

(te•kün) To mend, repair and transform the world.

TIKKUN

INTERVIEW WITH
CORNEL WEST

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

Post 9-11 REPENTANCE:
A HIGH HOLIDAY SUPPLEMENT

DENIAL **AMERICAN AND JEWISH STYLE**



HOW THE U.S. LEARNED SO LITTLE FROM 9-11

Thomas Moore • Elizabeth Lesser • Fred Branfman
Zygmunt Bauman • Danny Goldberg • Morris Dickstein
Phyllis Chesler • Lama Surya Das • Margaret Wheatley
Lawrence L. Langer • Robert Thurman

FEAR AND TRIBALISM IN ISRAELI AND AMERICAN JEWS

Kim Chernin • Joel Kovel
Neil Altman • Starhawk

\$5.95 U.S. \$8.75 Canada



PLUS:

Eric H. Yoffie, Bradley Shavit Artson, & Shmuley Boteach on Repentance
Arthur Green on God and Memory
Betty Jean Lifton on Being Adopted
Jorge N. Ferrer on the Participatory Nature of Spiritual Knowledge

Our father, our king

I don't feel like a cherished girl. The fall
enters as a forgiven guest, known to the dinner party, if absent
for seasons. Our father, our king, the air is full of tolerant embraces.
Trees thrust out their branches, and I cannot
do my part. Our father, why
have you brought me into your orchard of plums? To show me
the autumnal variety? I am well versed
in the sight of fruit
as it stacks in pails. What good does it do
you, to show me faultless things? You are fast losing
my most faithful sense
of your indifference. Our king, for years, I have known you
as you claimed to be: wrathful, or dispassionate, but always at a good
distance. Now you torment me with nearness. Take
your hand from my head; I'll uncover
my eyes, I'll testify
to your off-kilter beauty. Without direction, I'd recall for a jury:
this harvest is more lovely and worthy
of exhibit than the most mature and idiosyncratic
among your works. I swear,
I curse. I ask for a remission
of words, and to be left in an unenlightened
silence. Or, as you once did
with ribs, reconsider
my exquisite oneness, which
you created. May you see fit
to deliver me an unwashed
and distinctly wicked man. May you make him offensive
as an apple eater, a clothes wearer, a sky-fisting
bellower, but send me a dirty beloved,
whose body will drop down, distend
and discharge like an overripe berry
into my knowledged mouth.

—Susan Comninos

2 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

6 **PUBLISHER'S NOTES:** *Why the United States Needs a Strong, Peaceful Islam*

7 **EDITORIALS:** *The Great Denial—In America and Israel.* Facing the stock market melt-down, the globalization of the ethos of capital, and the ongoing Mideast violence—our editor provides an introduction to the sections below on Jewish denial and September 11.

12 Tikkun Community

In this interview, **Cornel West** discusses the lessons of September 11, the state of progressive politics, and his trials in academia.



FEATURES:

15 **Jewish Denial:** Why do American Jews find it difficult to be critical of Israel's policies? In this issue we look at the ongoing fear and tribalism within the Jewish community. **Kim Chernin** analyzes *The Seven Pillars of Jewish Denial* (15), while **Joel Kovel** attacks *Zionism's Bad Conscience* (21). **Neil Altman** draws on the psychology of denial to urge us *Not to Get Polarized* (25) and **Starhawk** asserts that *Loving the Jewish Community Means Supporting Justice* (29). Is **Alexander Cockburn** in denial? **Dennis Fox** invites him to *Join the Expanding Middle* searching for Middle East peace (31).



33 **September 11:** Have we really learned from September 11 or have we become more deluded? How can we begin to move toward true security? We asked a number of creative thinkers, activists, and spiritual leaders to reflect on these and other questions about the post-September 11 world. Featured are: **Thomas Moore** (33), **Elizabeth Lesser** (36), **Fred Branfman** (37), **Phyllis Chesler** (38), **Morris Dickstein** (39), **Danny Goldberg** (40), **Zygmunt Bauman** (41), **Lama Surya Das** (43), **Paul Krassner** (44), **Margaret Wheatley** (45), **Lawrence L. Langer** (46), and **Robert Thurman** (48).

50 **Mideast Politics:** **Mohamad Bydon** chronicles the rise of anti-Semitism in the Arab world in *The Cancer Within* (50). **Yehezkel Lein** maps out the *Israeli Settlements from a Human Rights Perspective* (52), and **Esther Sakinah Quinlan** refers to the Qur'an to address *The Jihad Question* (55).

65 **High Holidays:** Following our *High Holiday Supplement* (between pages 64 and 65), **Eric H. Yoffie** offers additions to the traditional *Al Cheyt* prayer for Jews on the Left and Jews on the Right (65). **Bradley Shavit Artson** calls for a return to *teshuvah*, the principle of *Turning* (66), while **Shmuley Boteach** asks *Is it Time for G-d to do Teshuvah?* (68).



ARTICLES:

60 **Spirituality:** All spiritual paths are not the same. **Jorge N. Ferrer** questions the belief in the Ultimate One in *An Ocean with Many Shores*.

70 **Judaism:** **Arthur Green** looks at the relationship between memory and God in *All About Being Human*.

73 **Activism:** **Miki Kashtan** offers a new strategy for peacemakers in *No Enemies, No Demands*.

80 **Chaim Bertman** on the comforts of Noah.

REVIEWS:

75 **The Enigma of Benjamin Wilkomirski.** Has Benjamin Wilkomirski preyed on the dreams of diaspora Jewry or given us a stunning look at the loneliness of the adopted child? **Judith Bolton-Fasman** details his lies in *Witness for the Prosecution* (75) and **Betty Jean Lifton** responds with compassion in *Wilkomirski the Adoptee* (77).

79 **Susan Olinger** reviews **Jonathan Kirsch's** *The Woman Who Laughed at God*.

Inside Back Cover: *Sikkum*: Books TIKKUN Recommends.



Opposite: "Our father, our king" by Susan Comminos

Front Cover: *After the Eleventh* by PJ Crook.

Acrylic on corrugated panel 36 x 50 inches.

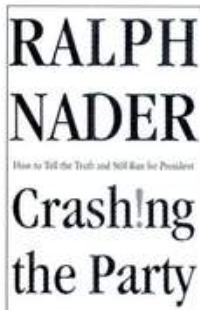
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Sikkum: TIKKUN RECOMMENDS ...

Crashing the Party

Ralph Nader
St. Martin's Press, 2002

Ralph Nader's economic points seem even more prescient in the midst of the great Wall Street meltdown of 2002 than they did when he ran for President in 2000. The deregulation of the marketplace began under Democrat Jimmy Carter, accelerated under Republican Reagan, and reached its apex with Bill Clinton's strategy of stealing the Republicans' thunder rather than pioneering another direction. Liberal Democrats who were furious at Nader for spoiling their victory may be wondering today if the whole country would not have been better off had Nader received more votes and more attention and less vilification in 2000—because as this book demonstrates, Nader remains one of the sanest and most courageous voices in American politics. Despite his continuing failure to incorporate an Emancipatory Spirituality into his analysis or strategy, Nader is a giant among political pygmies, and his account of the 2002 election gives the honest insider's account that you never heard in the mainstream American media.



A Time For Every Purpose Under Heaven

Arthur Ocean Waskow
and Phyllis Ocean Berman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Arthur Waskow is one of the founders of the Jewish Renewal movement and Phyllis Ocean Berman is director of the summer program at the Elat Chayyim retreat center, and a Jewish Renewal liturgist, prayer leader, Torah teacher and, like Arthur, TIKKUN author. This book continues decades of their creativity and insight into the depths of a spiritual path in Judaism. Focusing on the life-spiral as a spiritual path, Waskow and Berman provide a detailed guide for some of life's major opportunities for openings to the divine: childbirth and its rituals, raising children, bar/bat mitzvah, dating and marriage, midlife celebrations, divorce, aging, death and mourning. Full of practical guidance and spiritual insight, this is a book that will bring the wisdom of Jewish Renewal spirituality to the challenges of a conscious life.



Pay Attention, For Goodness' Sake

Sylvia Boorstein
Ballantine Books, 2002

Sylvia Boorstein is a brilliant teacher at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, and her latest popular rendition of Buddhist teaching, like so many of her other books (*It's Easier Than You Think*, *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There* and *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist*), shines with a joyful common sense and compassionate attitude that may reflect as much on Boorstein's Jewish foundations as on her current meditation practice. Whatever your spiritual foundations (or lack thereof), this is a book so wise and so fun to read that it may give you a moment of hope at a difficult time in history, not to mention some useful directions for inner growth. Boorstein's approach should be integrated into the daily lives of those building The TIKKUN Community.



The Cyclist

Viken Berberian
Simon & Schuster, 2002

An engaging, humorous first novel with a terrorism twist. The narrator, an unnamed character in Berberian's first novel, is a trainee in the Academy, a terrorist group operating in the present-day Middle East. He has been given a mission to deliver a bomb by bicycle to a hotel with the intent of killing hundreds of civilians. This is a novel that seeks to get inside the mind, and emotional complexity, of a terrorist. The narrator spends as much time contemplating his feelings about food and love as he does about his impending murderous task. Without knowing the narrator's nationality or agenda, the reader undertakes a psychological ride to the edges of national and existential borders: the ones set at birth, and the ones we are born into.



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Letters to the Editor

Zionism as Affirmative Action

To the Editor:

In your July/August 2002 editorial, you say:

"For hundreds of years we were at the mercy of non-Jews who raped, tortured, and murdered us. The world ... rightly decided to do affirmative action."

This is what happened—but usually it's countries who lose wars who lose parts of their territories. Since Italy invaded France in 1940, it had to give Nice back at the end of WWII; and, for a similar reason, it lost Austria to Yugoslavia. That's how things go. But since millions of Jews had been killed by European inhabitants, the UN gave the Jews the right to a state—not in Germany or in Poland, but in Palestine. The great mufti may have been a Nazi, but, differently from Germans, he was only responsible for silly words—not for real killings. And so Palestinians

lost their land—and became citizens with inferior rights than Jews in the Jewish State; many were killed, and many more expelled. And something similar happened in 1967.

By the way, if all persecuted people could have a state in some part of the world, many wars would be sure to

begin. Since Tutsis have been killed by Hutus, why can't Tutsis have a state in Scotland? And where are Kurds going to have a state? In Australia? Of course, this is nonsense. We Europeans may take Palestinian land to give it to former European inhabitants, the Jews. Certainly a

Third World country can't "steal" European land for some of its former inhabitants.

TIKKUN only fights for affirmative action to benefit the Jews—not for other people.

What happened in WWII was that



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Hitler persecuted Jews because of their "race": even Catholic nuns, having been born by Jewish parents, ended up in concentration camps. If the definition of "Jew" given by the Israeli State had to do with ethnicity, there could be a sort of perverse logic in the whole thing. But the definition of "Jew" now given by Israeli law has less to do with ethnic ties than with religious choices. Papers have reported that Peruvian peasants recently arrived in Israel and were sent to live in the Occupied Territories. They had been converted to Judaism less than a year ago, in November 2001. And, to have an increase in the Jewish population, the Israeli right has recently proposed to convert to Judaism people who have gone to live in Israel arriving from Eastern Europe.

All over the world, Jews fight against discrimination because of religion. Everywhere, except in Israel: because it's the state of Jews.

PAOLA CANARUTTO
Italy

Editor Responds:

We at TIKKUN do not support the way that the religious establishment in Israel has taken control over the issue of Who Is a Jew? But we do support the idea of affirmative action for Jews as long as they face anti-Semitism in other parts of the world, just as we will also support "the right of return" for Palestinians to the new Palestinian state that we hope will be set up in all of the pre-'67 West Bank (with slight border adjustments mutually agreed upon). We believe that Jews should have the right to live in the new Palestinian state (as long as they obey the laws of that state), just as Arabs have the right to live in the Israeli state. We also believe that when people apply to become immigrants to that state the Palestinian people all over the world should be given the same kind of special priority in the Palestinian state that Jews are given under the Law of Return in Israel. We also support affirmative action for Buddhists in Tibet, Native Americans in the U.S., and Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. TIKKUN is proud to be both pro-Israel (even at a time when Jewish McCarthyism is sweeping the Jewish world and labeling us self-haters), and also pro-Palestinian—because peace is only possible when we validate the discourse on both sides.

The Psychodynamics of Hate Speech

To the Editor:

Your editorial on "The Psychodynamics of Denial about the Middle East" (July/August 2002), captures some of the pathos of contemporary Jewish life. Your call for compassion came to mind in late July when I faced a particularly difficult moment. I was feeding my two toddler boys in a hospital cafeteria in Berkeley, California. Several tables away, a middle-aged man speaking with his friends said loudly: "Oh, too bad. Civilians were killed. I am so sorry." (His tone was very sarcastic, and did not imply any sorrow whatsoever.) "It's collateral damage. This is war. What do you expect?" He went on in this vein, speaking of the death of the Hamas leader and thirteen others in an Israeli bomb attack that day.

I began talking to my boys about other things, trying to focus on something else and not listen to him. "God help me," I said out loud, and actually waved my hands before me as if to cool off my breath.

Then I decided I would say something to him. I wheeled the double stroller over to his table and parked right in front of him. He and his friends looked at me. I could see the name on his hospital ID badge, and the letters "M.D." I introduced myself. He got very quiet and looked me in the eye.

"My children are one quarter Arab and one quarter Jewish," I said. "They're too little to understand right now. But don't you think if I heard an Arab in a cafe saying he wasn't sorry about a suicide bombing in Jerusalem, don't you think I would tell him that was hate speech?"

The doctor, whose last name indicated he might very well be Jewish, replied "I was speaking hate speech. I am full of hate. My wife is full of hate. Everyone we know. Hate, hate, hate!"

I replied, "Well I hope at least your children and your grandchildren find some space for healing." He said, over my words, interrupting me, something to the effect of the Arabs started it, why don't they change first?

"I'm an Arab," I answered. "I'm trying to speak with love. I'm sorry you are so full of hate." Then I felt I couldn't say anymore and turned the stroller to leave.



One of the man's companions raised his coffee cup to me and said, "I agree with you." Another fellow who must have overheard from elsewhere followed me into the elevator to say something supportive.

When I heard the news reports of the bombing in Gaza, I understood that many would have ambivalent feelings about it. It takes a certain amount of moral courage and perception to get past the news of the death of an alleged murderer. (I say alleged so as to follow the journalistic convention for suspects who have not yet been convicted of a crime—as far as I know, the Hamas leader killed had not faced a jury.) We are all human and we don't react with the most perfectly calibrated emotions. I know that most of you would probably agree, however, that terrorist violence (whether by a state or by people trying to win a state) is not only wrong, it never achieves the

*We must do the best
we can to encourage
people around us to
think clearly and
critically.*

intended goal. It does not win security or peace for anyone.

I feel it's important that we in America, with our distance from the conflict, do the best we can to encourage people around us to think clearly and critically about the situation. And I pray in my heart that that man, a doctor, finds a little bit of compassion for the collateral damage he dismissed: The dead children of Gaza.

LEILA ABU-SABA MACLEOD
Berkeley, CA

To the Editor:

You are a traitor to the Jewish people, as are all those who follow you. Were I prime minister in this country, the minute a plane set down with you on it, it would be boarded and you'd be tossed in jail to rot like the traitor you are. And

LETTERS

then you could enjoy calling us fascists — you'd be getting a stiff dose of the medicine that you and the Arabs whose rear ends you so assiduously kiss in your articles dish out daily.

The only real hope the Arabs have there is to leave and settle in Jordan, in real homes, paid for by the United Nations and generous people like you and the fools who follow you. People like you are all over the world like a bad smell. It's high time you put your mouth and your money to work helping the savage animals you love so much instead of agitating for the death of fellow Jews, which is the actual effect of all that you propose.

Inasmuch as the Arabs want martyrdom, we ought to give them what they so urgently desire—to bath our feet in the blood of our enemies, as they have done to us for the last two years. Let them cry over the martyrs who wanted to live, that they might forget how to dance over those who want to die. Let them learn to weep the bitter tears of loss, like the neighbors they so happily murder.

If you want to act like a Christian goody-two-shoes, as you would have us here do for you, offer yourself to be beaten up by the anti-Semites who infest the Bay Area of California like cockroaches. Enjoy the suffering in true multi-denominational joy. In fact, take an extra punch in the stomach for me.

RONALD A. KOSOVER
Jerusalem, Israel

Is This a Poem?

News Report: Fill in the Date
Bomb kills y,
 Hamas takes responsibility,
 PA denounces,
 PM threatens,
 IDF kills x,
 Bomb kills y.
 Is this a poem?—
 My poetry professor says
 its nouns are too abstract. It is a poem
 Only in a world where arms legs
 screams skulls tears
 shattered beds and shattered buses
 blood and vomit
 the earth of grave and grave and grave
 and grave
 no longer matter.
 Is this a disquisition in ethical
 philosophy,

Making a statement,
 False or true,
 that deed and deed are morally
 equivalent?

It is philosophy

Only in a world where arms
 legs screams skulls tears
 shattered beds and shattered
 buses blood and vomit

the earth of grave and
 grave and grave and
 grave

no longer matter.

Is this an accurate AP report of history,
 And why does it begin where it begins?

The only accurate AP reports are

written on a Moebius strip
 With no beginning and no end

It is an accurate/ inaccurate report

Only in a world where arms legs
 screams skulls tears

shattered beds and shattered buses
 blood and vomit

the earth of grave and grave and grave
 and grave

no longer matter.

ARTHUR WASKOW

The Middle East Mess

To The Editor:

We are all horrified and heartbroken by the violence in the Middle East against innocent people on both sides. Nobody seems to know how to solve this carnage and stop the terrorism. Israel has asked Arafat to arrest terrorists, change textbooks, etc.; but no really sincere effort is made unless it is temporary for publicity.

I mean this respectfully and would like your opinion. A very high percentage (some say 62 percent or greater) of Palestinian Arabs believe in suicide bombing. Of course, I know there are "good Arabs" but the violent ones are very vocal and active. They continue to deny the Holocaust and teach that the Mossad orchestrated the September 11 tragedy. They do not only kill, they mutilate by beheading, they castrate, destroy, and mutilate corpses. They also do it to their own who "collaborate" with Israel. They still have honor killings against their women.

How can a democratically-elected Palestine realistically control Hizbollah, Fattah, Hamas, Jihad, etc? It can't. Even if some Arab leaders say they will

recognize Israel, which I think is wonderful, there are the masses who desire the deaths of Jews. There are those who say once the territory of Jews is reduced we will regroup and eventually infiltrate and overcome. It is, unfortunately, not just a few psychotics who share these ideas; it is a significant part of the population

I, like you, truly long for the day when we can be at peace with our neighbors. Meanwhile, what can we do to stop genocide?

RAHEL SHERMAN
Jerusalem, NY

Editor Responds:

Full peace and security for Israel would be possible within twenty years of the time that Israel withdrew from the West Bank and Gaza, allowed Palestinians to have their own state and control over their own borders and a capital in East Jerusalem, provided generous financial reparations to Palestinian refugees, rebuilt the parts of Palestine that had been destroyed by Israeli tanks or bulldozers, restored the land grabbed by settlers, eliminated all discrimination against Israeli Arabs, put war criminals and others who have violated the human rights of Palestinians on trial, and approached the Palestinian people in a spirit of repentance and atonement for the unnecessary pain and cruelty inflicted upon them by thirty-five years of harsh military occupation.

But imagine that I'm wrong about that. Let's imagine that twenty years of pure generosity and open-heartedness did not create real reconciliation. Instead, imagine that the worst is true: that for whatever

Correction:

We regret the printing error that garbled a passage in Lawrence L. Langer's article "The Art of Atrocity," in the July/August 2002 issue. The last paragraph on p.69 *should* have read: "The deliberate deception of the Germans," Adler argued, "led to the self-delusion of the prisoners," and then in an illuminating comparison with Auschwitz, he added: "In Auschwitz, sheer despair was supreme, and the reality of the situation was unambiguously recognized..." (The rest of the quote remains intact and continues onto p.70.)

LETTERS

reasons Israel has actually gotten to the point in which there are too many Arabs or Muslims committed to destroying Israel who will never be influenced by anything Israel does. In that case, given the possibilities of at least some of these haters getting access to methods of mass destruction (mini-nukes, biological weapons, etc.), those who love Jews would do all we could to get them out of the Middle East and resettled elsewhere. So if you really think this is the situation, start buying land and collecting money for that resettlement project. We at TIKKUN are far more optimistic: We believe that a Jewish state can survive if it lives by the highest moral standards, treats everyone around it with generosity and love, and embodies the highest values of the Jewish tradition.

Naive? Far less naive than those who think the Jewish people can build a state with an ethos of anger and antagonism toward Arabs and Muslims, in the geographical midst of a billion Muslims. Wake up. There is only one strategy for Jewish survival under those circumstances, and it is the opposite of the one being pursued by Israel and being cheered on by numbskulls in the United States who claim that they are pro-Israel while actually supporting policies that are leading Israel off a cliff to disaster.

To the Editor,

In a recent issue, TIKKUN published an article advocating a wall of separation between Israel and the West Bank (*Time for a Wall*, May/June 2002). This was put forward as a nonviolent, non-aggressive way for Israelis to protect themselves against suicide attacks without encroaching on Palestinian territory.

As this wall is now being built, Arafat denounces Israel as "fascist" for building this wall. It creates an "apartheid-like separation," he complains, apparently for not letting more suicide bombers build their friendships with Israelis standing at bus stops and hotels.

Soon the whole world will be echoing that Israel is engaging in "fascism" for building this wall. I am hoping that TIKKUN will realize at this point how well Arafat manipulates world public opinion in ways that will enable him to continue his campaign for the "total eradication of the Zionist entity."

