a suspect. Perhaps the only person who disliked the victim, Camille Cypriani, a wildly successful and wildly odious author, more than Juno is Nick's partner, Stefan. The child of Holocaust survivors, Stefan is a moody writer whose career is on the sharp decline. He has been treated shabbily by Camille, and not much better by the university where, although he is tenured, Camille has been given an endowed chair created just for her along with a CEO's salary. No wonder she turns up dead.

The murder, which happens offstage (this is a nonviolent murder mystery), is woven in seamlessly with the kinds

of comic academic peccadilloes that define the novels of David Lodge or Mary McCarthy's *Grove of Academe*. Raphael's fictive State University of Michigan (SUM) offers up no shortage of suspects as much of its faculty dines regularly on sour grapes. The satirical renderings here of academic back-biting fests bring to mind McCarthy's famous line, "Never have so many fought so hard over so little." Not Nick Hoffman, though. He's quite happy with what he's got. A rare fellow indeed, he likes teaching freshman composition, he steers clear of departmental politics, and he's a nice guy. So why is someone making death threats, albeit creative and literary death threats, against him?

In a narrative that often quotes and echoes the films of the 1940s and 1950s, the vehicles for the great divas of the day, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and the like, *Little Miss Evil* offers up the same kind of campy fun.

We all need a break from time to time. Do yourself a favor. Curl up on the couch with a box of assorted chocolates and a good mystery novel. Indulge.

Binnie Kirshenbaum is the author of *Pure Poetry* (Simon & Schuster) and adjunct professor in the Writing Division of the Columbia University School of the Arts.



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