NINA MOLIVER
Boston, MA

Editor Responds:

Ideas put forward in TIKKUN articles are not ideas endorsed by TIKKUN. We print many articles with whose content we disagree. We've printed articles on Israel supporting the settlers, or calling for a binational state, or attacking Zionism, or even saying that the Likud would make peace with Arafat—none of which reflects our views. Our policy is stated in our editorials, not in our selection of articles.

Time for a Wall emphasized that it should be built on the Green Line (that is, the borders as they existed in May of 1967). No wonder Palestinians are upset that Israel is continuing the eradication of the Palestinian homeland by building a wall that includes yet more land within Israel's borders—the tiny part of pre-1948 Palestine that Oslo negotiators promised to the Palestinian people in 1993.

Bush's War on Iraq

To the Editor,

The Bush administration has yet to substantiate allegations either of Iraqi involvement in the September-11 attacks or that Iraq is rebuilding its chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs. To understand the incentive for invading Iraq, we need to remember that Iraq's oil reserves are the world's second largest. Being closer to the earth's surface, Gulf oil is also the most lucrative in the world. By overthrowing the Iraqi government and occupying the country, the U.S. could give its oil companies direct control over profits from Iraqi oil for several years, until popular forces could organize to oust our puppet government (as happened in Panama, for example, several years after the illegal U.S. invasion there in 1989).

The illegality of invading Iraq is just one problem. A second is that after twelve years of routine bombings and sanctions targeted at the most vulnerable—claiming the lives of more than one, perhaps even more than two, million Iraqi civilians—the Iraqi people have little reason to trust or cooperate with the United States. Third, thousands more innocent Iraqi civilians would be killed in the invasion itself. Fourth, U.S. soldiers would die in any ground assault, whether or not Iraq has or uses chemical weapons. Fifth, the invasion could destabilize Iraq and generate a long-term civil

war inside the country. Also, Iraq would likely attack the U.S.'s regional allies, as it did in 1991. Even if it did not, the danger of an outbreak of war throughout the region is real. Civil or regional war: either could result in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.

Brushing aside these concerns, Rumsfeld and company appear to be making every effort to undermine Kofi Annan's initiative to negotiate the return of arms inspectors to Iraq. Annan's efforts should be supported, as should the language of UN Resolution 687 demanding region-wide disarmament of weapons of mass destruction (including Israel's nuclear arsenal). Only arms inspections by an independent monitoring body can achieve that. The alternative is more escalation, and continuing the cycle of violence. Modern warfare is terrorism, so one cannot "preserve the peace" with a "War on Terrorism." You either make war or you make peace. But when oil is at stake, Washington has long shown a preference for making war.

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Why the United States Needs A Strong, Peaceful Islam

George Vradenburg

The United States holds a position of military and political dominance unique in world history. The Roman Empire surrounded the Mediterranean Sea but held no sway in the rest of the world. The British Empire was global in reach, but confronted countervailing powers in Europe and in the continents where it had outposts. Neither constraint applies to the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

This “unipolar” structure of world power cannot last. Multipolarity will inevitably develop. In a process of political entropy, monopolies of global power necessarily dissipate. Even if the United States were to pursue its goals with a more collaborative style than it is today, its historically unique grip on global military and political supremacy will necessarily and ultimately recede.

This structural change may not happen overnight. Today, the United States is able to ignore politically, or suppress militarily, those who oppose its point of view. But the accelerating tide of globalization—the global connectivity in communications, transportation, and financial services and the cross-border mobility of people—are democratizing the tools of warfare as well. Soon, weapons of mass destruction coupled with the tactics of suicide bombers will make traditional means of detection and deterrence irrelevant. Population demographics, particularly among the young, are expanding. Feelings of injustice from American dominance run high. These trends suggest that efforts to defend the status quo will be expensive, dangerous, and ultimately ineffective.

Restructuring the world order to create multiple centers of economic, cultural, and political power will give more peoples and nations the incentive to oppose terrorism. The issue is whether we will aggressively seek to shape a new multipolar world order or whether a restructuring will be imposed on us by hostile forces. And if we ourselves are to effect change, will we do it peacefully or only after military victory over our enemies.

The view that the United States would be better off if its enemies were strong, not weak, is not as far afield as one might think. At the end of World War II, the United States found itself in a uniquely powerful position. What did it do with its defeated former enemies, Japan, Germany, and Italy?

It undertook a massive program of economic reconstruction and development coupled with democratic reforms that replaced Fascist European and feudal Japanese political and social structures. With remarkable vision, the United States affirmatively sought to create economic, cultural, and political powers in Europe and Japan, believing that doing so was in the interests of the United States itself. It accompanied that new, less hegemonic political and economic structure with strong institutional mechanisms for military cooperation and economic collaboration—namely NATO, SEATO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. That new structure and those institutions have led to a peaceful and healthy competitive international framework unaccompanied by European or Japanese rearmament.

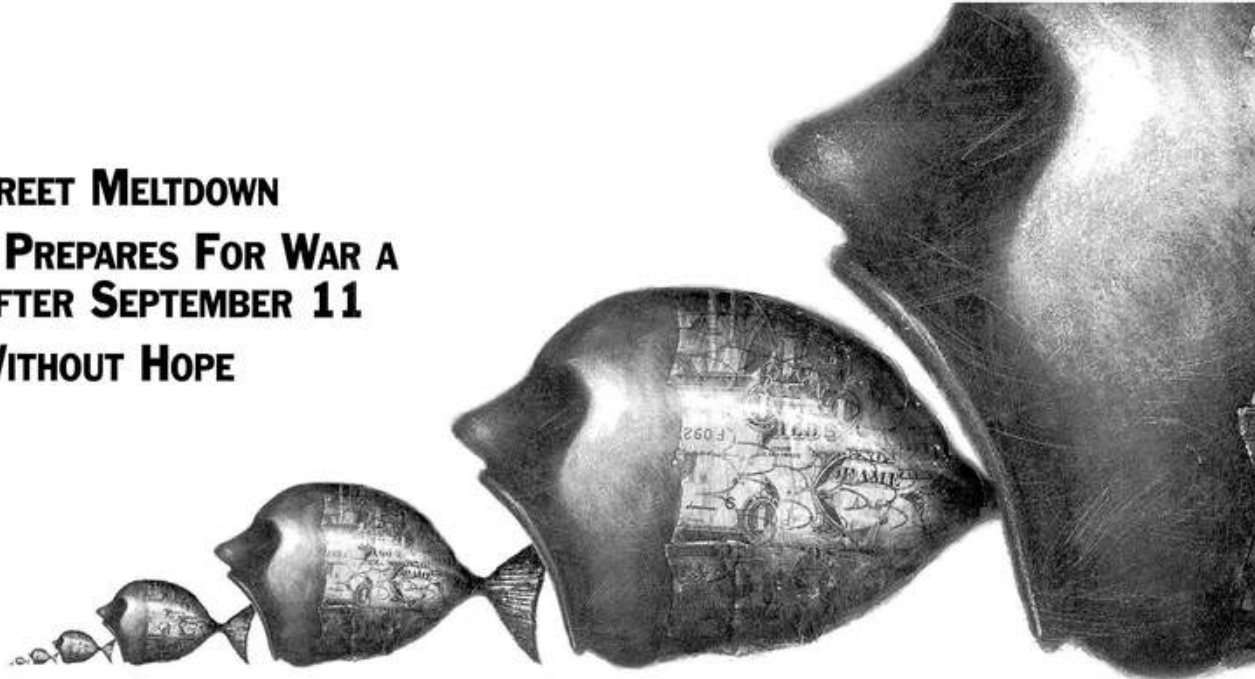
Now is the time to consider an extension of that strategy beyond Europe and Japan. It should be the policy of the United States in this twenty-first century to encourage and promote competing economic, cultural, and political centers of power in the Islamic states of the Middle East and Central Asia as well as China and elsewhere. Existing or new global institutional arrangements should be structured to include those new centers of power as equal partners to assure that global conflicts are peacefully resolved.

Do we have to use military force to effect regime change in Iraq and other countries in the “axis of evil” in order to pursue this strategy broadly throughout the Islamic world? This depends on whether those nations have and are about to use weapons of mass destruction on us, Israel, or their Arab neighbors. But whatever the answer to that critical question, a multipolar strategy can be pursued now, at least on a selective basis, with the younger, more moderate leaders in the Arab world—in Jordan, Morocco, and the Gulf States—who, together with Israel, are ready, willing, and able to partner with the United States to demonstrate the efficacy of an economic approach to change in the Islamic world. We cannot wait to play the “economic card.” Whatever our military strategy, it is critical that the Islamic world see economic opportunity and cultural independence in their future.

The existing world order will change. That is a certainty. Better that we seek to create a peaceful structure with multiple sources of economic and political power than resist until hostile forces are strong enough to restructure that world order through terror and violence. □

George Vradenburg is husband to publisher Trish Vradenburg.

WALL STREET MELTDOWN AMERICA PREPARES FOR WAR A YEAR AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 ISRAEL WITHOUT HOPE



The Great Denial In America and In Israel

Michael Lerner

We live in a society whose bottom line is money and power. What is “real” in our society is only that which can be verified (or at least falsified) through some set of sense experience. All the rest is dismissed as “non-sense.”

Living out this worldview, we’ve created a society filled with people who are rational maximizers of self-interest. They’ve learned that “common sense” means “looking out for number one.” They’ve learned that we can only trust each other to do those things that we each see as being in our own short-term self-interest, measured in terms of maximizing the bottom line of money and power. In return for this way of thinking, Americans are rewarded with more money, more material goods. By creating a globalized system of capital, our society has been able to temporarily increase the wealth of people in our society at the expense of people in other parts of the world.

This selfish and materialistic way of thinking, however, doesn’t come easily to most Americans. The American people are as decent as any on the planet, and have often shown their generosity and goodness to others (not least in the way that they’ve treated Jews). Generosity and goodness don’t belong to a particular people, but to all people, passed down through the millennia of human evolution. Our *natural* tendency is to care for others, to feel connected to a community, and to find meaning in something of higher value. When we live as we do in a world based on a narrow conception of self-interest, when we find ourselves surrounded by people

who are doing their best to teach themselves to be “realistic” and “mature” by these standards, we often end up in a great deal of pain, alienation, frustration, loneliness, and anger.

That pain is always in danger of bursting out in all kinds of ways—some of them very destructive, some of them constructive—that might lead us to challenge the whole nature of the world we live in. In response, the society established on the principles of maximizing self-interest does its best to contain, criminalize, pathologize, or otherwise repress all behaviors that express that pain, and to provide a system of material rewards for everyone who is doing their best to be out of touch with what they are really feeling.

Spiritual leaders and traditions teach us that a world cannot be based on this kind of thinking. They have taught that it is love and kindness, generosity and caring for others, justice and peace, open-heartedness and repentance that are the keys to keeping the world sane and functional. Yet there have been counter-tendencies, moments of cruelty and hurt, and when those counter-tendencies became institutionalized in social systems based on oppression, more and more people lost confidence in the underlying truths of the spiritual tradition. So, for a very short period in human history, people in the West have thought they could ignore this spiritual wisdom and build a society based on an ethos of selfishness and materialism.

We are now at the beginning of the breakdown of that delusion. There are signs all around us that are overwhelming. And yet, both in the United States and in Israel, the forces of

denial still have a huge amount of power to shape public discourse and to force everyone to deny the evidence that is right in front of them—that the old ways are not working.

American Denial

We are about to commemorate the first anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center. Instead of using the occasion to rethink the fundamentals of our system and the world crisis that it is generating, instead of using the occasion to reclaim the best in American patriotism and to let it speak for the revolutionary values of every human being endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights, we are likely to hear more claptrap, including justifications for a war against Iraq and whatever other military maneuvers the Bush administration thinks it can get away with.

Moments drenched in self-deception will fill the airwaves and then pass, and we will still be left to face the reality that a world based on selfishness and materialism just doesn't work.

The Wall Street Meltdown

The heart of the system of self-interest beats on Wall Street, where the stock market depends on the assumption that corporations will be run to maximize the advantage of investors. But this assumption leaves out the impact of the ethos of selfishness on everyone who works in the system, and who have learned to “be realistic” and use the opportunities we have to maximize our own advantage without regard to the consequences for others. The society provides no incentive to look at our own long-term self-interest and to see how we are all interconnected and our fates tied to the well being of the planet and each other. Corporations are rewarded for maximizing profits, even if the way they do so leads to depletion of the planet's life support systems and global warming. Americans are in denial of what is facing us directly: A system built on narrow conceptions of self-interest is necessarily self-destructive.

Corporate executives are not bad people—they share the same values as almost everyone else in our society, only in different circumstances. They know that they have a short period of opportunity to maximize their own advantage. If they were not smart maximizers of self-interest, they would not have figured out how to get to the top in the first place. And the people who picked them did so because they saw those qualities and figured they'd work well for advancing the interests of the corporation. But for most top corporate executives in most (not all) fields, the corporation is primarily an opportunity to make money.

The Communists had a joke which captures a deep truth: “When the next to last capitalist is being hanged,” their story goes, “the last capitalist will be selling the rope for the occasion.” The reality is that selfishness blinds everyone to their own long-term best interests. Millions of people have lost their life savings and their retirement because of

this dynamic. A system of wild self-interest consumes itself.

In a world in which each corporation seeks to maximize its own advantage, measured in terms of money and power, there is no incentive to develop a program for the rational use of our resources. Ecological reform movements find themselves in a struggle that they cannot win, and so become “realistic” by redefining their goals so narrowly that even when they win specific battles the overall degradation of the planet nevertheless accelerates with devastating consequences. We are just beginning to experience the reality of global warming, and that's only one of the hundreds of ways in which the ethos of selfishness is now destroying the entire life support system of the planet.

If we took the imperative to be realistic seriously, we would realize that the only realistic thing to do is to fundamentally change the bottom line of our current economic system so that people would be rewarded for being caring rather than for being selfish. Try for anything short of that, and soon you'll be left with the same old system, because the logic that leads people to compromise for minor reforms leads them to compromise on their compromises. Partial reforms are not going to work. Nor will achieving partial reforms be easier than going for larger social change, because the current political system is dominated by people in *both* major parties who are subservient to the interests of big capital, and because the powerful will fight against minor reforms with the same intensity they'd use if the challenge were against the whole system. Partial reforms have the additional problem of having less popular appeal than a fundamental change in the bottom line because they are so complicated and because it's so much harder to communicate their underlying ethical foundations.

That's why progressives and spiritually oriented people should stop trying to compromise and instead make the central point of what we have called Emancipatory Spirituality or a Politics of Meaning the center of their entire program:

America needs a New Bottom Line so that institutions, economic practices, and individual decisions are judged rational not only to the extent that they maximize money and power, but also to the extent that they maximize our capacities to be caring about others, ecologically and ethically coherent, and capable of responding to the world not only in narrow utilitarian ways but with awe and wonder at the grandeur of creation.

People raised in such a society will not think it rational to pillage the economy to benefit themselves.

In *Spirit Matters: Global Healing and the Wisdom of the Soul* (Hampton Roads, 2000) I show what the specific programmatic consequences would be of taking this new definition seriously. If we demanded this new bottom line for every economic, political, and social institution, we'd have the basis for a major transformation of American society and a simple and understandable first principle that would appeal to many people who do not necessarily respond to the current vision of liberal and progressive politics.

Here's how to get this conversation going: join the Tikkun Community's national campaign for The Social Responsibility Amendment (SRA) to the U.S. Constitution. It would require corporations with incomes of \$20 million or more to get a new corporate charter every ten years, which would only be granted to corporations that could prove to a jury of ordinary Americans that they had a satisfactory record of Social Responsibility as measured by an Ethical Impact Report (for the full text of the SRA see www.tikkun.org or check out our July/August 1997 issue at your local library).

If corporations knew that they stood to lose their corporate charter, they would have a powerful incentive to encourage different behavior than that which is bringing down the global economy.

As a first step in this campaign, local cities, counties, and state governments should require that any corporation competing for a state contract of more than a million dollars file an Ethical Impact Report and that the contract be awarded to that corporation among the three low bidders who had the best history of social responsibility.

In their guts, most investors know that the problems caused by Enron, Global Crossing, WorldCom and all the rest are endemic to the system of which they are a part. That's why, when forced to confront the rash of greed that is destroying our corporations, investors don't feel reassured by halfway measures.

No "reform" will put a permanent end to this kind of corruption as long as people accept that "looking out for number one" is the only rational approach to their life situation. That's why a progressive politics must be firmly focused on changing the bottom line. Spirit Matters very very much. Those of us who have been talking about spiritual transformation are far more practical than those who think that they can run an economy based on the ethos that has caused the Wall Street meltdown.

The Global Struggle Against Fundamentalism

Ever since September 11 our society has deluded itself into thinking that the primary problem it faces is a bunch of Muslim fundamentalists who are irrationally committed to destroying America because of the freedom, democracy, human rights, and women's liberation that our society embodies.

Unquestionably, there are such people. But this is a picture that only makes sense through a lens of denial about our actual role in the world.

The Left enters here with an important reminder: The globalization of capital has not been good for much of the world. It is not generosity and kindness that mobilized American corporations behind a program of global expansion that was championed by the Clinton/Gore forces as much as by the Bush/Cheney team. Through a series of international agreements promoted by the World Bank, the

World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, etc., Western capital has been able to penetrate third world countries even more effectively than they could using the old-fashioned methods of colonialism and military adventurism. The impact has been an increase of wealth in advanced industrial countries and a decrease in wealth among the poorest sectors of third world countries.

But if the Left has been right about the globalization of capital, it has missed an even more important dimension: the global struggle among religious systems. The corporate penetration of the world brings with it the corporate religion of materialism and selfishness, the common sense of looking out for number one, the bottom line of money and power, the relegation of any spiritual or moral values to the sidelines as purely inner and personal pursuits that should not be allowed to define public space. True enough, these ideas are often tied to political ideas about democracy and individual rights that have been won in the West and which are in fact worth fighting for. But the reality of most people's lives outside the West is that American corporate power does not actually increase their democracy or their individual rights. When push comes to shove, as it almost always does in these countries, the United States has been far more vigilant in fighting for corporate freedom than individual freedom, and has often sponsored governments that impose undemocratic elites who repress their own populations.

It is in response to this reality that Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian fundamentalisms have made a comeback in the past hundred years. What each of these systems offers is very similar to what ultra-nationalist and fascistic ideologies offer: a way for people to feel that they are valued and important even if they are not successful in the competitive marketplace. Faced with a world that tells them that what really counts is how much they can be of use to generate money and power, most people know that they will not be very successful. No wonder that they feel validated by a spiritual system that tells them that they are fundamentally valuable regardless of how successful they will be—valuable because they are part of "the faith community" or part of "the nation."

This is a logic that works even in advanced industrial societies. The recent surge of energy around the Pledge of Allegiance (after a panel of judges had declared it unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds because of the inclusion of "under God" in its phraseology) was only the most recent stage of a battle by people desperate for some sense of meaning higher than that which can be achieved through the marketplace (albeit articulated by right wing opportunistic leaders who attempt to channel this hunger for meaning into ultra-nationalist forms, plus a bunch of pathetic elected liberals who follow them). We don't want the Pledge in schools at all, in any form, because we don't want coerced loyalty, and we don't want God's name used to legitimate any particular national entity (which is why we don't support Jewish chauvinism either). At the same time, it's important

to understand why people respond to this issue so viscerally. It's not because they are stupid or reactionary, it's because they want to affirm a community which may only live in their fantasy world, but which provides them with some comfort from the realities of market-driven individualism.

The same is true globally. When people worldwide cheer attacks on the United States, it is *not* because, as our leaders pretend, they hate democracy, civil liberties, or human rights. The truth is that the governments the United States has attempted to impose on the world (e.g. in Iran under the Shah, Vietnam under Ky and Thieu, Chile under Pinochet, Israel's West Bank Occupation) have *not* been known for their democracy, civil liberties, or human rights. What most people experience of the United States comes from repressive regimes, or from the penetration of U.S. capitalism with its inevitable religion of money and power and selfishness. This capitalist religion demeans non-market values; undermines the traditional family structures that provide some degree of support for people that the market won't supply (even women in these cultures often feel more supported by these family structures than by the free market, which is one reason many women end up backing fundamentalist regimes); destroys village economies, which in turn leads villagers to move into the slums surrounding large cities; and does much else that people can legitimately

detest. Faced with this choice, many people reject the religion of the market and choose the only alternative being presented to them—fundamentalist religious communities.

It would be foolish to think that Bin Laden and his trained murderers were motivated solely by the actual suffering our global system has generated. The fundamentalist forms of religion that become popular have their own distortions that subordinate women, demean those who are not part of the community of the elect, and discourage critical thinking. So although people often get attracted to these communities for decent reasons, they end up adopting worldviews that have racist, sexist, and xenophobic elements that can lead to hateful sects like that created by Al Qaeda.

Yet Americans are in deep denial when they think that the solution to these problems will be achieved by overthrowing the (non-fundamentalist, secular) government of Iraq, or any other act of war. Of course, we'd like to see different regimes in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. But why stop there? We'd also like to see a genuinely democratic process in China, Russia, and even in the United States presidential elections (direct democratic election of the president, not an electoral system). But we do not want to see any of this achieved by force and violence, which will only lead to more force and violence. The way to peace is a way of peace.

In every act we do, we either affirm and strengthen the sanctity of human beings and bring God's presence in our lives more fully into focus, or we contribute to the desanctification of human life and the distancing of ourselves from God. America had a choice after September 11: to see the world through the lens of the firemen, policemen, and ordinary civilians who risked their lives to save others, or to see the world through the frame of Bin Laden and terror.

Unfortunately, following opportunistic and misguided leaders in both parties, most Americans rallied around the latter vision, using our resources to escalate military spending, reduce civil liberties, and increase the general level of fear and paranoia in almost every aspect of American life.

Yet the United States will only achieve security when it is perceived by the world as a society using its vast resources to eliminate global poverty, hunger, homelessness, and all forms of economic inequalities in the world; as the major power using its resources to combat global warming and to make all global investments and finances in accord with the best interests of preserving the ecological sustainability of the planet; and as the society that in its actual practice embodies an ethos of mutual caring and open-hearted generosity to the peoples of the world. Had the United States used September 11 to follow those paths, we would all be far more secure today.

Israeli Denial

I sit here in tears. Seven students at Hebrew University were just killed by a bomb while sitting in the cafeteria. A former member of Beyt Tikkun, now studying in Jerusalem, was sitting in the cafeteria moments before the bomb

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exploded and was nearly killed himself. Nothing can ever justify these morally outrageous murders. I am deeply angry and mournful, as I am whenever my Jewish brothers and sisters are harmed.

And I mourn also for the Palestinians killed by Israel in the past months. The UN reports that in the months of April and May, 497 Palestinians have been killed by Israel. I mourn for each and every one of them. And there is no "moral equivalence" in mourning for both peoples—every life is unique and no murder of any one person justifies the murder of another. We must fight against the denial that goes on on both sides—the denial of the humanity of the Other.

This insanity has to stop. Since the invasion of Jenin and the escalation of oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli army in the Spring of 2002, the violent attacks and counter-attacks have spiraled out of control. Here's a brief overview:

- Palestinian groups responded to the murder of Palestinian civilians in Jenin by escalating violent strikes and sickening acts of terror against Israeli civilians.

- In return, instead of responding to the specific groups that attacked them, Israel once again has declared war on the entire Palestinian people. Israel has reinvaded Palestine, occupied all the major cities and most of the small towns, and imposed martial law. Most of the population is living under conditions of twenty-four hour curfews—anyone leaving their apartments for any reason is being shot and killed. As I write, Israel is allowing people to go out to restock their food only once a week, for a few hours.

- The UN and other groups are reporting widespread hunger and malnutrition caused by the denial of food that is caused by the Occupation.

- The Palestinians were about to break this impasse. Yet, just a few hours after Hamas, the Tanzim, and other violent Palestinian groups put forward an offer for a cease fire with Israel, and indicated a willingness to suspend all acts of violence inside the Green Lines. Israel responded by sending a U.S.-supplied B16 to bomb a leader of Hamas who was inside an apartment building in Gaza, in the process killing fourteen civilians (including seven children) and injuring over 140 other civilians. This act was condemned by every major government in the world, including the United States, which had known about the process for ending the violence and was dismayed when that process was intentionally destroyed by Ariel Sharon's government. In this one move, Ariel Sharon made it clear that, despite his protestations against Palestinian violence, it is precisely this violence that his policies seek to encourage, because it is those acts that provide him with the legitimation to avoid negotiations and to expand the West Bank settlements in defiance of the world's insistence that Israel give up the West Bank and Gaza.

Nor was this only clear to outsiders, Westerners, or people previously opposed to the current coalition government between Likud and Labor. In a dramatic move the day after Israel had torpedoed this effort for peace, the Assistant

Minister of Defense of the Israeli government, the daughter of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, resigned from the government which she said was "destroying the last vestiges of the good accomplished by my father's legacy," and threatened to quit the Labor Party if it remained attached to the morally compromised direction of Shimon Peres. As the assistant Minister of Defense, no one has been in a better position than she to see what the Israeli government has been doing and why its actions are morally unacceptable.

- Hamas responded to Sharon's Gaza bombing with a terror assault of its own on students eating lunch at the Hebrew University cafeteria, killing and wounding many. Predictably, and stupidly, the Palestinians did not continue to offer peace, but returned to acts of violence. Their failure to see that their own interests lie in the path of nonviolence is equal in moral blindness to that of the Israelis who cannot see that their interests lie in a whole new approach based on generosity, open-heartedness, and repentance (a repentance which we call for from both sides, since both Israel and Palestine have engaged in acts of evil and cruelty for which the appropriate response is atonement and a genuine seeking of forgiveness from the other side).

- While all this has been happening in Israel/Palestine, a group of people who think of themselves as "pro-Palestinian" have launched a boycott of Israeli academics. The boycott recently led a European journal to fire from their editorial board two Israeli academics who actually oppose current Israeli policy. We protest this act of moral blindness and stupidity. Similarly, we oppose any blanket boycott of Israel. We do support narrowly targeted acts to oppose the Occupation—for example, the boycott of Caterpillar which has been selling to the Israeli army tractors specifically designed for use in destroying Palestinian homes.

Time for Repentance and Atonement

This year's commemoration of September 11 offers Americans a perfect time to rethink our society's priorities, to stop and think before engaging in another war, and to change our country's policies so that it becomes the force for ecological sanity, generosity, and sharing the wealth with everyone on the planet—a force for building a world of peace and justice. Please invite people to your home, synagogue, church, mosque, or community center—and have this discussion be the focus of September 11. If you are Jewish, let this be the focus of the Days of Repentance and Atonement (September 6–16). We approach this moment with deep compassion for the pain that leads so many people into denial, but also with a strong intention to make this period of repentance more than an empty ritual: We want to end the cycles of pain and violence, and that requires fundamental changes to which we must give our energies in the coming year. May we all be inscribed for a New Year, 5763, in which the whole planet experiences a rebirth of generosity and kindness, social justice, peace, love and compassion, and ecological sensitivity. □

AN INTERVIEW WITH Cornel West

Michael Lerner

Cornel West is co-chair, with Michael Lerner and Susannah Heschel, of the Tikkun Community. He is University Professor of Religion at Princeton University and author of sixteen books, including *Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism* (Common Courage Press, 1993), *Race Matters* (Beacon Press, 1993), and *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin* (Putnam Books, 1995), co-authored with Michael Lerner. His recently released *Sketches of My Culture* (Artemis Records), is his first spoken-word album.

MICHAEL LERNER: What were the lessons from September 11 that we should have learned, but haven't?

CORNEL WEST: We have to recognize that America must come to terms with the painful truth—the world is not only a dangerous place, and peace delicate and fleeting, but we are interdependent. We have to acknowledge that what we do affects everyone, that we are part of one interlinked garment of destiny. America as a country began as a European slave society settling on an indigenous people's land, then it broke from the English empire, and now we are the greatest empire since the Roman Empire. We are a settler society vis-à-vis indigenous power, a colony that developed a revolutionary tradition in response to the imperial power of England, and now we are the imperial power of the early twenty-first century. The challenge that faces us in the post-September 11 period, as we become increasingly willing to see our central role in the world, is how do we build on the best in our democratic and libertarian traditions so that we can wield our imperial power in ways that enhance human rights and democracy around the globe?

Now, to do that, we must try to relate to the UN and countries around the world in a different way than we have in the past. We need to overcome our arrogance and unilateralism so that we can relate to other countries in ways that emphasize common goals and our willingness to work together to achieve them in a spirit of mutual respect. One common thread among our political, economic, and cultural elites is this thread of arrogance and the attitude that we don't have to take into account the United Nations, the World Court, the well-being of others, and how our actions

Michael Lerner is editor of TIKKUN magazine.



Cornel West addresses students at a living-wage rally at Harvard University in 1999.

affect their destinies. More and more of the world sees this arrogance for what it is.

LERNER: What's our role?

WEST: One of the roles of radical democrats such as ourselves in the Tikkun Community is to help support the instincts of many Americans to challenge this arrogance and to help make mutual respect a guiding principle in shaping America's interactions with the world.

But the post-September 11 year has been difficult for radical democrats. The first casualties of the official institutions of American economic, political, and cultural power have been truth and dissent. So we in the Tikkun Community continually face the challenge of telling the painful truths about the injustices of the world system which we lead, and raising our dissenting voices. We know that we will be trashed as anti-American, though we are not one whit anti-American—we are pro-human. We stand in the tradition of people who are proudly pro-American and pro-human, but who have been critical of American policies, from Walt Whitman to Fannie Lou Hamer.

LERNER: Many people feel that this kind of pro-human voice is being increasingly marginalized in the current period.

WEST: Though there are attempts to marginalize us, our voices are still being heard. There is no doubt that TIKKUN's voice was heard when we were arrested in Washington, D.C., in April for protesting U.S. unwillingness to constrain Ariel Sharon's invasion of West Bank cities, and that what we were saying was picked up by people in the U.S. State Department. Despite the disappointing and misguided policy announced by President Bush, we are at a moment in

Cornel West will speak at the Founding Conference of the Tikkun Campus Network, Oct. 11–14, NYC.
More info: www.tikkun.org.

which many Americans are more willing to listen to our message than ever before.

The Tikkun Community's call for security for Israel and justice for the Palestinians, presented as equally important demands, would have been truly marginalized fifteen years ago, but today it is beginning to get a serious hearing, both in the media and in the corridors of American elites. We have Colin Powell echoing our call for even-handedness, and though he might not be winning the immediate battles of the moment in the elite structures of the White House, his voice is there and has been strengthened by ours. Our challenge is to continue to speak from the standpoint of prophetic witness, as TIKKUN does so effectively, and to simultaneously be cautious not to take on a tone of self-righteousness and insensitivity to those whose policies we critique. We don't want to mirror the arrogance of our elites. We are against all forms of dogmatism, including left-wing dogmatism. We have to cut through all forms of provincialism, parochialism, and tribalism—this is the perennial struggle of being a progressive.

There is a reactionary movement with significant power in the White House that is consolidating right now on the domestic and military fronts—the tightening of the plutocracy and the patriarchy in ways that effect all people who have been marginalized in our society: working people, gays and lesbians, people of color. Our role as progressives is to expose the deceit and use our analytic and empathic skills to help people discern what is happening in our world, and to connect not only to the minds but to the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens.

So we have to expose the lies and the curtailments of rights and liberties that Mr. Ashcroft is carrying out (as we did in the new book *It's a Free Country* by TIKKUN's former publisher, Danny Goldberg). But even as we critique Bush, we have to acknowledge moments when he does something valuable, as he did when he made the distinction between gangster terrorists who happen to be Muslim and Islam as a religion. It doesn't translate on the ground in the Justice Department—that's where the hypocrisy comes in—but we can still commend Bush for being right when he was.

Similarly, we have to expose corporate criminality—the kind of thing that Ralph Nader was doing so eloquently in the 2000 election and which now is forced onto public consciousness by Enron, Global Crossing, and Worldcom. It is this corporate abuse and mendacity which has gotten to a point where people have lost faith in our capacity to maintain an economy. The trust has been undermined by corporate gangsters. For years we've had a media that has focused negative attention on gangsta rap and gangster culture in many poor ghetto communities, but meanwhile the gangsters at the top have been “getting away with murder.” As a result, public trust in corporations has plunged, and now you have corporate executives rushing to discuss corporate accountability.

I had a meeting not too long ago with many of the Democrats in the U.S. Senate. I was invited to meet with them along with Kevin Phillips, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Randy Kennedy, and Alan Brinkley. Kevin Phillips' wonderful new book *Wealth and Democracy* had just come out, explaining the way that America is a plutocracy. There was great receptivity to the discussions of the threats posed by corporate power to American democracy, but discussions of that sort rarely go beyond those rooms. At the moment, many of the senators express concern that they not be perceived as striking out against America at a time when it is under external attack from terrorists. And that's a real issue for the few remaining progressive voices in the Senate, because the truth is that America does have some real enemies. That's a real issue for all progressives. We have to recognize that some of these enemies of America are not a bit progressive. We have to be able to criticize them without demonizing them, and be sure that they are hunted down and brought to justice.

LERNER: Progressives face a difficult moment. On the one hand, the Democratic Party has become less and less courageous over the past two decades in championing progressive causes, and yet on the other hand many progressives feel that they unintentionally may have contributed to the election of Bush when they put energies into building a third party. The Democrats have done little to invite the



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progressives back or to open up their own institutions of decision-making, so that leaves progressives in the position once again of voting for lesser-evil candidates who are only marginally better than their opponents, and who represent positions that many progressives find anathema.

WEST: When the Right is unified, the Left has little possibility of making significant inroads into the population because it needs to be there to support liberals who are under attack. But when the Right becomes more discredited and disunited, as it may be soon because of the current economic problems, then there is more room for the Left to assert its programs separately from the liberal forces. It is at the moment that conservatism is in deep crisis that we get our best chance.

The Democratic Party is always both indispensable and inadequate for progressives. If we want our ideas to enter the mainstream, we have to engage the Democratic Party because there are progressives in that party who have access to serious power (Sen. Paul Wellstone, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., Sen. Russell Feingold, etc.). My heart, however, lies more with the Ralph Naders and other radical democrats—the critics of corporate power—who are more explicitly concerned about social justice both domestically and internationally. But I don't think we can abandon our attempts to engage the Democratic Party and to challenge it from within. That's one of the things that I think will emerge with Al Sharpton's possible primary challenge in the 2004 election, because he is going to be raising issues about the way the criminal justice system works in poor and third-world communities, racial profiling, the prison industrial system, as well as issues of corporate power. If we can get those issues to play a role in the primaries then we might be able to have some impact on the Democratic Party.

But if we still end up faced with a centrist Democrat winning those primaries, then we may once again have no choice but to vote for a third-party candidate. We can't just endlessly and uncritically support candidates whose views are so far from our own. But if we end up with a progressive in the Democratic Party, that would be a very different story.

LERNER: Too bad, then, to have to rely for this strategy on someone like Sharpton, who has such a problematic past which will make it so much easier for the media to divert attention from the more controversial issues that need to be addressed. Why not have one of the other progressive African American elected officials as a candidate?

WEST: There aren't that many who would be willing to be a candidate and who simultaneously are willing to raise the kind of radical democratic critique that could mobilize people in a serious way. There are very few African American politicians who would be willing to offer this kind of critique not only about the Democratic Party itself

but about the larger society, and who would be willing to raise the issues not only about corporate power but about racial profiling and the criminal justice system as it operates among third-world and poor communities. There are some very talented political leaders, but they have developed ties inside the Democratic Party that make them reluctant to speak with the kind of clarity that Sharpton has. This is understandable, though not always defensible, to the extent that maintaining those ties does in fact give them some influence inside the circles of power.

LERNER: In the recent attempt by neo-conservatives to throw you out of a conference planned for October at NYU on the life and works of Sidney Hook, wasn't your association with TIKKUN raised privately by some of them as one reason they wanted to distance from you?

WEST: Absolutely. The four major conservative intellectuals from that conference—Hilton Kramer, William

Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and John Dinkens—all abruptly withdrew when I was asked to replace Richard Rorty. There were three claims being made: First that "West doesn't know anything about Sidney Hook" (apparently they were unfamiliar with my book on the American pragmatists which has an entire chapter assessing the works of Hook); that "West isn't a real intellectual;" and that "West is an anti-Semite, proved by the fact of his association with self-hating Jew Michael Lerner." And I said the third point is a compliment, because if the fact that you love not only Jews but other human beings as well and insist on the biblical message that everyone is created in the image of God and equally deserving of God's love makes you someone who is going to be demeaned, then I'm proud to be identified with you and with those other Jews who are willing to overcome tribalism.

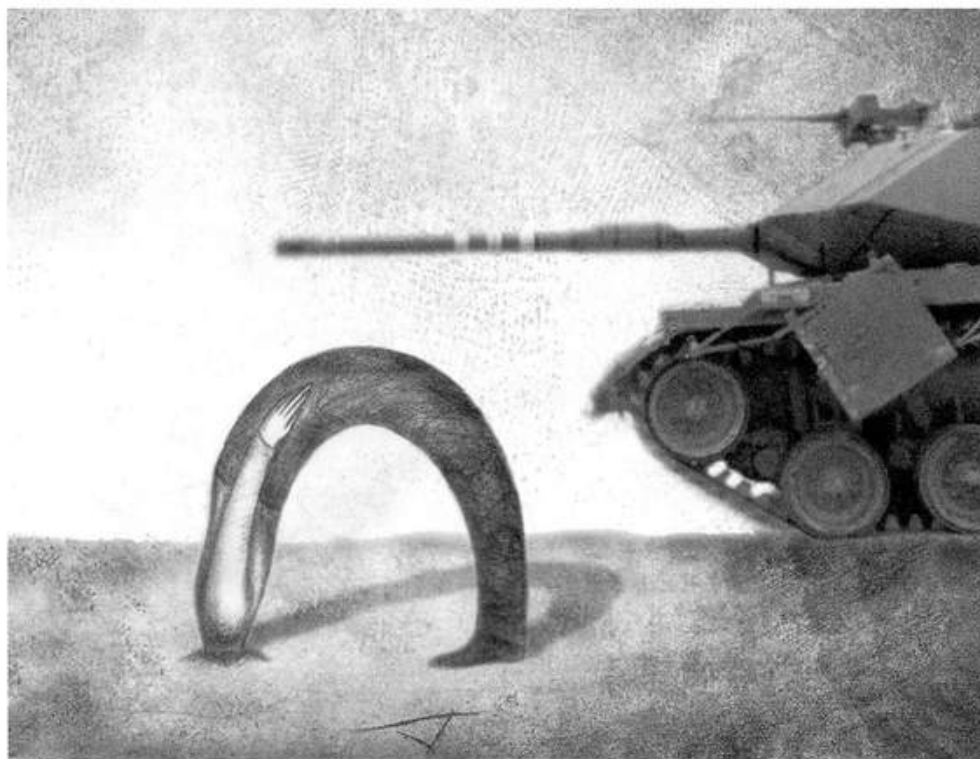
I witness how your stance makes you the victim of attacks and put-downs by people who disagree with your willingness to stand for peace and justice and for the equal value of everyone on the planet—particularly by fellow Jews who think that the only way to love Jews is to show that they are loved more than other people on the planet. I've seen how painful that is for you, because in fact you have a passionate love for the Jewish people, and I've heard how passionately you criticize others on the Left when you feel that they are not giving the respect to Israel or Jews that is deserved. So I understand how difficult it is for you to have your actual love for the Jewish people being denied just because you think that the current policies of the State of Israel are deeply mistaken and the American Jewish alignment with those policies deeply immoral. So, I'm happy to have the chance to stand with you on these issues.

(continued on page 28)

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Seven Pillars of Jewish Denial

Kim Chernin



I am thinking about American Jews, wondering why so many of us have trouble being critical of Israel. I faced this difficulty myself when I first went to Israel in 1971. I was an ardent Zionist, intending to spend my life on a kibbutz in the Galilee and to become an Israeli citizen. Back home, before leaving, I argued almost daily with my mother, an extreme left wing radical, about the Jews' right to a homeland in our historical and therefore inalienable setting. However, once established on my kibbutz on the Lebanese border, I began to notice things that disrupted my complacency.

We used to ride down to our orchards on kibbutz trucks with Arab workers from the neighboring villages and were occasionally invited to visit. We liked sitting on a rug on a dirt floor, eating food cooked over an open fire, drinking water from the village well. Above all, we loved the kerosene lamps that were lit and set in a half circle around us as it grew dark. But walking home it occurred to me that our kibbutz had running water, electricity, modern stoves. Our neighbors were gracious, generous, and friendly, although I had learned by then that the land the kibbutz occupied had once belonged to them. We were living on land that was once theirs, under material conditions they could not hope to equal. I found this troubling.

The path from this troubled awareness to my later ability to be critical of Israel has been long and complex. Over the years I have spoken with other Jews who have traveled this same path, and to many more who haven't. In each of

us I have detected mental obstacles that make it hard, sometimes impossible, for us to see what is there before our eyes. Our inability to engage in critical thought about our troubled homeland is entangled by crucial questions about Jewish identity. Why do American Jews find it difficult to be critical of Israel? Here, set out in linear form, are seven obstacles to a Jew's ability to be critical of Israel.

Seven Obstacles:

1. A conviction that Jews are always in danger, always have been, and therefore are in danger now.

Which leads to:

2. The insistence that a criticism is an attack and will lead to our destruction.

Which is rooted in:

3. The supposition that any negativity towards Jews (or Israel) is a sign of anti-Semitism and will (again, inevitably) lead to our destruction.

Which is enhanced by:

4. Survivor's guilt.

Which contains within itself:

5. A bidden belief that we can change the past.

Which holds:

6. An even more hidden belief that a sufficient amount of suffering confers the right to violence.

Which finally brings us to:

7. The conviction that our beliefs, our ideology (or theology), matter more than the lives of other human beings.

Obstacles 1-3: Conviction

The first three obstacles reveal a cluster of convictions about Jewish endangerment which tend to reinforce one another in insidious ways. We can trace the development of

Kim Chernin is the author of fourteen books and numerous articles. She is the founder of EdgeWork Books (www.edgework.com). Her most recent book is: *The Girl Who Went And Saw And Came Back*, a novel.

this consciousness. It goes something like this: We keep a watchful eye out, we read the signs, we detect innuendo, we summon evidence, we become, as we imagine it, the ever-vigilant guardians of our people's survival. Endangered as we imagine ourselves to be; endangered as we insist we are, any negativity, criticism, or reproach, even from one of our own, takes on exaggerated dimensions; we come to perceive such criticism as a life-threatening attack.

The path to fear is clear. But our proclivity for this perception is itself one of our unrecognized dangers. Bit by bit, as we gather evidence to establish our perilous position in the world, we are brought to a selective perception of that world. With our attention focused on ourselves as the endangered species, it seems to follow that we ourselves can do no harm. We are so busy warding off danger we become unaware that we endanger others. We fill up, we occupy, all the endangerment-space. When other people clamor for a portion we believe they are trying to deny us our right to this ground. At its most vehement, our sense of ever-impending Jewish peril brings down on us a willed ignorance, an almost perfect blindness, to the endangerment of others and to the role we might play in it.

When I lived in Israel I practiced selective perception. I was elated by our little kibbutz on the Lebanese border until I recognized that we were living on land that had belonged to our Arab neighbors. When I didn't ask how we had come to acquire that land, I practiced blindness.

Long before I went to Israel, my mother would bring out a rolled up poster of a Palestinian youth. Without saying a word, she would unroll it and hold it up. It showed a very young man lying in the road in a pool of his own blood. This image had caused a major family breakdown when she showed it to her brother, who stormed out without saying goodbye and didn't speak to her again for years. On another occasion, there was an even more violent scene with the father of an old high school friend of mine. My mother unrolled the poster, he jumped up from the couch, raised his fist at her, and stormed from the room. Before slamming the door behind him, he shouted back: "This time, Rose, you've gone too far. Next thing, you'll be calling Israeli soldiers...." Here he caught himself, but couldn't hold back. "You'll be calling Jewish people who defend their lives...." Another break, and then, finally, the unthinkable word: "You'll be calling us *fascists*."

Slam. My friend and I looked at my mother in shock, amazed to find her silent and unperturbed. Between us, between my mother and myself, I was the one still practicing blindness. Where my mother saw martyrdom, victimization, tragedy in the image of the fallen youth, I saw a dangerous enemy stopped short in his effort to destroy our

people. My friend's father, who lived in constant dread of Jewish annihilation, may have seen a necessary vengeance, an image of justice. I don't know what my friend saw. I drove her home in silence and we never met up with one another again. My mother, for her part, never said a word. When I stared at her she merely narrowed her eyes and looked back with an expression that implied: "Am I afraid of a word? Am I going to let a word keep me from seeing?"

The fixed certainty of impending Jewish destruction. Wherever we look, we see nothing but its confirmation, the same old story, always about to happen. In the grip of this persuasion, any other possibilities of meaning are swept away; we are unable to imagine things, even for a split second, from another's point of view. It took me years to overcome this blindness. My thoughts would return to the scene in my mother's living room; I would pore over the image, the outrage, the silence. One day, during an

enormous inner struggle, most of what I believed about most of what mattered most to me fell apart. (Buber refers to such an event as "an elemental reversal, a crisis and a shock....") Years of images and impressions I had kept at one remove came resoundingly together. I saw what my mother had seen: A boy gunned down by a superior military force; a very young man fighting for the survival of his people, who were far more endangered than ours.

To see a people far more endangered than ours: step one in the dismantling of blindness.

Obstacles 4-5: Survivor's guilt

Guilt goes something like this: I was walking across the beautiful square in Nuremburg a couple of years ago and stopped to read a public sign. It told this story: During the Middle Ages, the town governing body, wishing to clear space for a square, burned out, burned down, and burned up the Jews who had formerly filled up the space. End of story. After that, I felt very uneasy walking through the square and I eventually stopped doing it.

I felt endangered, of course, a woman going about through Germany wearing a star of David. But more than that, I experienced a conspicuous and dreadful self-reproach at being so alive, so happily on vacation, now that I had come to think about the murder of my people hundreds of years before. After reading that plaque I stopped enjoying myself and began to look for other signs and traces of the mistreatment of the former Jewish community. If I had stayed longer in Nuremburg, if I had gone further in this direction, I might soon have come to believe that I, personally, and my people, currently, were threatened by the contemporary Germans eating ice cream in outdoor cafés in the square. How much more potent this tendency for alarm must be in the Middle East, in the middle of a war zone!

*Wherever we look, we
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impending Jewish
destruction.*

What was the reasoning underlying my fear? If we live in a world as dangerous to us as the Holocaust was to our people, we can be that much closer to the victims of the Holocaust, we can know their apprehension and terror; perhaps we may even succeed in taking their suffering upon ourselves. No one holds these beliefs knowingly. But they hold on to us: in a tragically paradoxical way, our guilt brings us to magnify our vulnerability. It seems that no victory on the Israeli side, no crushing of the perceived enemy, no destruction of their wells or complete dismantling of their infrastructure, can change our fear that they will defeat us or alter this perception of ever-present danger.

We will not let it happen again. But this claim, which seems to point exclusively into the future, is also yoked to our inability to accept the past. By keeping the past alive, by living it all over again, we attempt to alter it. Hidden within the militant "never again," is the anguished, impossible cry: "It will never have happened."

There is a widespread assumption among our people that the vanished victims of the Holocaust would approve of what we do to make sure their fate cannot again befall the Jewish people. Is it fair, however, to assume that their suffering and death would hold no other meaning for them than a recourse to violence, vengeance, and paranoia?

Some of our people, listening in on our ancestors' imagined, other-worldly discourse, hear only the endless repetition of the *never again*.

I hear, *not in my name*.

There is a new poster. It shows a single Palestinian woman facing a massive Israeli bulldozer. Looking at this image one immediately understands what Primo Levi (a survivor) meant when he claimed that the Palestinians are the Jews of the Middle East. Can we face the fact that we make use of the Holocaust as a way of refusing to see our own lamentable actions?

I hate this idea. It is, I think, the harshest moral reproach I have ever directed against myself. I can just about tolerate the idea of a survivor guilt that exaggerates my sense of vulnerability and leads me to perceive danger and an enemy where there may be instead a suffering neighbor. Can I, (can we), really face the idea that we are using the six million, hiding behind them, importing our own meanings into their suffering and death, using their victimhood for propaganda? It took me a long time to face this charge; to recognize that some part of my ever-increasing concern with Holocaust victims, Holocaust books, and first-person Holocaust accounts, was serving as a cover up, distracting my gaze from a living struggle in which another people were enduring a victimization for which we Jews were responsible.

For which we Jews are responsible.

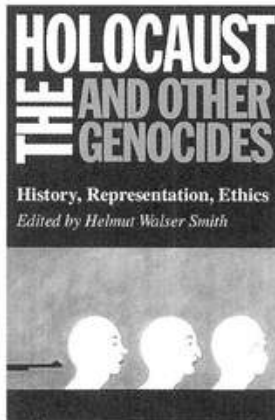
Arafat is not Hitler. The Palestinian terrorists are not the SS. We are no longer the victims. The world has changed, but Jewish identity has not kept up with it. If we

lived in the present, we would have to acknowledge that the Jewish people of the twenty-first century are no longer the world's foremost endangered species. We would have to recognize that we, as a people, are ourselves capable of victimization.

Seeing ourselves as ordinary people, not victims: Step two in the dismantling of blindness.

Obstacle 6. Suffering, Violence

The Israeli army that defends our homeland behaves brutally, uses torture, fires upon innocent civilians. What justifies the behavior of this army? We call it self-defense but this is, I suggest, only the surface of our justification. Further down, tucked carefully away in our collective psyche, we find a sense of entitlement about our violence. Our historic suffering, as a people, entitles us to the violence of our current behavior. Our violence is not horrendous and cruel like the violence of other people, but is a justified, sacred violence, a holy war. Of course, we would not want to know this about ourselves—it would make us too much like the perceived enemy whose violence against us we are deploring. When the suicide bomber blows up a hotel full of Passover celebrants, we see clearly that this is an instance of hateful, unjustifiable violence. (And it is, it is.) When we destroy a refugee camp of impoverished Palestinians, this, in our eyes, is a violence purified



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by our history of persecution. (And it is not, it is not.) We are puzzled that much of the world doesn't see our situation in the same way.

I think many of us hold this view of purified Jewish violence without being aware of it. Though we rarely admit it, the Torah is full of ancient stories marked by tribal violence done in the name of Jehovah. We know the story of Elijah wrangling with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The prophet wins a clear victory for Jehovah over the Canaanite gods. We know, but don't make much of the fact as we retell the story, that after Elijah won the contest on Jehovah's behalf he took the prophets of Baal down to the brook Kishon and slew them there. All 450 of them. I have not heard of or read a midrash that elaborates this massacre.

I recently wrote an article about the traces of Goddess worship in the Torah. When I cited this example of Elijah and prophets, my three editors, all intelligent and well-educated Jewish women, were uneasily eager to have me supply a footnote for this contentious assertion. They were as surprised as I initially had been to discover that the account of this violence was in the Torah itself. And yet they had certainly read Kings II.

In a similar vein: We celebrate the military victories of Joshua. But do we really take in what they involved? "Joshua, and all Israel with him, went on up from Elon to Hebron. They attacked it, took it and struck it with the edge of the sword, with its king, all the places belonging to it and *every living creature in it* (my italics, Josh. 10:37)." I have yet to hear a rabbi help us imagine this event in which women and children, the very young and the very old, are put to the sword.

Our sense of victimization as a people works in a dangerous and seditious way against our capacity to know, to recognize, to name and to remember. Since we have adopted ourselves as victims we cannot correctly read our own history let alone our present circumstances. Even where the story of our violence is set down in a sacred text that we pore over again and again, we cannot see it. Our self-election as the people most likely to be victimized obscures rather than clarifies our own tradition.

I can't count the number of times I read the story of Joshua as a tale of our people coming into their rightful possession of their promised land without stopping to say to myself, "but this is a history of rape, plunder, slaughter, invasion and destruction of other peoples." As such, it bears an uncomfortably close resemblance to the behavior of Israeli settlers and the Israeli army of today, a behavior we also cannot see for what it is.

We are tracing the serpentine path of our own psychology. We find it organized around a persuasion of victimization, which leads to a sense of entitlement to enact violence,

which brings about an inevitable distortion in the way we perceive both our Jewish identity and the world, and involves us finally in a tricky relationship to language. That boy over there with the black face mask and a rock. That is a terrorist. That boy over here with a sub-machine gun, firing on the boy with the rock, he is a soldier.

A trick of language? A highly dangerous trick. I was once persuaded to show up for rifle training when I lived on my kibbutz, although as an American citizen I wasn't required to attend. And whom did I imagine I would shoot? And kill?

I, who cannot kill a moth? I never imagined it had to do with killing. Because of the language I used (*I lift this rifle in defense of my beleaguered homeland*) the training became a clean act, necessary, not even in need of justification.

Accepting our own history of violence. Step three in the dismantling of blindness.

Obstacle 7. Ideology vs. Living People?

Some American Jews will soon set out to join settlements on the West Bank or to volunteer for the Israeli army. Others are going to Ramallah to help the Palestinians, hoping that their presence there will make it harder to smash through the city with tanks, randomly killing civilians. Still others are talking about a peace brigade that will be established along the border, a human buffer zone between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Jewish identity, stretched out between these extremes, is up for grabs.

At one extreme, the decision to further occupy the West Bank is guided by a sense of Jewish destiny and by an ideology that claims Judea and Samaria as Jewish sacred ground. These claims are based on archaic conversations with God. The Orthodox families moving to the settlements will set themselves down among a hostile population, will be trained to shoot, and will participate in the further partition of Palestinian lands. They will take up a great deal of the water when there is already not enough water for their neighbors, many of whom go for days without being able to wash or even drink. In service to an archaic idea these people will see their Arab neighbors, not as a humbled, battered, impoverished, hopeless people, but as a potent enemy living illegitimately on ancient Jewish land. In the grip of ideology some things get neglected. Living people, the present, the sanctity of civilian life become less important than what, exactly? An idea? The idea of the Jewish people as chosen by God, living out a covenant with Him?

When I first went to Israel in 1971 I was on my way to a new kibbutz in the Golan Heights. It was a bleak, grim, heavily armed place with living conditions as rough as those

*Teach us to grieve
without turning into
those who have
brought us grief.*

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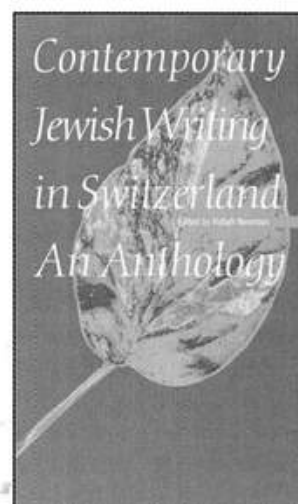
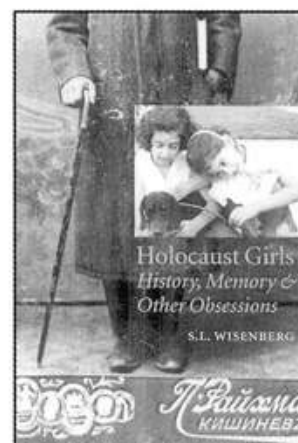
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faced by the early pioneers. There were no trees on this kibbutz, no gardens, no fields, no grazing animals. It was an armed camp made up of mud, reserve forces, and young Israelis who were there to hold the newly acquired land. I was convinced that I belonged with them, although I was not invited to stay. Today I want to ask that younger self: What can it mean to be God's people if this election does not come with a concern for all living peoples? Would it mean that the God who once spoke to our people has nothing new to say?

Our God is a God of many changes. The old warrior God who has had nothing new to say for thousands of years has been able, over time, to unfold aspects of Himself our Israelite ancestors would have found surprising. In talmudic thought the war-like, conquering deity evolves into a God of profound ethical concerns. He has revealed the *Shechinah*, his female, compassionate side, who comes to her children on the Sabbath and goes out with us into exile. She has, along the way, shown herself to be in love with a good story. She inspires midrashim, cherishing them as much as stories and teachings regarded as more sacred. She rejoices as women speak to her through their own prayers and rituals in settings that for too long excluded women. She is a God of perpetual unfolding; we, her people, inherit a tradition that asks for and imposes on us the work of continual renewal. Compassion, service, and a concern for justice are the imperative expressions of our divine worship.

Call to Prayer, Call to Action

What Judaism means and will come to mean follows from the choices we make today. Our acts, as Jews, promote or defeat the crucial purpose of Judaism—to maintain a potent, living, intimate relationship to a divine force that tears through the universe busily promoting transformation. The call of this presence, as I experience it sitting here at my desk, is towards community and action, to the awareness that if we can't do everything we can still do something.

We can clarify our vision. There is no reason we must continue to live either in survivor's guilt or in a sense of our inevitable victimization as Jews. We need not take refuge in an entitlement to violence or a remorseless emphasis upon our suffering. We can see the world as it is, not as it was or as we hope or fear it might be. We can enlarge our sense of Jewish identity to include both vulnerability and aggression. We do not have to be blind. We can see and we can act.

If we don't happen to be the people called to Ramallah we are certainly the people who can join the long march to social justice.

We can:

- take on the conservative policies of the established Jewish institutions
- incessantly pester the White House and Congress to intervene in the Middle East
- join organizations that support a Judaism of radical commitment to social justice.

Challenge, pester, join—they do not seem to have the epic scope required by events that involve so much suffering and death. But it would be a mistake to diminish their

significance. They stand well within the radical challenge the prophets have always made to the conservative Jewish establishment; they direct themselves, against all odds, toward formidable obstacles and will require the staying power of a visionary, activist community. These commitments, in our time, in a world in crisis, must be recognized as an essential form of Jewish prayer.

But are we, as a people, still capable of prayer? How will we manage to pray, we who have just seen this:

Wednesday, June 19, 2002. 7:10 AM. Eyewitness. Fifteen-year-old girl:

People coming apart o my god right in front of us all over the place. O my god, o my god. Mama gets out of our car. Mama steps on a finger. Let's get out of here Mama, let's go, let's run, let's get away. If you walk in the street you will fall, you will slip in the blood, Mama says we have to help them, Mama says never take the bus, walk everywhere we have to go. Could happen, any day, any minute, look around, look over your shoulder, keep an eye out. That's me, screaming no no no no no no. That's me shouting get them, get them, make them stop, do something, kill all of them....

We who have just seen, who know, who have witnessed, if we are to pray, we will have to call upon the highest development of our Jewish God, evoking the compassion of the *Shechinah* and the traditional female abhorrence for violence. We will have to imagine the midrashim that will, in time, inevitably be told to our ethical God about the struggles between Israel and Palestine. In this crisis we need a divine presence who is still talking to us and is closely in touch with the contemporary world of our people, so that, when we are able to pray, our prayers might sound like this:

*Make it possible for us not to seek vengeance.
Help us to find the way that is not the way of violence.
Teach us to grieve without turning into those who have brought us to grief.
Help us to remember the innocence of the innocent.
Teach us to remember ourselves, a holy people.
If compassion is not possible for us,
If love is not possible for us,
Teach us not to hate.*



Zionism's Bad Conscience

Joel Kovel

Let me begin with some blunt questions, the harshness of which matches the situation in Israel/ Palestine. How have the Jews, immemorially associated with suffering and high moral purpose, become identified with a nation-state loathed around the world for its oppressiveness toward a subjugated indigenous people? Why have a substantial majority of Jews chosen to flaunt world opinion in order to rally about a state that essentially has turned its occupied lands into a huge concentration camp and driven its occupied peoples to such gruesome expedients as suicide bombing? Why does the Zionist community, in raging against terrorism, forget that three of its prime ministers within the last twenty years—Begin, Shamir and Sharon—are openly recognized to have been world-class terrorists and mass murderers? And why will these words just written—and the words of other Jews critical of Israel—be greeted with hatred and bitter denunciation by Zionists and called “self-hating” and “anti-Semitic”? Why do Zionists not see, or to be more exact, why do they see yet deny, the brutal reality that this state has wrought?

The use of the notion of denial here suggests a psychological treatment of the Zionist community. But in matters of this sort, psychology is only one aspect of a greater whole that includes obdurate facts like forceful occupation of land claimed by and once inhabited by others. The phenomena of conscience are of course processed subjectively. But they neither originate within the mind nor remain limited to thoughts and feelings. Conscience is objective, too, and linked to notions like justice and law that exist outside of



any individual will. It is also collective, and pertains to what is done by the group in whose membership identity is formed. These group phenomena are, we might say, organized into “moral universes,” in which history, mythology, and individual moral behaviors are brought together and made into a larger whole. Such universes may themselves be universalizing, wherein that whole is inclusive of others, who are seen as parts of a common humanity (or for non-human creatures, nature). Or, as all too often happens, they may be unified only by splitting apart of the moral faculties.

Now, the situation prevailing in Israel/Palestine is that common humanity is denied, the Other is not recognized, and the double standard prevails. In such conceptions, which have stained history since the beginning and comprise one of the chief impediments to the making of a better world, talion law reigns, violence toward the Other is condoned, and violence from the Other is demonized. Like the realms of matter and anti-matter, each such moral universe is paired with that of its adversary. But such mirroring does not imply moral equivalence; that is settled according to the

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rules of justice. In this instance there should be no doubt that those who have dispossessed others and illegally occupy their national lands have to bear prime culpability. This is not meant to excuse such Palestinian or Arab wrongdoings as have arisen in the course of the struggle—which would be a denial of moral agency—but it provides context for understanding the conflict at a deeper level and obliges us to look with special care at the curious situation of the Jews. Despite the innumerable variations between different fractions of Judaism, here certain unique historical forces have shaped a common dilemma and played a crucial role in the unfolding of Zionism.

Jews were supposed to know better, to *be* better. Suffering persecution and being eternally on the margins of Europe were supposed to have made Jews more morally developed. I speak from first-hand experience, having been made to feel as a boy that I had inherited a two-fold superiority, by belonging to a people both cleverer and more highly moral than the non-Jews who surrounded us. We Jews were history's exceptions.

A myth made this belief coherent over the ages and shaped Jewish identity: A "covenant" existed, a kind of special treaty and promise between Jews and God. *How Odd of God*, ran the title of a book from my boyhood Yeshiva days, to *Choose the Jews*. There was an unmistakable lift one got from feeling endowed by the Supreme Being and made superior to the mere "goyim." The morally dubious implications of this attitude and the hateful contempt that often accompanied it—indeed, one could almost hear the sputum striking the ground as the word, "goyim," was spoken—was mitigated by the fact that Jews were speaking from the position of victim. Jewish exceptionalism was a kind of payback that nullified the centuries of being forced into ghettos, being denied ordinary rights such as land-holding, and being kicked around, massacred, and expelled, not to mention being constantly in the cross-hairs of the reigning racist system of anti-Semitism.

Living with anti-Semitism, even when its overt violence was latent, contributed to the heightened self-consciousness of the Jewish character and also to its thin skin. Few Jews are able completely to avoid the visceral fear integral to the legacy of Judaism: a drumbeat of blame, with its intimations of the pogrom to follow. The Jew still lives with the fact that his/her people have been scapegoated for centuries by Christian Europe—we still hear in our heads that *Jews* were the killers of Christ, hence responsible for the failures of Christianity; *Jews* were the usurers who destroyed the medieval community, not the landlords/barons; *Jews* were responsible for the misery of the Russian masses, not the

Czar. In years too numerous to list here, Jews were made to pay for the crimes of the West, and the betrayal of its ideals. The peculiar exaltation of believing oneself the chosen people is both the effect and, to a degree, the cause of anti-Semitic persecution: They hate us, but we are better than them; and then, they hate us *because* we are better than them. Exceptionalism reinforced the tribalism imposed upon the Jews; and tribalism played into the hands of anti-Semitism even as it defended against it.

Within this matrix a great variety of ways of being Jewish arose. These included, especially for Jews in the Western European Diaspora, the possibility of assimilating or remaining apart from the societies they inhabited. Some Jews, of course, embraced the protection of tribal ways as a defense against a harsh and accusing world. Others embraced the calculating pecuniary skills which had been foisted upon Judaism long before capitalism became the dominant order, and developed these to become masters of finance once capital moved to the center of the stage. In the West, some Jews saw in the great ideals of universality and enlightenment a

means to transcend the stifling tribal role that had been imposed upon them. Having been persecuted, brutally denied the elementary rights of self-determination given to others, Jews of this type adopted the ideals of universal human rights that arose with the Enlightenment, and championed the cause of emancipation.

Then, toward the close of the nineteenth century, the ancient promise of the Covenant took the shape of a real Promised Land. Israel gave European Jews a material opportunity to balance the tensions between tribalism and enlightenment. Driven by the upswelling of anti-Semitism that preceded and gave its horrific stimulus to the Third Reich, Israel became the home of the tribe, the safe place where Jews could be Jews. At the same time, it offered Jews identifying with the enlightenment a chance to demonstrate their competence in western liberal ways (including socialism). In this way, a project arose that sought to combine and synthesize both advanced Western democratic and ancient tribal values.

The Zionists took from the West the values of liberal democracy, but also the goals, tactics, and mentality of imperialism that often accompanied these. The convergence between tribalism and imperialism seemed, on the surface, to be a successful alignment of the various impulses of the Zionist project. From the first Jewish settlements in Palestine an imperialist mentality enabled Zionists to readily rationalize their displacement of indigenous Palestinians under the notion of a civilizing mission, embroidered with a full repertoire of Orientalist prejudices.

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Zionism's allegiance to modernity also gave Zionism a high degree of technological prowess and organizational ability. During the years of the Yishuv, or settlement, this was evidenced by the degree to which Zionists would consistently out-produce and out-perform the indigenous peoples despite the great numerical superiority of the latter. Later, in the period of the wars leading up to the state of Israel, as well as the wars carried out by this state, superior organizational ability combined with superior weaponry made Israel into a regional juggernaut—one, moreover, driven by the talion law of tribalism and the racist reduction of one's adversary.

It was for some time easy to sympathize with a Jewish state and to overlook its imperialist tendencies, especially in the crucial period of the mid- to late 1940s, when evidence of the Holocaust surfaced as a diabolic reminder of Jewish vulnerability to the malignancies of so-called Western Civilization. I remember well as a youth of twelve the rush of joy and hope as it became increasingly clear that we were at last going to have "our state," and I know full well how deeply the Jews around me shared that feeling.

But neither understanding nor sympathy can nullify the judgment that in proceeding down this path, Zionism set the stage, as surely as could an Aeschylus or Euripides, for the present hellish outcome. And this has a great deal to do with the fact that the notion of a democratic Jewish state, despite its allure, is a logical impossibility and a trap. It is remarkable that so sophisticated a people should have so much trouble grasping the impossibility inherent in their notion of a Promised Land: a democracy that is only to be for a certain people cannot exist, for the elementary reason that the modern democratic state is defined by its claims of universality.

Modern nation-states are uneasy syntheses of the two terms: the nation, which embodies the lived, sensuous, territorial, and mythologized history of a people; and the state, which is the superordinate agency regulating a society and having the capacity, as Max Weber put it, to wield legitimate violence. In its pre-modern, non-democratic form, the nation-state could embrace directly the will of a particular national body. Under these circumstances, state power was held by those who controlled the nation. In practice, these were a mixture of kings and aristocrats who exerted direct territorial dominion, along with the theocrats of the priest class who controlled symbolic and mythopoetic production. Between the divine right of kings and the territorial powers of priests, the legality of pre-modern states took shape.

The democratic nation-state was a mutation of this arrangement, forged to accommodate the power of the newly emerging capitalist classes, but also to advance the notion of an universal human right—the stirring ideal that all

human beings are created equally free before the law. The subsequent history of this political formation reveals, in all its fragility, the tensions inherent in the fitful development of human rights. But there should be no mistaking that our hopes for a world beyond tribalist revenge and the arbitrary power of rulers depend on strengthening and advancing the notion of universal human right. The legitimacy of modern nation-states—the legitimacy of justice itself—rests upon this right. Of course, not all democratic nation-states are just in practice, nor have they necessarily come into being in ways

consonant with the universal human rights they assert. The United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa are just a few of the many examples of democratic nation-states that have come into existence through violence. The various horrors that have marked the history of these countries, however, have not prevented them from offering full participation in the polity to those

who had been enslaved, expelled, and/or exterminated as the nation-state came into existence. Thus Ben Nighthorse Campbell, an American Indian, sits in the U.S. Senate, while Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, descendants of enslaved Africans, run U.S. foreign policy (needless to add, very cordially to Israel), and may someday be president.

None of this denies the racism that blocks the modern democratic state from keeping its promise. But there is a big difference between a state that fails to live up to its social contract because of a history saturated with racism, and one where the contract itself generates racism, as has been the case for a settler-colonial Israel which claims to be both a democracy and an ethnocracy organized by and for the Jewish people. Under such circumstances, racism is not an historical atavism, but an entirely normal, and constantly growing, feature of the political landscape. To have a state created expressly for one people constantly eats away and mocks the democratic-emancipatory aspects of Zionism. Zionism, in short, is built on an impossibility, and to live in it and be of it is to live a lie.

In other instances of post settler-colonial states, the democratic promise, however compromised, confers legitimacy. In the case of Israel, the logic of the ethnocratic state rules out an authentic democracy and denies legitimacy. All the propaganda about Israel being the "only democracy in the Middle East" and so forth, is false at its core, no matter how many fine institutions are built there, or how many crumbs are thrown to the Arabs who are allowed to live within its bounds. This can be shown any number of ways, none more telling than the inability of Israel to write a Constitution with a Bill of Rights.

As we well know, there are many states in the modern world that proclaim themselves for a given people and are in many respects more unpleasant places than Israel,

*A state created for one
people mocks the
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aspects of Zionism.*

including some of the Islamic states, such as Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. But none of these assert extravagant claims for embodying the benefits of democratic modernity as does Israel. Thus one expects nothing from Pakistan or Saudi Arabia in the way of democratic right, and gets it; whereas Israel groans under the contradictions imposed by incorporating features of Western liberal democracy within a fundamentally pre-modern, tribalist mission.

In Israel, Jewish exceptionalism becomes the catalyst of a terrible splitting of the moral faculties, and, by extension, of the whole moral universe that polarizes Zionist thought. For God's chosen people, with their hard-earned identity of high-mindedness, by definition cannot sink into racist violence. "It can't be us," says the Zionist, when in fact it is precisely Zionists who are doing these things. The inevitable result becomes a splitting of the psyche that drives responsibility for one's acts out of the picture. Subjectively this means that the various faculties of conscience, desire, and agency dis-integrate and undergo separate paths of development. As a result, Zionism experiences no internal dialectic, no possibilities of correction, beneath its facade of exceptionalist virtue. The Covenant becomes a license giving the right to dominate instead of an obligation to moral development. Zionism therefore cannot grow; it can only repeat its crimes and degenerate further. Only a people that aspires to be so high can fall so low.

We may sum these effects as the presence of a "bad conscience" within Zionism. Here, badness refers to the effects of hatred, which is the primary affect that grows out of the splitting between the exalted standards of divine promise and the imperatives of tribalism and imperialism. A phenomenally thin skin and denial of responsibility are the inevitable results. The inability to regard Palestinians as full human beings with equivalent human rights pricks the conscience, but the pain is turned on its head and pours out as hatred against those who would remind of betrayal: the Palestinians themselves and those others, especially Jews, who would call attention to Zionism's contradictions. Unable to tolerate criticism, the bad conscience immediately turns denial into projection. "It can't be us," becomes "it must be them," and this only worsens racism, violence, and the severity of the double standard. Thus the "self-hating Jew" is a mirror-image of a Zionism that cannot recognize itself. It is the screen upon which bad conscience can be projected. It is a guilt that cannot be transcended to become conscientiousness or real atonement, and which returns as persecutory accusation and renewed aggression.

The bad conscience of Zionism cannot distinguish between authentic criticism and the mirrored delusions of anti-Semitism lying ready-made in the swamps of our

civilization and awakened by the current crisis. Both are threats, though the progressive critique is more telling, as it contests the concrete reality of Israel and points toward self-transformation by differentiating Jewishness from Zionism; while anti-Semitism regards the Jew abstractly and in a demonic form, as "Jewish money" or "Jewish conspiracies," and misses the real mark. Indeed, Zionism makes instrumental use of anti-Semitism, as a garbage pail into which all opposition can be thrown, and a germinator of fearfulness around which to rally Jews. This is not to discount the menace posed by anti-Semitism nor the need to struggle vigorously against it. But the greater need is to develop a genuinely critical perspective, and not be bullied into confusing critique of Israel with anti-Semitism. One cannot in conscience condemn anti-Semitism by rallying around Israel, when it is Israel that needs to be fundamentally changed if the world is to awaken from this nightmare.

This is not the place to explore what such change would look like. But the guiding principle can be fairly directly stated. By forming Israel as a refuge and homeland for Jews from centuries of persecution, and especially by making the Faustian bargain with imperialism, those Jews who opted for Zionism negated their past sufferings, and turned their weakness into strength. But such strength, grounded in the domination, oppression, and expulsion of others, is worthless. Zionism negated what had been done to the Jews but failed to negate the negation itself, and thereby repeated the past with a different set of masks. If one doubts this, look at the set of oppressions forced upon Jews by Christendom—being forced into ghettos, denied ordinary rights such as land-holding, kicked around, massacred, expelled, and subjected to a racist system by the oppressors—and ask yourself whether the same have not been imposed upon Palestinians by the Zionist, with the only distinction worth noting being the terms of the racism?

It is never too late to remedy this state, and a sizable minority of people of good will are already moving in this direction, against great odds. But it would be irresponsible to gloss over the grim finding that the journey is conditioned by the fact that the core of the problem lies in Zionism itself, with its assumption that there can be a democratic state for one particular people. So long as this notion is held, poisonous contradictions will continue to spill forth from the ancient land variously called Palestine or Israel. And as a frankly non-democratic, or even fascist, Israel can scarcely be imagined as an improvement, we are led to the sober conclusion that a basic rethinking of Jewish exceptionalism must be the ground of any lasting or just peace in the region. The implications are many, and need to be worked out. But the time has come for the Jewish people to resume their striving toward universality. □

A basic rethinking of Jewish exceptionalism must be the ground of any lasting or just peace in the region.

On Trying Not to Get Polarized

While Talking About a Polarized Situation

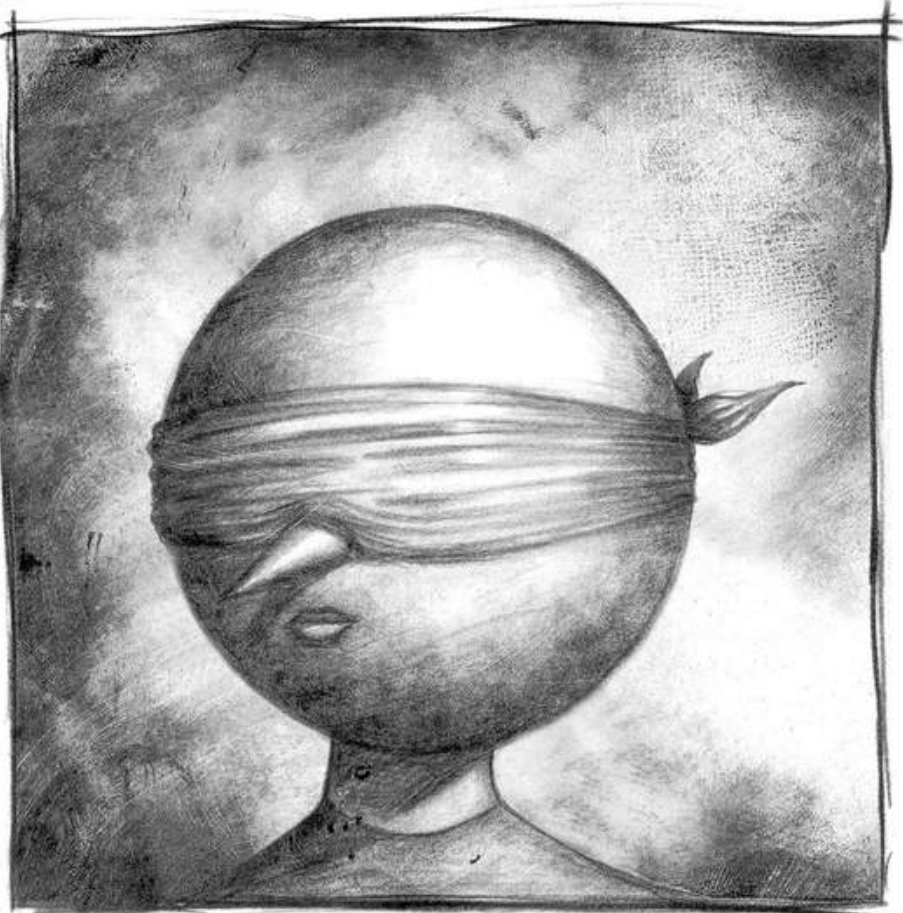
Neil Altman

There has been a good deal of talk lately among psychotherapists about how our expertise may be valuable in thinking through political impasses, such as that in the Middle East. Therapists who are concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (but not immediately affected by it) can see quite clearly how Israelis and Palestinians continually reinforce and validate fears about each other, all the while believing that the other side's untrustworthy behavior was always, and will always, remain. Psychotherapists are accustomed to managing—even turning to good account—polarized situations in which we are actively involved. We imagine our clinical experience could be quite helpful in establishing a reflective space in which both sides of the Middle East conflict could step back a bit from the self-reinforcing vicious cycle in which they are currently caught.

Consider the following example from ordinary clinical work: My patient believes I am exploiting him. My desire to get paid indicates to him that I don't care about him, but only about his money. As he is chronically late paying me, I do find myself thinking about his money a lot, and bringing up the question of how it is that I am not getting paid. We are caught up in a self-reinforcing vicious circle, in which we seem destined to validate each other's worst fears about each other.

Such situations can be transformed to the extent that the therapist can, as Harry Stack Sullivan put it, be a "participant-observer"—that is, take a reflective position alongside the position in which he is emotionally entangled with the patient. Obviously it helps if the patient can join the therapist, at least part of the way, in a self-reflective inquiry into

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the nature and origin of their struggle. In short, the two people can emerge from their impasse to the extent that they can establish a reflective space in the midst of an emotionally charged stand-off. Talking about how the current situation may resonate with significant events in the patient's history has value not only in terms of enhancing the patient's understanding of himself, but also because it may defuse the tension enough to allow for some reflective space. The therapist's silent or overt reflection on how the patient's behavior touches upon his own sensitivities may also help to pull both parties back from the precipice.

Ultimately, if the conflict is to be resolved, the patient must realize that although the therapist is indeed frequently asking to be paid, the meaning of that behavior is complex and ambiguous—that, although he is not off-the-wall to feel exploited to some degree (therapy in a capitalist context indeed builds exploitation into the relationship), this factor does not rule out authentic caring on the therapist's part. It helps if the therapist can give some credence to the patient's feeling of being exploited. It also helps if both patient and therapist realize that the patient's withholding of payment also significantly induces the therapist's preoccupation with money.

To make the leap from the consulting room to the political world we must add a radical new element, one not entirely unknown to therapists: imagine that the patient suddenly pulls a gun on the therapist. The reflective space suddenly shrinks drastically, or disappears. Worse yet, suppose that the therapist has always been afraid of the patient

DENIAL

and has taken to carrying a gun himself. So when the patient reaches for his gun, the therapist also reaches for his, and the impasse takes on life-and-death urgency. Now the only hope for resolution is the fear each has that if one fires, the other will too and they both will be dead. At the same time, out of panic or hasty calculation, each may feel that to fire first is his only hope. The therapist is no longer a therapist, by virtue of the loss of his capacity to foster a reflective space; only the intervention of a third party can save them now.

Much of the thinking and writing about the Middle East conflict that is taking place in this magazine and elsewhere has to do with how Americans, American Jews, some Israelis, and some Palestinians can foster a reflective space in which to try to begin a healing process. Edgar Levenson, an interpersonal analyst, has observed that people tend to enact the emotional dynamics that they are talking about. For this reason the ability to talk about an emotionally charged situation is always fragile and tenuous, because one is always on the brink of falling into the emotional quagmire about which one is trying to talk. Content and process reflect each other, so as we try to talk about the polarized Middle East situation, we tend to get polarized ourselves and our dialogue breaks down.

When the topic is the hatred between Israelis and Palestinians, the discussants tend to have trouble finding common ground; friendships are strained, people feel enraged, they cannot talk to each other. People who feel supportive of Israeli military action accuse critics of wanting to deprive Jews of our right to defend ourselves from those who want to destroy us. Accusations of anti-Semitism may be leveled. On the other hand, critics of Israel feel that those who support military action are insensitive to how Israel is becoming an oppressive, imperialistic power, laying the seeds of future terrorism by its brutal repression of Palestinians today. Disagreements quickly move beyond the level of difference of opinion; one's interlocutors start to seem like the enemy, their opinions lead to disaster. Mutual respect is hard to maintain under these conditions.

Part of the problem is that in emotionally supercharged interpersonal and political situations like these the adversaries' worst fantasies about each other tend to become true. In the case of the Middle East, not only do both sides have justifiable claims to the same piece of land, but, in fact, there are many Palestinians who do want to destroy the state of Israel, and many Israelis who do want to drive the Palestinians off the land.

Each side is plausibly afraid of the other. Each side hates the other with justification. The stand off would be easier to resolve if one or both sides had simply erroneous or distorted perceptions or beliefs about the other, because educative measures might have some hope of success. However, in a polarized conflict such as this, each side fails to take account of how their own behavior (violent, but jus-

tified as necessary for self-defense) induces the violent behavior of the other side (also justified as self-defense), which in turn serves as justification for further violent behavior. In order to break the cycle (before both sides are fully exhausted and/or destroyed by the conflict, and short of a resolution imposed by a third party) both parties simultaneously must realize that the cycle of violence is generated and regenerated by both sides—that their efforts to save their own lives is, in fact, further endangering them. Obviously there must be some brief cessation of violence, enough to cut through the mutual sense of immediate mortal threat. But then, in that brief cease-fire, both parties can be called upon to assume the stance of participant observer—to hold in mind, alongside an extreme degree of fear and hatred, a somewhat more detached perspective that allows them to see the big picture.

One of the most formidable obstacles to the attainment of such a detached perspective is that, in order to achieve the requisite degree of respect for the other person's feelings and viewpoint, one must be willing to grant credence to the notion that I, me and my people, are dangerous, murderous people. "But, but, but ..." we want to say, "we are only dangerous to you because you are dangerous to us." It is extremely difficult to see oneself as "bad" in this way, to bear the guilt for one's destructive actions without justifying ourselves by making someone even more guilty than we are. But the other party will counter that they must do what they do because of what we do to them. Once the discussion turns to the question of who was bad first, it can recycle itself indefinitely.

We Jews, with the emphasis on responsibility and atonement bequeathed to us, should have some basis in our culture for bearing guilt, but no human being finds it easy to do so. The fresh memory of the Holocaust also serves as a constant reminder that hesitation to draw one's own gun in the face of one's enemy's drawn gun can get you killed. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis also provide a model of an enemy that is simply and unambiguously evil, with whom no dialogue is possible—the choice is to kill or be killed. How do we know when our adversary is of this type, when reflectiveness will be fatal? And, in the face of how hard it is to face our own guilt, and in the face of people who are clearly trying to kill us, what hope is there for thoughtfulness and negotiation?

Here is where involved bystanders, like American Jewry, can be crucial. They, we, can provide a framework for thinking about the vicious circle aspect of the conflict that those more immediately endangered can draw upon during the lulls when thought—as opposed to action and reaction—is possible. But, since content and process mirror each other, involved by-standers too are likely to reach a polarized impasse, rife with violent feelings, if not actions, as they talk about the current situation. If someone accuses my people of being the aggressors in the Middle East, I may

well counter with “But, but, but ... we are only responding to the very real threat of radicals who only want to exterminate us.” And, if I am speaking with someone who at the moment is attuned to the Palestinian point of view, we are off and running.

So, how can those of us who are trying to provide a framework for reflective thought about the Middle East be most effective? I believe that when we talk among ourselves, and especially when we talk with those with whom we have differences, we, like the patient-therapist dyad, can best transcend an endless loop of vicious-circle repetitions by scrutinizing the process that evolves as we talk to each other. We must be aware of, and concerned about, how we may be provoking, disqualifying, pathologizing, and denying the reality of the other person in the course of passionately disagreeing with her. To some extent, we may be able to listen better, to acknowledge and respect the reality of those with whom we disagree simply as a function of being more aware of our own behavior and seeking out ways to be more respectful.

Passion is an inevitable and valuable aspect of talking about issues we care about, and so there may be a degree to which disqualification of the other person's reality is inevitable in the course of a heated conversation around life-and-death issues. It is a difficult balancing act to disagree with someone heatedly while maintaining respect for their position. It is most difficult of all when the other person's reality is that *you*, or your position, constitutes a threat to his or his people's survival, because then you must bear the guilt attendant to seeing that there is some merit to his view of you without sacrificing your own perspective within which you are defending yourself from mortal threat, or simply proposing what seems like a fair compromise. The same behavior, seen as unthinking violence from one perspective may be valid self-defense from another; the same behavior, seen as a constructive sort of empathy with one's adversaries from one perspective, may be seen as masochistic appeasement from another. Holding all these points of view in mind is the challenge that those of us who seek constructive dialogue face, and it is a challenge that we often do not meet. We must acknowledge those occasions when we have failed to find a way, and keep trying.

There has been a good deal of discussion within the TIKKUN Community about the level of denial in the Jewish world with regard to the violence being visited on Palestinians during the recent invasions of the West Bank, and the counterproductive effects of this denial. It's important to properly understand the concept of “denial” before using it to critique the Jewish community at large. On one hand, it is unquestionable that there is a great deal of denial about what is being done in our name, as Israelis and/or as Jews. It is unquestionable that many, if not most, of us are

unwilling to expose ourselves close up to the human suffering, death, torture, maiming of loved ones, children, parents, family members, and friends that is taking place at this very minute. If we were exposed to this human suffering close up it would certainly be harder to support what the Sharon government is doing. But there are two pitfalls in challenging “denial” in this way.

The first is that all of us, as human beings, are prone to denial. There is only so much pain that the human being can tolerate before looking away if he can, or breaking down, going crazy, or falling into a dissociated state if he can't. So, when we talk about other people being “in denial” we need to speak from a position that implicitly acknowledges our own potential for denial. We unnecessarily alienate those to whom we speak otherwise, as we use him or her as a proxy for a part of ourselves that we wish to disavow. I do not mean to say that we shouldn't challenge people's denial when that denial allows them to tolerate atrocities that ought to be opposed. I am talking about the art of taking strong political positions in opposition to other people while maintaining a sense of human connection with those whom we passionately oppose.

The passion in our opposition should come from our commitment to our values, not from a desperate need to disassociate ourselves from the negative potential in ourselves as embodied in other people. A good example of the art of taking passionate positions in a productive way is the essay by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek in the *London Review of Books* (May 22, 2002) called “Are We at War? Do We Have an Enemy?” In this essay Žižek, discussing the way in which torture is being talked about in the United States, acknowledges that he could imagine himself torturing another person under some circumstances. What he most deplores, he says, is the *justification* of torture, because that involves an effort to avoid a sense of guilt that he feels is crucial. It is clear that Žižek not only understands how it is that torture happens, how one might perpetrate it under conditions of feeling one's life threatened, but also that he understands how tempting it is to seek to avoid a sense of guilt in this connection.

The second pitfall is the use of “denial” when it implies that everyone would agree with one if only they could or would acknowledge reality. Such an implication amounts to an absolutism that is at variance with the values of the TIKKUN Community. In the present case the argument could cut both ways, such that being sympathetic to the Palestinian position, it could be said, rests on “denial” of the suffering being perpetrated on Israelis. An argument, such as one according to which “appeasement” of the Palestinians would only encourage further violence cannot be disproved. Whether one buys such an argument—or the

(continued on page 59)



INTERVIEW WITH CORNEL WEST (from page 14)

But of course these people had never read my book *The American Evasion of Philosophy*. This was a moment of ignorance in action and arrogance run amok. It reminds me of Harvard President Larry Summers and his actions toward me as a "University Professor" at Harvard. Summers summoned me to his office, critiqued me for being involved in political activity (something which is not entirely new to Harvard professors, as both former Harvard professor Henry Kissinger and current professor Samuel Huntington exemplify), critiqued me for making a spoken-word album of which he had not heard a note, then insisted that he wanted to supervise my academic work of which he had not read a page, and insisted that I come and report to him every two months on how my scholarship was coming along and present it to him. But most importantly, he falsely accused me of skipping three weeks of classes to support my dear brother, Bill Bradley.

Now a provost or dean wouldn't dare say something like this to an untenured assistant professor, much less to a tenured "University Professor," so I realized that this would not be a hospitable place for me to teach. He wouldn't say this to anyone whom he thought had even a modicum of self-respect, except if his goal was to push me out—and I had no desire to use my time to be engaged in that kind of a battle. No one should be subject to this kind of unjust treatment. It was so disrespectful. Then he posed himself as a victim after having initiated a vicious attack on my integrity, my character, and my scholarship. So he positions himself as a victim, yet he is part of the crowd of people who speak out against victimology when third-world or poor people talk about being victimized. Fortunately, I was blessed to become a part of the great humanistic conversation at Princeton University.

LERNER: To return to the issue of what progressives should be doing and saying on the anniversary of September 11: As co-chair of the Tikkun Community, what is your message for this moment?

WEST: Well, first we have to put at the center our sadness at the fact that innocent human lives were sacrificed. Each of these precious lives was lost in a vicious way. That has to be the central point. And then, from our anguish at the loss of innocent lives we should begin to also discuss the innocent lives that are being lost every day in other parts of the world by virtue of the social, economic, and political realities that could be changed. So we root ourselves in a moral and ethical stance—rooted in the best of American traditions. And from that position we can also critique specific American policies, and the policies of other countries, that do not take seriously enough the preciousness of human life.

It was that message that led you and me to get arrested in Washington in April—our insistence that a Palestinian life is as precious as an Israeli life, because every person on the planet is equally valuable. This principle, which is the

center of the Tikkun Community message, is so basic, and yet in the contemporary world it is seen as subversive when we take it seriously. It's a message that goes back to the prophets and the great leaders of many different religious and secular traditions.

Any talk about defending what is best in America and critiquing what is worst cannot be separated from a critique of what the United States is doing in the Middle East. Our criticisms of the Occupation have to be articulated clearly, though not in a way that trashes Israel or romanticizes the PLO; but neither should we pull back from our moral critique of both sides. The Tikkun Community is one of the few spaces in our entire culture where the various progressive voices come together in such a way that people who are paralyzed or who don't have a historical sense of what is happening can get educated and motivated. And that is what happens when they hear the Tikkun Community voice with its careful concern to affirm the best in both Israeli and Palestinian life and to critique the worst in both—reflecting a balanced perspective, yet a clear prophetic concern about justice that goes beyond the "accepted discourses" of both sides. When people hear your voice on television, they feel liberated from the constraints of the doctrinaire partisans on both sides, and as a result your perspective has become not only the most visible but the most significant voice articulating this middle and progressive path.

But this is the moment when progressive Jews are under severe attack and severe test. If ever there was an historical moment in which the best voices of the Jewish world should be heard, it is now. On the one hand, we must be unequivocal in our fierce opposition to the anti-Semitic voices that are escalating. On the other hand, the connection of much of American Jewish power to the most conservative elements in American elites has allowed a downplaying of the suffering of the Palestinian people and a willingness to not take the lives of Palestinians as of equal value to those of Jews or Americans. Thus we have the need to be both unequivocal in our support for the security of Israel while simultaneously being fully committed to ending the subjugation of the Palestinian people. Progressive Jews can maintain both the demand for Israeli security *and* the demand for an end to the Occupation and subjugation of the Palestinian people, and join with non-Jews like myself who are ready to walk with you. We can open up possibilities for a very important kind of progressive movement. That is one of the many things that excites me about being co-chair with you of the Tikkun Community—you've made it an organization for both Jews and non-Jews. And TIKKUN is uniquely well suited, not only because of its continuing ties to both secular and religious Jews and your serious commitment to Judaism, but also because TIKKUN continues to be respected beyond progressive circles right into the mainstream of American politics. □

Loving the Jewish Community Means Supporting Justice

Starhawk

Supporting justice in the current crisis in the Middle East is not easy. The issues are painful for any Jew to face. Criticizing Israel comes at a huge emotional cost for all of us who were raised to love her. And when we do, we meet a wall of denial, hostility, and rage. Yet if we truly love Israel and the Jewish people, we must speak and act against the policies of the Israeli government.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine is a huge injustice. I have recently returned from spending time in occupied Palestine. I have witnessed the siege of the Balata refugee camp, seeing with my own eyes the level of ongoing repression and humiliation that the occupation entails. I could detail the abuses I saw, and what may be worse, the way the occupation is a constant, relentless assault on any sense of hope or safety, any possibility of normal life.

What I want to tell now, though, is not this story of oppression, but what happens when we tell this story. We expect to receive the usual denunciations and death threats from the opposition: TIKKUN has received plenty of these threats, many of them directed against its editor, Rabbi Michael Lerner. What hurts even more, though, is the criticism that comes from friends and allies who tell us that we are being too provocative, arousing too much anger and hate, not being loving enough toward the Jewish community.

The question is, how can we be truly loving to the Jewish community under these conditions? Real love speaks truth, even if that truth is unwelcome. Real love challenges the beloved to be her or his truest possible self. We cannot love the Jewish community by condoning injustice or colluding with abuse. The most unloving thing we could do for Judaism is to accept its identification with current Israeli policies.

Loving the Jewish people may mean calling them to our deepest and fullest understanding of God. If the Jewish God is truly a God of Justice, it's the ultimate insult to Judaism to imply that He would condone and sanction a great injustice. A Jewish state cannot be sustained by unjust actions and remain Jewish.

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If Judaism is the worship of one God who created the whole universe, we cannot imagine that God cherishes only the Jews. A monotheistic God must also be the father/mother of the Palestinians, for how could a loving God who is All create a people separated from God? A God who is God of the Jews and not of the Arabs would be merely a tribal godlet, a cosmic football fan rooting always for only one team. To worship such a God would truly be idolatry. We cannot love Judaism by accepting a diminished concept of God; we cannot accept God as being any less than the great, pulsing, life-generating force of creativity and compassion that reverberates through all human beings and through the universe.

Loving the Jewish community may also mean challenging what it means to be a member of that community. Who decided that "real Jews" support Ariel Sharon, while those who dissent are somehow less Jewish? The essence of anti-Semitism is the portrayal of the Jews as one monolithic whole. Real Jews are actually hugely diverse—politically, spiritually, and culturally. One of the loving things we can do for the Jewish community and to counter the very real anti-Semitism that does exist is to embody that diversity, to be a strong, loud, clear, and Jewish voice that can also champion the rights of Palestinians to peace and hope and life.

It would not be loving toward the Jewish community to allow certain factions to silence all criticism of Israel by screaming "anti-Semitism." For the more we use that charge to fend off valid criticism, the more we undercut its power and validity, and the less likely we are to be listened to when we face true anti-Semitism.

Real anti-Semitism does exist, but so does Jewish racism against Palestinians. And it would not be loving of the Jewish community to allow that prejudice to continue unchallenged, to accept the picture of the Palestinian community as a monolith of mindless hate. When we see the Palestinian community as an undifferentiated enemy, we fall into hopelessness and despair, for how can we make peace with "animals?" The truth, however, is that the Palestinians are not some mindless force of evil, they are real human beings. Among their community, just as in the Jewish community, are people who hate and people who love; broad-minded, tolerant people and narrow, prejudiced people; people who love war and people who want peace; people

DENIAL

who want to die and those who want to live. The more we can see the Palestinians as real human beings, the more hope we can find in the situation. We can then begin to strategize about how to foster a climate that discourages hate, instead of feeding it as the current policies do. We can begin to envision the possibility of a just peace and reconciliation.

When Jewish peace activists speak out in a truly loving way, we will undoubtedly be met with anger, rage, even real hatred. But we are not creating that hate. I can think of no way we can speak in a truly loving voice that will not evoke anger, because we are saying things people do not want to hear, speaking truths that challenge comfortable assumptions and self-righteousness and that which is always hardest to face, the justifications that we use to ease our conscience when we know we are doing wrong.

In Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he writes about the criticisms he received from fellow ministers for being too confrontational and provocative. And he says that nonviolence is not about avoiding conflict, but about heightening it until those who have always refused to negotiate are forced to do so. He too preached love, but had to withstand the venomous hate of the Southern segregationists. And yet the movement he was part of succeeded in changing a deeply entrenched, oppressive system. Nonviolence is the art of provoking confrontation that can lead to change, the willingness to directly confront oppression and absorb violence without retaliating or passing the violence on, and the belief that ultimately truth will win and even bitter opponents will reconcile.

Political change almost always comes through some level of conflict and confrontation, violent or nonviolent, because, as King also says, those who hold power and privilege rarely relinquish it voluntarily.

Essentially, we are asking the Jewish community to give up its position of privilege, both because it is morally right to do so, and because it is ultimately in our community's self interest to do so. That message challenges our self-conception as victims. We have been victims over and over again for 2000 years; in this case, however, we have also become the victimizers, and no one enjoys having that pointed out. The only way to break through this denial is to tell the truth, strongly and clearly but with compassion, and then withstand the storm that results.

People give up privilege when it becomes too costly and uncomfortable to hold on to it. A nonviolent strategy for change involves causing discomfort, making the inherent violence in the system visible and arousing moral condemnation of the violence, dramatizing the injustice, heightening the social and political costs of continuing the system, and ultimately undermining the legitimacy of the current system and its supporters. We break through the wall of denial by making it too uncomfortable for people to shelter behind it.

Our task is not to convince those who are actively and bitterly opposed to us. They will be the last to change.

I see the task as threefold:

Mobilize Jews who oppose the occupation to become more visible, vocal and active, to take greater risks and become a strong, cohesive and powerful voice for justice.

Provide a rallying beacon for all those who are uncomfortable with the current situation but have not yet formulated a position. We must show how current policies run counter to true Jewish ideals and interests and set new terms for the debate.

Provide information and education to those who are not informed, and create enough drama and urgency that the apathetic have a reason to want that information. And, please, stay alive and healthy while doing so. We've had enough martyrs!

So, let's imagine some possibilities:

Suppose we continue to speak out honestly, fearlessly, and lovingly, without worrying about the reactions we'll get.

Many people will respond negatively, vilify us, spread vicious rumors and lies, etc.

But we'll simply continue to speak the truth, without retaliation, without wasting our energy defending ourselves against ridiculous allegations, just saying with deep compassion, "I know many people don't want to hear this truth, but my God is a God of justice and only the path of justice leads to a viable future for the Jewish people."

For every person ready to brand us traitors, there are probably ten people out there who are confused, who sense that there is something deeply wrong and don't know what to do or say about it, or who already know it's wrong and just feel hopeless and despairing. This group includes many Israelis as well. Staunch Zionists won't be convinced, but the vast legions of these Jews who are already uncomfortable about the issue will hear us and think, "Thank God there is a Jewish voice actually telling the truth!" Then the next task will be to get them to coalesce into a coherent force that can be a counterweight to the current self-defined "mainstream" Jewish community.

If we can do that, the world will see that Jews are not a monolithic voice on this issue, that there is a strong Jewish movement for justice. It will help undercut the very real anti-Semitism that is resurging today, and strengthen the position of those who deplore both anti-Semitism and the injustice of the occupation. It will also give some hope to the Palestinians, and encouragement to those within their community who don't want to hate Jews, who do separate Israeli policy from Judaism, who still yearn to believe in the possibility of peace. It will lay some groundwork for future reconciliation, and help strengthen the Israeli peace movement.

This is an optimistic scenario, but I believe it is perfectly possible. Perhaps this is once again an era of prophecy. This is a time when we need to speak with a moral voice, in the voice of those ancient prophets calling the community to a deeper and fuller conception of God. Tikkun has begun the work of Isaiah and Jeremiah—it is time for more of us to join their ranks. □

Joining the Expanding Middle

Dennis Fox

I've never hung out in the political center before, so maybe I'm just a little oversensitive to getting trashed from both ends of the Middle East divide. Still, I expected it. To many on the extremes there is no center—you're either for us, 100 percent, or you're against us, 100 percent, even if you think you aren't. I realized this more personally than academically when I first criticized Israel in print after the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres. Even then, applying general principles that recognized valid needs on both sides was proof to many that I had joined the enemy.

It's embarrassing to admit that, after first editorializing against Israeli policy two decades ago, I stopped. There were plenty of other political challenges more closely related to my academic work. I was disaffected from mainstream Jewish life. And I wasn't eager to expose my own views to friends and relatives here and in Israel who, I knew, would react with anger and pain.

Then last February, a month before Israel's incursion into the West Bank, I used one of my biweekly community newspaper columns to support Amer Jubran, a Palestinian protestor who was arrested last year on apparently bogus charges at Boston's Israel Independence Day Celebration. I wrote about "an uncomfortable truth: from the beginning, Zionism's focus on Jewish survival blinded it to the equally legitimate rights of Arabs who, inconveniently, already lived on the land." In later columns I suggested we create a local forum to facilitate an open exchange of views, to ease public discussion of Israel in my heavily Jewish and heavily liberal town. My columns drew long, angry letters to the editor raising the specter of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred. I was called a self-righteous sellout, ignorant of history, willing to destroy Israel and endanger the Jewish people. The proposed discussion forum was denounced as a front for anti-Israel propaganda.

I also received email from people who appreciated my public stance—from other Jews critical of Israel who



introduced me to the Boston-based Jewish group Visions of Peace with Justice, from Amer Jubran's supporters who movingly described their despair over the Palestinians' plight, from non-Jewish political friends who seemed relieved they could now discuss with me this sensitive issue they had always avoided. Cautious but compelled, I began to attend local demonstrations, half a dozen over the next couple of months. At a big pro-Israel rally at Faneuil Hall I joined 150 mostly Jewish counter-protestors; we tried to ignore the antagonism directed our way from the Zionist crowd. At another demonstration against the Occupation, I felt welcomed by Palestinians and at ease among Jews-Against-the-Occupation signs. Then I saw signs equating Israel with Nazi Germany—not too many, but hard to disregard. When the speakers at the microphone condemned Israeli actions, there was loud applause; when they denounced suicide bombings, the applause was dampened, and I saw a few barely hidden smirks. Subsequent protests yielded similar experiences.

Finally, based on my experience of being in the middle, I wrote an essay addressed to others on the Left who support Palestinian rights, published on the web in *Common Dreams* and *Beyond Mainstream* and in an expanded version in *Salon*. I offered three cautions: those of us on the Left should know what we're talking about (we shouldn't blindly repeat allegations of a 500-person massacre at Jenin or make inaccurate comparisons to the Holocaust); we should respond with more than lip service to anti-Semitism where it exists within the Left itself, the Arab world, and elsewhere; and we should avoid oversimplification and communicate more openly and effectively with Israel's supporters. The justice-based left, I said, "must seek analyses and solutions built on general principles, and reject those that make new forms of oppression inevitable."

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I heard the usual responses: from the pro-Israel side accusations that I was a self-hating traitor who understood nothing of history or the Arabs' uncivilized mind; from the pro-Palestinian side explanations justifying comparing Israel to Nazi Germany or minimizing the importance of anti-Semitism. What soon struck me was the similarity on both sides: Even if your criticism is valid, they instructed equally, don't make it public. Our side is in danger. Exposing our excesses helps the enemy and hurts the public relations battle over U.S. Middle East policy. Whose side are you on, anyway?

Then things got worse. In his column for *Counterpunch* and *The Nation* and now spreading in two versions virus-like throughout the Internet, Alexander Cockburn called me an apologist for Ariel Sharon and ethnic cleansing. Cockburn wrote: "Over the past twenty years I've learned there's a quick way of figuring just how badly Israel is behaving. There's a brisk uptick in the number of articles here accusing 'the Left' of anti-Semitism. These articles adopt varying strategies." Isolating selected quotes and ignoring almost everything I actually wrote, Cockburn used my words to label me and my comrades in the middle reflexive Israel supporters who condemn all criticism as anti-Semitic.

Readers of my *Salon* piece or my response to Cockburn know that his distortions detract from, rather than strengthen, his point about misusing the anti-Semitism charge. Although Cockburn's twisting of my words beyond recognition concerns primarily me, his blasting of anyone who doesn't toe his line is emulated by too many on both extremes who believe justice is a zero-sum game.

The good news is that, despite this lashing from the extremes, the middle is expanding. Last Sunday, I again marched against the Occupation with other Jewish activists; the larger pro-Palestinian crowd again welcomed us, and this time I was glad to see the rhetoric and banners less inflammatory than a month or two earlier. Reaching the Boston Common's Israel Independence Day Celebration, I joined others inside who were leafleting about Israeli peace and justice groups; although some in the surrounding crowd were hostile and the formal speeches disappointed as always, many took leaflets, stayed to talk, and offered support.

The broad center, it thus seems to me, comprises people with dramatically different, even conflicting, perspectives and allegiances. It includes Zionists, non-Zionists, and anti-Zionists. It includes Jews and non-Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, religiously motivated and secular. It includes people whose primary motive is preserving a secure Jewish State, those primarily seeking a state of Palestine, even some whose ideal is one secular democratic state. But regardless

of political self-definition and ultimate goal, what unites this middle is a mutual understanding: only principles that secure the legitimate needs of ordinary people on both sides of the Green Line can lead to a workable moral solution. Anything else will fail to ensure justice for all, and will probably ensure safety for none.

As those of us in the middle pursue our various goals, we can at least use this mutual understanding to build bridges among ourselves. We can reject those who seek total dominance or an "ethnically-cleansed" Jewish or Islamic state.

We can encourage not just the Israeli refusenik and peace movements but also Palestinians urging nonviolent resistance and other Arabs who have criticized the dissemination of anti-Jewish hatred. By strengthening our center, perhaps we can make less relevant those who insist on methods and solutions that magnify existing injustice or merely shift it from one side to the other.

Doing so means confronting difficult choices. Too many groups in the center spend inordinate time refining every last detail of their positions. Some refuse to meet with groups whose position varies

even slightly on a range of delicate issues—for example, whether or not to advocate a suspension of U.S. military aid to Israel, or accept the Palestinians' right-of-return, or join the growing boycott against Israeli products. Others water down their public statements so much they become too general to be meaningful or get tossed aside in boredom.

As I see it, instead of creating one litmus test after another, the middle should begin with what we have in common: A commitment to working with one another. Our middle may be muddled, but it contains the elements we need to develop realistic justice-based solutions. Rather than emulate those on the purer-than-thou ends, we should establish a framework for ongoing discussion and political advocacy.

Throughout that process we can seek to persuade others while we remain open to what they say in return. Yes, the conflicting assumptions and goals with which we begin complicate our efforts. They cause misunderstanding and discomfort. Yet these assumptions and goals mirror those of the parties in the Middle East. If we expect Israelis and Palestinians to work with their adversaries and create a stable, just peace, we should try to do the same.

The key measure is not how far from our own position others stand today but whether they break with those on the extremes. Refusing to work with groups that are willing to work with us compounds a risk we cannot afford—that one end or the other, rather than the multifaceted middle, will generate the energy and resources to create a solution of its own. □

Isolating selected quotes, Alexander Cockburn used my words to label me an apologist for Ariel Sharon and ethnic cleansing.

A Nation in Need of Renewal

Thomas Moore

A nation is a kind of person. When it's attacked, it will fall into the psychology of the victim and counter-attack with a sense of righteousness. It may take a good while for it to come to its senses and respond with more subtlety and maturity, if indeed it has such resources in the first place. It's time now to reconsider our initial reactions to September 11 and determine whether a war on terrorism is the appropriate response.

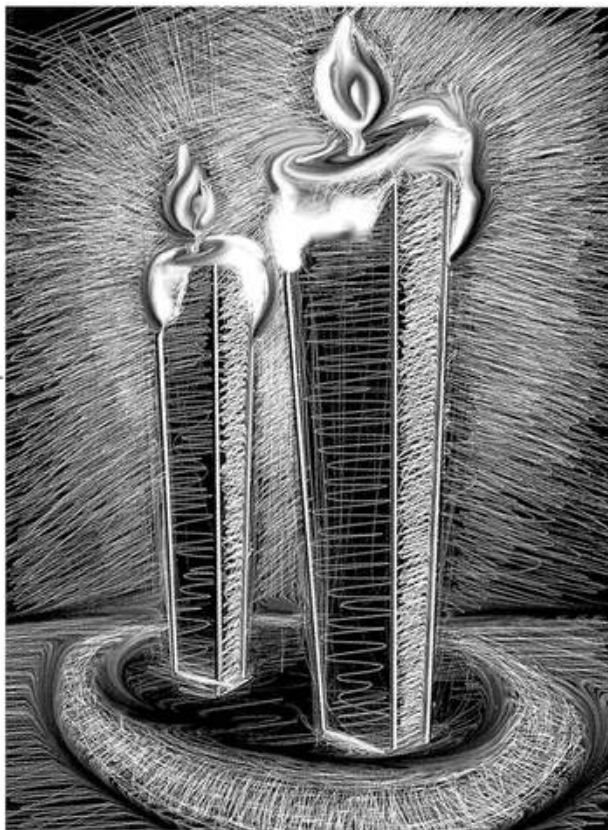
Many Americans responded to the brutal assault on them with courage, compassion, and sensitivity. Many others reacted with belligerent hyperactivated patriotism. The government offered new military strategies and equipment but old and tired ideas and language. Many connected the attacks on New York and Washington with Pearl Harbor—a sentimental and imprecise attempt to mythologize the current crisis in terms of righteous vengeance and patriotic bravura.

In the tense and eerie lull between the attacks and the bombing of Afghanistan, my mind was full of possible scenarios. I imagined America shocking the world by not falling for the provocation. I imagined us disarming our foes by the sheer power of our patience and the wisdom in not retaliating in obvious ways. I imagined our friends and even some enemies coming to our aid and resolving the situation with us because of the surprising maturity of our thoughtful response. I knew these were pipe dreams, but I still had hope.

When the bombs began dropping in Afghanistan, I knew I was back in the familiar terrain in which insane brutality is offered as a way to peace. Children were slaughtered and the military defensively took up its caricatured chant of "collateral damage." How many times have I been in this place? How many groundhog days have come and gone on which the military stiffly calls the enemy "he" and claims it has no intention of hurting civilians?

Among the lesser but numbing shocks was to watch the media and the politicians fall into line behind the Orwellian posturing of leaders. Television news anchors, normally remote and analytical, suddenly became hyperpatriotic. Even National Public Radio pulled the plug on dissenting callers. I listened to one erudite show on the peace movement, to which

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representatives of the peace movement were not invited.

Like so many, in the immediate aftermath, my imagination was filled with apocalyptic images, and I feared for my children and the world. In those early days, when my own vision was cloudy with shock, I was asked for advice. I recommended that people let their compassion swell, and to respond from the heart with a vision equal in strength to their disturbance of soul. I encouraged people not to shrink in fear and self-protection, but be unusually visionary and ethical.

Now that we know better what we're dealing with, a more sophisticated response is possible. I would now add three deep lessons to be learned from the events.

Reflection and Renewal

In trying to understand violence, I often think of Freud's short essay on Medusa, the snake-haired monster whose gaze petrifies. Deep in paradox, he says that the many snake-hairs are phallic images the multiplicity of which signifies castration.

Freud's reasoning may sound absurd, until you think of its applications. Consider thousands of soldiers marching in parade, their guns raised on their shoulders, or ships and planes loaded with missiles pointing to the sky. Do these snake-like objects represent personal and creative power, or does their display, their exaggeration and quantity, indicate impotence?

The inflated talk of weaponry and military might is snake-talk, gorgon-like braggadocio whose very inflatedness is a sign of weakness. Yet what we need on the international scene is real power, the strength of a self-possessed nation that doesn't have to resort to violence to solve problems, that can reach into its vast resources of thought and experience,

that can call on men and women of great insight and wisdom.

The first lesson and our first task is to reflect on who we are. Do we walk our talk? We speak incessantly of ourselves—at least our leaders do—as the greatest nation on earth. But how do we fare with human rights and human opportunity? Have we solved racism and sexism? Are our children happy, safe, healthy, learned, good citizens, at home in a world of unimaginable diversity? Are our marriages solid and secure? Are our cities and towns beautiful? Do the great majority of our citizens live fulfilled lives?

I'm not as pleased with the rewards of twentieth-century America as some are. I don't want to measure progress in terms of flat-screen televisions and palm-size computers. I'd rather see progress in our humanity, an end to unnecessary suffering, and the release of suppressed creativity. I'd rather see our nation as a member of the family of humankind, internationally a good neighbor rather than "the greatest on earth." We would do better to recognize greatness in every nation we deal with, from the largest to the smallest.

Our recent trauma, like a crisis in any life, is an invitation to consider ourselves and renew our lives. Deep renewal would be a form of resurrection, those who died coming to life in our new sense of connection and compassion. Renewed, we might re-establish relations with the world in a way that might overcome inequalities and the roots of hatred. These are not sentimental ideals but real possibilities. If we don't renew ourselves after this horrendous trauma, what will it take? To wake up and renew life always requires a degree of suffering and sometimes shock.

As if we needed more impetus to renew ourselves, we now discover that American business is more corrupt than anyone could have imagined. In all the talk about new policing and getting tough on cheaters, there is no talk about morality. What does the current upheaval on Wall Street say about the moral fiber of Americans? Perhaps it shows that again we have been all talk about values, with little practice to back it up. Not surprisingly, the very quarters that smack their lips at loss of values in the culture at large are the current source of corruption. Enron and WorldCom are yet another sign urging us to consider ourselves and the need for renewal.

Government leaders scoff at the naiveté of those who advocate honesty and altruism in international affairs. They convey that morality is personal—not political—that its purpose is to make you feel good, not to guide international policy.

Sometimes I dream of having a leader who has simple wisdom and the ordinary values of plain-speaking honesty and guileless good will. We have thousands of these men and women in America, but of course they don't have the money to win an election. The game of politics should be intricate and fun; after all, culture is a form of play. But that play requires a sophisticated level of innocence, or the play turns into a manipulation. How can we get more thoughtful people in roles of leadership? Another important renewal question.

But renewal is not just a word, not only a distant ideal. We need to talk about it seriously, to discuss how we might bring renewal to government and civic life, and how we can as individuals and communities have a renewing impact on the world. We could use an old-fashioned examination of conscience and a plan for making our fine ideals a matter of policy.

Secularist Religion and Religious Secularity

The second lesson has to do with religion. We have created what may be the first fully secular society the world has known. This doesn't mean we're not religious. We are a society full of religions. Our leaders, for the most part, display their religiosity not unlike the way the gorgon displays her snakes. To some extent we are what Emerson called "pew-holders," but that doesn't mean we are a religious people. In fact, we are a secularist people who split religion from life, a division that has destructive consequences.

We have pseudo-religions, in sports and politics, for instance. We build vast, expensive stadiums, temples of sport, for our heroes and demiurges. The raw patriotism stirred up by September 11 is an example of piety rooted in the state. This is all half-religion, but it isn't the real thing. It doesn't make us holy. It doesn't move us toward peace at home or abroad. It was reported in the newspapers that citizens complained when, in the aftermath of September 11, a Catholic priest quoted the line, "Blessed are the peacemakers" on the marquis of his church.

I don't think anyone could say that we are a reverent, peace-abiding, deeply moral people, models to the world of what humanity can be at its most ethical and spiritual. We are devoted to money, sex, and power—or so it appears from the films and television programs we export to the world. We are fascinated with guns and don't examine ourselves seriously in response to shoot-outs in schools and workplaces. Further signs of a need for renewal.

Now it is broadcast to the world that some of the priests in this greatest nation are pedophiles. How are the people of the world and of different religious traditions supposed to understand this? Is it only that there are a few bad apples? Should we reduce it to personal psychological problems? Or does this issue say something about our spiritual and sexual confusion? Another good topic for examination.

I don't mean to put us down, but rather to tame our adolescent narcissism, which is a dangerous trait in a people who are the world's military might. We should follow the advice of one of our most inspired spiritual leaders, Henry David Thoreau, and examine our life from love of America, and not from the anxiety disorder of extreme patriotism. I don't think most Americans want to kill innocent children and entire families—but our government is doing it and justifying it. And if you don't complain about it, you are participating in it.

We could become religious at our core, not just in form. We could enjoy our secular lives, and be enriched by our spiritual vision. What we have now is secularist religion—religious forms that prop up a secularist way of life. What we need is religious secularity, a deep participation in ordinary life led by transcendent values and great vision. We need in our hearts and souls to be religious—to honor the sacredness of all human life, to speak and act honestly, to embrace a philosophy of unsentimental love, to protect children at all costs, and to live on this earth with reverence and transcendent vision. This is religion of the soul.

Making Peace

The third lesson from September 11 is to get serious about peace. We have now had a taste of what it's like to have our homeland shaken and scarred by war. This motivates some (apparently the majority) to opt for retaliation, for "routing out the evil-doers." But this reaction turns a complicated event into a morality tale about good and evil. It's like saying to child, "Bad men hurt us, now we are going to hurt them." An alternative is to avoid infantilizing our situation through unenlightened reactivity and choose the more mature and radical path of peace.

To do the work of peacemaking requires that we search for peace in ourselves, in our families, in our communities, and in the world as a whole. It can't be a half-hearted decision or a cynical one that advocates war as the way to peace. We have to decide to be creative and tireless in our pursuit of peace, believing it is the only humane way to give our children the tranquility they need to live out their potential.

Presumably, having been shattered by unimaginable violence, we have sensed the importance of peace in our lives. Now it is time to work seriously for that lost peace. If we spent one percent of our military budget directly on peacemaking, we might make a little progress. If we had a Secretary of Peace with a staff and budget we might pursue peace intelligently. If religious leaders did their job and led the nation toward peace, we would be halfway there. If each person spoke publicly from his and her vision of peace, we might all be educated toward an alternative to war.

Peace is not the absence of conflict or even war. It is a positive appreciation for the Other that inspires compassion and empathy. Peace can't be won by principle alone or by programs. It requires a positive effort toward mutual understanding among people, and it comes out of thoughtful conflict resolution. There is no reason why Americans couldn't, in the aftermath of September 11, make the effort toward this radical degree of understanding and peacemaking.

People of the world generally are ready to be friends with America, but America makes it difficult to make and

sustain that friendship. It seems unsure of itself even as it displays its achievements and its power. People of the world are rebuffed by the resulting arrogance and threatening postures, and peace remains elusive.

America acts like the richest and most powerful kid on the block who bullies everyone else. But if you were to put America on the couch, I think you would discover an unruly adolescent, a youthful psyche full of wonderful ideals but unseasoned and unsure, not even aware that its behavior contradicts its ideals.

A few months before September 11, I was living in Ireland where I could see America from a distance. I watched on television as America's leaders came to Europe and distanced themselves from treaties and agreements, saying they didn't want Americans to have to change their lifestyle. They implied that a global warming treaty wasn't worth the discomfort it would cause Americans. The self-

indulgence was embarrassing, and I had to explain to my Irish neighbors that the American people are not as self-centered as they seem.

But at that moment I could see the seeds of America's downfall. I could sense the decay of a civilization. Shortly after I returned to America, I had a dream of airplanes attacking our country amid fires and explosions. In the dream, which came three weeks before September 11, I knew that my homeland had been violated, and I wasn't entirely surprised.

I don't know if this was a premonition dream or simply an echo of my deep feeling that America was becoming seedy and worn out, in a period of cultural entropy, easy prey for disgruntled people from afar. As a therapist I know that decay can be the occasion for renewal. But it all depends on how the nation-person responds.

Many Americans today are looking for spiritual identity and inspiration. Many think wrongly that it is a personal pursuit, that it will contribute to their individual self-improvement. Yet the religions teach that spirituality is made up more of compassion than self-regard, that the process of transcendence begins with the first small step of reaching beyond the self. Advocating for peace could be a powerful way to discover the substance of spirituality.

Peace does not arrive as a gift, and it's not up to anyone but yourself to make it happen. You make it day by day as you extend yourself in deep spiritual vision to the Other, in whatever form that other appears. Peace is the opposite of paranoia. It is the condition of trust engendered by your own trustworthiness. Peace comes out of the realization that the human race, in all its glory and ugliness, is a family. Peace is the willingness to work out the conflicts in that family, celebrate the harmonies, and love each member with tough, spiritual, and unconditional regard. □

*Peace does not arrive
as a gift, and it's not up
to anyone but yourself
to make it happen.*

Phoenix Rising

Elizabeth Lesser

*In the middle of the journey of our life
I came to myself within a dark woods
Where the straight way was lost.*

—from Dante's *Inferno*

There's a mythic quality to what America is going through in its post-September 11 process. Like Dante's Pilgrim, we have left our youthful innocence behind; we are in the middle of our journey as a nation; we are experiencing great change and, hopefully, real transformation.

All stories of change and transformation—personal and collective—are myths in the making. If you look at your own life through a mythic lens, you will find stories as profound as the most oft-told parables and fairy tales. You will find in your own mundane story line Dante's *Inferno*, Homer's *Odyssey*, the Greek myth of Persephone, the Sumerian tale of Inanna, the Arthurian Grail Legends, or Eastern myths like the story of Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, or the Hindu gods and goddesses in the *Upanishads*. What links these stories to each other, and to yours and mine, is that they are all stories of people who are, as William James coined it, "Twice-born." Twice-born people, unlike the more innocent "once-born," descend into Dante's dark woods, learning the dark ways of descent, discovering hidden parts of themselves—ugly parts, truthful parts, powerful parts—and do not ascend from the woods until the hard lessons have been learned, until the golden treasure has been found, until the wise and mature self is born.

Up until September 11, America was a "once-born" nation—naïve, optimistic, immature. Then came our "phoenix experience," when, like the mythic bird, our once-born nature died in the flames of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. We are in the process of becoming twice-born, but we're not there yet. I like to think that America and Americans will do what the phoenix did—arise from the ashes as a wiser and stronger version of its original self. But this is not guaranteed. Fire and ashes do not always result in positive transformation.

We all know people who say that their cancer or their divorce or their bankruptcy was the greatest gift of a

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lifetime, that until they burned like the phoenix they didn't know who they were, they took more than they gave, they were full of arrogance or fear or confusion. In the fire they were brought to their knees and humbled. Their priorities became clear, their purpose spelled out, their passion set free. But we also know people who do not spin misfortune into insight, or terror into awakening. Instead, they become more bitter, more reactive, more blameful. Can America use its phoenix experience to awaken, or will we choose reactivity over metamorphosis?

Along with disturbing signs of reactivity (false patriotism, racial profiling, our biased policies in the Middle East, military paranoia masquerading as homeland security, and more), there are also some positive signs that our country will rise from the ashes of September 11 a wiser and more magnanimous force in the world. I believe that we have been humbled: I see signs of it in a new-found interest in Americans in their brothers and sisters in the rest of the world; I see signs of it in an awakened political and environmental activism in our young people; and I see signs of it in a true patriotism that is building in strength—a patriotism that celebrates our fabulous diversity and evolving democracy.

I'm pulling for America to rise from the ashes. I want to see this bold human experiment transform itself from the terrors of September 11. I think we can. Regardless of our backgrounds, most Americans seem to share the same psychological DNA: We're an openhearted and forgiving lot; we're optimistic and creative; and we are bent on freedom. Each one of us can assist America in its phoenix experience by paying attention to our own abilities to grow, to forgive, to nurture freedom in our personal lives, and in our lives as citizens.

ILLUSTRATION BY SABRINA JONES

The Need To De-Mystify the Presidency

Fred Branfman

The major impact of September 11 has been to make people more frightened of death, more scared that something is going to happen to them. The objective horror of the fact that we could basically die ourselves is the real issue.

—Dr. Robert Firestone

The most important consequence of September 11 has been the re-mystification of the presidency, as Americans have yielded to their unconscious, childlike needs to be protected by the most unlikely father figure in our nation's history. The president's undeserved surge in popularity has blinded us to his flawed military, economic, environmental, and civil liberty policies, policies that threaten our long-term security far more than Osama bin Laden. A few more domestic September 11s, and American democracy could face its greatest challenge since the Civil War.

September 11 had enormous psychological implications for Americans. The largest domestic attack on U.S. civilians in our history, it shattered forever the sense of security and invulnerability conferred on us by our geographic separation from the rest of the world. Not only did foreigners murder thousands of Americans on a typical day at work, but, even more importantly, these victims were average, ordinary citizens no different from ourselves. Each of us was made to feel our vulnerability toward death in a way we never had before.

As Ernest Becker so brilliantly described in *Denial of Death* and *Escape From Evil*, the origins of authoritarianism lie in a Faustian bargain that people make with their rulers. Unconsciously terrified of death, they agree to cede power to leaders to be protected against it. This is why leaders combined sacred and secular power for most of recorded history.

Although modern democracies have thankfully separated church and state, our unconscious fear of death remains—as does our willingness to give up our freedom in return for this illusory protection against death. The presidency remains the repository of these unconscious desires for protection, the last remaining public office that possesses more than secular power. It is this transcendent power that under-

lies our belief that the presidency is the “symbol” of the nation, or that it represents more than the man occupying the position.

Nothing illustrates the truth of Becker's insights more than the astonishing rise in post-September 11 popularity enjoyed by President George W. Bush, an average man of no discernible gifts who has become the beneficiary of the people's unconscious desire to be protected from death. The absurdity of magazine covers comparing him to Theodore Roosevelt, or polls ranking him as a better president than any but FDR and Lincoln, reveal just how deep our unconscious desire to be protected by a father figure can go.

The post-September 11 rise in President Bush's popularity began before he had taken any military action, and was clearly not due to his subsequent unexpected luck in Afghanistan. (Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was predicting a long, hard winter just prior to the unforeseen collapse of the Taliban.) And it has remained high despite Bush's failed promise to capture bin Laden, the growing evidence that his administration bungled its pre-September 11 anti-terrorism efforts, the failure of his Middle East policy, his empty threats against Saddam Hussein, his inability to forge an international coalition to fight terror, and his failure even at home to force domestic agencies to cooperate in creating an effective “Homeland Security” policy. While his failures are not all his fault, the simple fact is that his rise in popularity is not due to serious substantive accomplishments as president.

This increase in President Bush's popularity has serious consequences for both our short and long-term security. His rise in the polls has neutralized the voices of his critics. Where are the editorials and speeches criticizing a Bush budget which wastes billions of dollars on high-tech weapons we do not need rather than financing such critical measures as democratic nation-building in Afghanistan? The single greatest threat to our long-term security, after all, is an increasingly enraged Muslim world to whom we represent little more than support for corrupt dictatorships. Bush's popularity has allowed him to ignore the threat to

(continued on page 38)



Fred Branfman directs For Generations to Come and Gifts of Death Awareness Project, and works on a variety of other spiritual and psychological issues. In a previous lifetime he exposed the secret U.S. Air war against Laos.

Now We Are All Israelis

Phyllis Chesler

Since September 11, I have learned that we are all Israelis. I have learned that Islamic terrorists do not distinguish between progressive or reactionary human beings; they are not interested in whether or not we oppose imperialism, colonialism, misogyny, or the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The September 11 attacks were a direct hit on Western civilization and the values it upholds, which include democracy, secularity, modernity, individual rights, and women's rights—as well as laissez-faire capitalism, military and governmental arrogance and corruption. Like it or not (and I do not), this is the civilization we live in. Understand it—and weep—but let us also be clear about who is responsible for September 11.

I first learned how different the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic East are when I was living in Afghanistan in the early 1960s. My feminism may have been forged in Kabul living under extreme pre-Taliban gender-apartheid. Afghanistan has never been colonized, so there were no Westerners to blame. It was then that I learned how not to romanticize wily, colorful, third-world tyrants. For years, American feminists were calling for the removal of the Taliban and that is precisely what the Bush administration set out to accomplish. Yet, feminists and leftists opposed the invasion of Afghanistan. Yes, I know that Bush, Sr. and the oil companies also funded the Taliban at one point, but that doesn't mean that the United States should refrain from bringing down the monster it helped to create.

Since September 11, many progressive Westerners have still not learned this and have continued to focus on the

moral failures of Israel and America instead of the enemy at our gates—as if demonizing Jews or the American government will keep us safe. (Women do not “cause” sexism, Jews do not “cause” anti-Semitism.) Israel's failure to integrate Arabs into its society as equal citizens is reprehensible, but nothing justifies the systematic terrorization of the Jewish people by terrorists who themselves have repressed and destroyed more Muslim and Arab people than the State of Israel ever has. Since September 11, Israel is increasingly being treated as the symbolic scapegoat for all the crimes committed by both colonial Europe and repressive Arab regimes—a classic position for the Jews in human history.

I am a member of Women of the Wall, and the co-editor of a book about to appear on the subject. We have been suing the State of Israel and the Ministry of Religion on behalf of Jewish women's religious rights. Were we Arab women we might have been beheaded for daring to bring such a lawsuit in an Islamic country. While our struggle is not yet over, we have prevailed in the Israeli Supreme Court. I would like Israel's Jewish critics to remember that we are safer in Israel than in Saudi Arabia.

What I have learned post-September 11 is this: There is no shame in being an American patriot and a Zionist. It is important not to lump all Muslims together, not to take American support for Israel for granted, to seek pro-Israel alliances with people whom I may not agree with on other issues, and to consider every Jew as both an ally and an honorable opponent. We must avoid rhetoric, rage, and self-righteousness, and remember that most Jews focus either on Israeli racism towards Arabs or on the world's continued hatred of the Jews—but we must remember both wrongs at the same time. And, when asked, I must speak my truth, even where other truths are more highly valued. □

Phyllis Chesler, Ph.D., is the author of Women and Madness and most recently, Woman's Inhumanity to Woman.

THE NEED TO DE-MYSTIFY (from page 37)

the environment that his own Environmental Protection Agency has noted will harm future generations far more than any terrorist threat. It has greatly weakened efforts to reduce the corporate greed and fraud that so weaken our economy. And Bush's popularity has enabled him to take measures that, if continued and implemented, pose the greatest threat to civil liberties in our nation's history.

Perhaps Bill Clinton's major contribution to the presidency, however inadvertent and unintended, was to demystify the office. For the first time millions of Americans realized the ugly truth: that the need to fundraise, compro-

mise, and distort the truth—actions necessary to win the White House—ensures that our president will be an average, normal citizen distinguished neither by moral commitment, vision, wisdom, or compassion.

Only as the American people apply this lesson to George W. Bush, rather than continuing to be ruled by their unconscious desires to imbue “the Presidency” with mystical powers, will our democracy be saved. And only when we learn to face our own deaths will we develop the equanimity and long-term will necessary to develop effective policies that can protect not only our generation, but future ones, from the scourge of terrorism and environmental devastation. □

Keep Peace with Justice

Morris Dickstein

Especially in New York, the shock of the September 11 attacks led to a mass trauma unlike anything we've seen since the assassinations of the 1960s.

The initial self-protective numbness gave way to a sense of horror, blight, and, just below the surface, feelings of helpless vulnerability. There was a tremendous need to do *something*, anything: give blood, give money, volunteer at Ground Zero, help out in some way. Astonishingly, elected officials from the president to the mayor rose to the occasion, allaying everyone's fear and uncertainty, radiating reassurance and a steady

resolve. Soon, however, politics reasserted itself as ideological zealots, such as the Republican leadership in the House, tried to harness the enormities to their previous agendas.

On a personal level, longtime friendships were strained or shattered as people who had long shared assumptions reacted in different ways. The received wisdom is that the Left disgraced itself, taking some pleasure at a blow directed against the bastion of capitalism and imperialism, or against the world's bully (as one Cambridge don put it), but this is only partly true. With some notable exceptions, the contributors to an infamous symposium in the *London Review of Books*, many of them Americans, permitted a reflexive anti-Americanism to dull their moral sense, as they would again with dire warnings when the war in Afghanistan began to unfold. But the sensible Left reacted with human empathy, measured patriotism, valid concerns about civil liberties, and a genuine hatred of the blind terrorism that has often dogged the fringes of radical movements.

As the second intifada worsened in the Middle East, the politics of the war against terrorism created a special challenge for Jews. The epidemic of suicide bombings sowed panic among American Jews about the morale and even the survival of Israel. For some, this caused a shift to the Right, with unqualified support for Bush and Sharon and for a military crackdown, whatever its impact on the lives of Palestinians or the prospects for peace. As a short-term

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The Left is divided and weakened now, but its role remains essential: to keep peace with justice as the ultimate goal.

solution to a hemorrhage of Jewish lives, strong military action was inevitable. In some places the IDF took heavy casualties to avoid putting civilians at risk; elsewhere the toll in death and disruption was hard to defend. As Levi Eshkol once told the young officer Sharon, even if you wipe out their armies, the Arabs will still be there. A human solution will one day be necessary.

The Left is divided and weakened now, but its role remains essential: to keep peace with justice as the ultimate goal, whatever security requires in the interim. At home this means vigilance about civil liberties, especially the rights of immigrants and resident aliens. As we think about the Middle East, it means remembering the good years of the late 1990s, the years of coexistence, economic cooperation, mutual security, and even tentative friendship after the Oslo agreement. Above all it means preserving a moral compass and a respect for human life in an atmosphere polluted by hatred, fear, bigotry, and strident nationalism. Among Jews and non-Jews alike, the reasonable Left, the Left of conscience and moral responsibility, still has an important role to play. □



Torn at the Roots

The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America
Michael E. Staub

The story of the many fierce battles over what constitutes an authentically Jewish politics.

"Effectively punctures the 'we are one' myth, and demonstrates that the problem of 'Jew vs. Jew' has deep historical roots. Thoughtful

[and] well-written . . . this volume should be must reading for anyone seeking to understand what American Jews have been fighting about since the 1950s." —Jonathan Sarna

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Don't Abandon Civil Liberties

Danny Goldberg

Compared to those directly affected by the thousands of deaths on September 11, our family is lucky. Although for weeks after the World Trade Center attack our Greenwich Village neighborhood smelled of acrid smoke when the wind blew north, we never had to abandon our home like many of our friends downtown. We are lucky that the members of our family did not work in the World Trade Center, though we did know a number of people who died that day.

I do not begrudge anyone's concern about security. I think it's appropriate that New York City cops and fire fighters and emergency workers were treated like heroes, and I don't even mind flag waving—although I am aware that those who wave the flag are not always pure of heart.

Having said that, I am very disappointed in the Bush administration and frustrated at the limited criticism that has come from Democrats and the incoherence of much of the Left.

With regard to security—why hasn't it been federalized and why aren't security workers paid a salary commensurate with their responsibility? Why has there not been a massive federal program to beef up emergency rooms across the United States? In addition to helping give better service to the poor and others who use emergency rooms, such a program would genuinely prepare all parts of the United States for unexpected attacks.

These issues are easy picking for Democrats and progressives. More complex is the much needed debate about our foreign policy, our energy policy, and the other long-term underlying causes of murderous rage in other parts of the world. There are no easy answers, since there is no progressive consensus on our foreign policy—but there is an urgent need for serious discussion and debate. Instead we've been confronted with a cartoon-like political tableau consisting mostly of inflexible Republicans and conservative Democrats, tepid and tentative progressives, and shrill anti-American lefties.

However, progressive response to this crisis cannot dismiss the legitimate fears Americans have of violence from people sympathetic to the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks.

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Everything we know about extremist Middle Eastern groups tells us that Jewish Americans are particularly vulnerable.

Meanwhile, the primary government response to September 11 has been to strip away individual rights as fast as politically possible. There is no historical evidence that such rollbacks make people more secure, but much evidence of such actions doing great harm.

In order to prevail, progressives must find ways to create alliances with conservative libertarians who oppose excess government power over individuals. Many conservatives whose views are abhorrent to me on issues such as abortion and gay and lesbian rights, have had courage and clarity in pointing out the danger of the Patriot Act, proposed National Identity Cards, etc. With these caveats, all progressives must be unrelenting in opposing the erosion of individual rights, the unfair broad-brush targeting of Arab Americans, and the convenient hysteria that pressures for authoritarian policies.

Finally, progressives need a meaningful agenda. Concentrated effort on single issues can pay off. Diffuse lamentations about "the government" accomplish nothing.

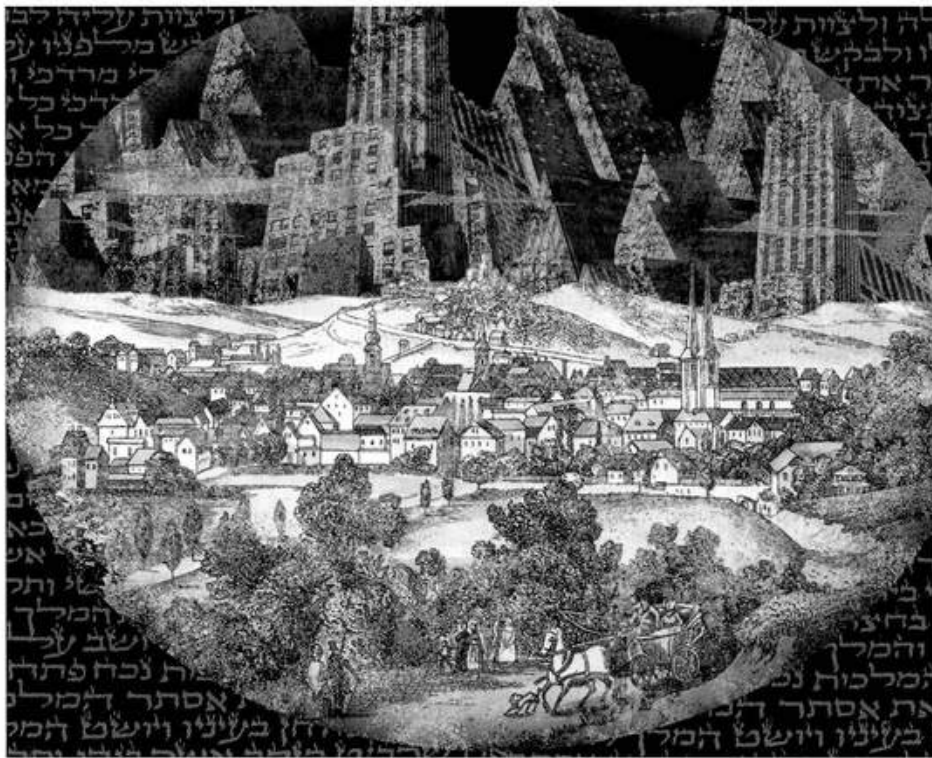
One place to start should be pressure for the resignation of Attorney General John Ashcroft. His views are out of synch with most Americans and if a spotlight is shone on him, there is a reasonable chance that the politically nimble President Bush will capitulate. If Bush clings to the Attorney General out of stubbornness, he will seriously undercut his Clintonesque "moderate" image that was at the root of his victory in 2000.

Ashcroft took legal action to stop implementation of an Oregon State right-to-die initiative only weeks after September 11. He waited nine months to direct the FBI to transfer hundreds of their agents away from the so-called War on Drugs to defense against terrorism. He is an extremist on the abortion issue and is so uncomfortable with sexuality that he ordered a nude statue in front of the Justice department to be covered over. He is so unpalatable to voters that he was defeated by a dead man, Mel Carnahan, in his U. S. Senate race in Missouri—the same state where Bush beat Gore in the presidential election.

Opposition to Ashcroft can be a vital organizing tool for progressives on a vast array of issues and can attract a wide coalition. Such a cause should be one of the first steps progressive leaders take in their thousand-mile journey on behalf of a moral and secure United States. □

The Crisis of the Human Waste Disposal Industry

Zygmunt Bauman



A specter hovers over the planet—the specter of xenophobia. Old and new, never extinguished or freshly unfrozen, lit up tribal suspicions and animosities have mixed and blended with the brand-new fear for safety that has been distilled from the old and new uncertainties and insecurities of our liquid-modern existence.

People worn-out and dead-tired by forever inconclusive tests of adequacy, frightened to the raw by the mysterious, inexplicable precariousness of their fortunes and by the global mists hiding their prospects from view, desperately seek the culprits of their trials and tribulations. They find them, unsurprisingly, under the nearest lamp post—in the only spot obligingly illuminated by the forces of law and order: “It is criminals who make us insecure, and it is outsiders who cause crime” we are told, and so “we must round up, incarcerate and deport the outsiders to restore our lost or stolen security.”

Throughout the world ruled by democratically-elected governments, it’s the “I’ll be tough on crime” card that has turned out to trump all others; the winning hand is almost invariably a combination of a promise of “more prisons, more policemen, longer sentences,” often tied to an oath that there will be “no immigration, no asylum rights, no naturalization.” As Donald G. McNeil put it, “Politicians across Europe use the ‘outsiders cause crime’ stereotype to link ethnic hatred, which is unfashionable, to the more palatable fear for one’s own safety.”

This past spring, the Chirac vs. Jospin presidential duel in France degenerated in its preliminary stages into a pub-

lic auction. Both competitors vied for electoral support by offering ever-harsher measures against criminals and immigrants, but above all against immigrants who breed crime and against the criminality bred by immigrants (as recorded in a piece on Jospin by Nathaniel Herzberg and Cécile Prieur in *Le Monde*, May 5–6, 2002). First of all, though, the candidates did their best to re-focus the anxiety stemming from the electors’ ambient sense of *precarité* (the infuriating insecurity of social position intertwined with the acute uncertainty about the future of livelihood) onto their fear for personal safety (the integrity of their bodies, personal possessions, homes, and neighborhoods). On July 14, 2001, Chirac set the infernal machine in motion, announcing the need to fight the “growing threats to safety” in view of an almost 10 percent increase in recorded crime in the first half of the year; he declared he would ensure that a “zero-tolerance” policy became law once he was reelected.

The tune of the presidential campaign had been set, and Jospin was quick to join in, elaborating his own variations on the shared motif (though, unexpectedly to the main soloists, but certainly not to the sociologically-wise observers, it was Le Pen’s voice that came on the top as the purest and so the most audible in this anti-crime chorus). On August 28, 2002, Jospin proclaimed “the battle against insecurity,” vowing “no laxity,” while on September 6, 2002, Daniel Vaillant and Marylise Lebranchu, his ministers of, respectively, internal affairs and justice, swore that they wouldn’t show any tolerance for crime in any form. Vaillant’s immediate reaction to September 11 was to increase the powers of the police principally against the juveniles of the “ethnically alien” *banlieues*, where the devilish concoction of uncertainty and insecurity poisoning the Frenchmen’s lives was, according to the official version, being brewed. Jospin himself went on castigating and

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reviling, in ever more vitriolic terms, the “angelic school” of the soft approach, to which he swore never to have belonged in the past and never to join in the future. The auction went on, and the bids climbed skywards. Chirac promised to create a ministry of internal security, to which Jospin responded with a commitment to a ministry “charged with public security” and the “coordination of police operations.” When Chirac brandished the idea of locked center to confine juvenile delinquents, Jospin echoed the promise with a vision of “locked structures” for juvenile offenders, outbidding his opponent with the prospect of “sentencing on the spot.”

Moving south: A mere three decades ago, Portugal was (alongside Turkey) the main supplier of the *Gastarbeiter* feared by the German *Bürger* to despoil his homely townscapes and undercut the German social compact, the foundation of his security and comfort. Today, thanks to its sharply improved fortune, Portugal has turned from a labor-exporting into a labor-importing country. The hardships and humiliations suffered when earning bread in foreign countries having been promptly forgotten, 27 percent of Portuguese have now declared that crime-and-foreigner-infested neighborhoods are their main worry. The newcomer politician Paulo Portas, by playing a single, fiercely anti-immigration card, helped the new right-wing coalition into power (just as Pia Kiersgaard’s Danish People’s Party did in Denmark, Umberto Bossi’s Northern League in Italy, and the radically anti-immigrant Progress Party did in Norway—all countries that not so long ago sent their children to far-away lands to seek the bread which their homelands were too poor to offer).

All such news made it easily to the first page headlines (in Britain, the *Guardian* headlined the “UK plan for asylum crackdown” on June 13, 2002, and there’s no need to mention tabloid first-page banners). The main bulk of the immigrant-phobia, however, stays hidden from Western Europe’s attention (indeed, knowledge,) and never makes it to the surface. “Blaming the immigrants”—the strangers, the newcomers, and particularly the newcomers among the strangers—for all aspects of social malaise (and most of all for the nauseating, disempowering feeling of *Unsicherheit*, *incertezza*, *precarité*, insecurity) is fast becoming a global habit. As Heather Grabbe, research director for the Centre for European Reform, put it, “the Germans blame the Poles, the Poles blame the Ukrainians, the Ukrainians blame the Kirghiz and Uzbeks”—while countries too poor to attract any neighbors desperately seeking a livelihood, like Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, or Slovakia, turn their wrath against the usual suspects and stand-by culprits: the local but drifting, fixed-addresses shunning, and therefore “newcomers”

and outsiders, always and everywhere—the Gypsies.

When it comes to the setting of global trends, the United States has undisputed priority rights and most of the time holds the initiative. But joining the global trend of immigrant-bashing presents America with a rather difficult problem. The United States is an admittedly immigrant country; denigration of immigrants, throwing suspicion on the immigrants’ noble calling, would go against the grain of American identity and perhaps deliver a mortal blow to the American Dream, its undisputed foundation and cement. Still, efforts are made, by trial and error, to square the circle....

On June 10, the highest ranking U.S. officials (FBI Director Robert Mueller, U.S. Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz among others) announced the arrest of a suspected Al-Qaeda terrorist on his return to Chicago from a training

trip to Pakistan. As the official version of the affair claimed, an American citizen, Jose Padilla (the name suggests Hispanic roots—the latest, relatively poorly-settled addition to the long list of immigrant ethnic affiliations), converted to Islam, took the name of Abdullah al-Mujahir, and promptly went to his new Muslim brethren for instructions on how to harm his homeland. He was instructed in the artless art of patching together “dirty bombs”—“frighteningly easy to assemble” out of the few ounces of widely available conventional explosives and “virtually any type of radioactive material” that the would-be terrorists “can get their hands on” (it was not clear why sophisticated training was needed to assemble weapons “frighteningly easy to assemble”—but when it comes to sowing the seeds of fear for the grapes of wrath to grow, logic is neither here nor there). “A new phrase entered the post-Sept. 11 vocabulary of many average Americans: dirty bomb”—announced the *USA Today* reporters Nichols, Hall, and Eisler.

The affair was a master stroke: the trap of the American dream had been skillfully bypassed since Jose Padilla was a stranger and an alien by his own free American’s *free choice*. The terrorism was vividly depicted as simultaneously of foreign origin yet ubiquitous at home, lurking just beyond the corner and spreading over every neighborhood—just like “the Reds under the beds” scare of yore. It was an impeccable metaphor and fully credible outlet for the equally ubiquitous fears and apprehensions of precarious life.

And yet this particular expedient proved to be an error. When watched from the other offices of the federal administration, the assets of the case looked more like liabilities. A “frighteningly easy to assemble” dirty bomb would expose the folly of a multi-billion dollar “anti-missile shield,” since

(continued on page 47)

*“Blaming the immigrants”—
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The Force of Nonviolence

Lama Surya Das

The enemy can be our greatest teacher.

—Shantideva

The first anniversary of September 11 should be a time for prayer. It's a time to reflect on what is most important in our lives, and to think about what steps we might take towards nonviolence within ourselves in order to build a more peaceful world. As a Buddhist, a believer in karma, I know there are no accidents. The task before us is to cultivate a clear mind and an open heart so that we may understand as fully as possible the origins of the crisis in the world today and engage in effective peacemaking and reconciliation.

Many have said that September 11 was a wake-up call—but are we awake now? Or have we gone back to business as usual? I hear a lot of talk lately about compassion, service, love, and “good-versus-evil” from leaders in our nation’s capital, but I find weakness of vision and a certain insincerity in these sound-bytes. I personally have found that love without wisdom is blind; wisdom without love is sterile, and can kill. And when I see how little the major enterprises of our society—big business, government, media, the military, education—have changed or are striving to transform in meaningful rather than reactive and superficial ways, I feel we have much left to learn, reassess, and transform.

The Buddha began his spiritual search twenty five hundred years ago as any warrior would: by asking tough questions and being willing to face the answers at any cost. He asked: Why do people have to suffer so much? Why is there hatred and violence in the world? Is there any escape from this condition? If there is, what is it? What are we to do?

Myself, I wonder: How has America’s role in the world over the last fifty or a hundred years contributed to the problems we face today? Over the course of this year I’ve become increasingly uncomfortable with the knowledge that some of our aggressive, alternately imperialist and isolationist karma has come home to roost. What responsibility

do we have in shaping our country’s policies and how do we go about creating change? I think we need to learn a little about why some people hate us so much in order to learn how to heal that deep divisions and widening separations occurring across the globe.

Buddha taught that without any difficulties and problems, we cannot really grow in inner strength, patience, and vision. I call this the Pearl Principle: no irritation, no pearl. The Dalai Lama often says that the enemy and the adversary can be our greatest teacher, from whom we can learn patience, forbearance, humility, nonattachment, and that there are other ways to see and be in the world, as our arrogance is dispelled and we become more sensitized and even empathic towards the wishes and needs of others. We can learn to rise like a phoenix from the ashes, arising as part of a better world and a better life for one and all.

One hundred years ago, the Tibetan Dzogchen master Patrul Rinpoche lay down across a narrow mountain pass to thwart warring parties of horsemen from continuing to carry on a clan feud by raiding the adjacent valley. The young warriors had to walk their horses right over the enlightened vagabond’s supine body in order to pursue their bellicose aims. Through the Lama’s nonviolent witnessing, both sides were slowed down and their conflict brought to a halt. When asked how he had brought that bloody feud to an end, Patrul said: “Compassion is contagious. May all be infected by it!” This is Buddhist spiritual activism—nonviolent witnessing, putting oneself on the line.

(continued on page 44)



*Lama Surya Das is a poet, Buddhist teacher and translator, and author of *Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World* (Broadway Books). He is the founder of the Dzogchen Meditation Center.*

The Ten Suggestions

Paul Krassner

1. Stay well-informed and be on the alert for disinformation; besides mainstream media, check out alternative papers and the Internet, especially the international press.
2. Maintain empathy for the motivation of terrorists and sympathizers, bearing in mind that they are victims of their own conditioning.
3. Start saving the world by acting in every aspect of your daily life as though you were a role-model for all humankind.
4. Understand and forgive your foibles instead of guilt-tripping yourself.
5. Resist police-state legislation passed in the guise of security.
6. Pro-choice or not, don't abort your inner child.
7. With the stench and sadness of death so much in the air, practice loving those you cherish while they're still alive.
8. Keep feeling hopeful by finding your balance between total despair and cautious optimism. As Harry Chapin said, "If we don't act like there's hope, there is no hope." And remember, placebos work.
9. Pay attention to the word of God, our Ultimate Spin Doctor, as in, "Don't blame me for September 11, I just make the laws, like gravity. Would you rather I control everything and *not* let you have free will?"
10. When eating a sandwich at the delicatessen, be sure to remove the toothpick before taking your first bite. □

Paul Krassner is the author of *Murder At the Conspiracy Convention and Other American Absurdities*.

THE FORCE OF NONVIOLENCE (from page 43)

Buddhism's long, illustrious history remains unscarred by religious warfare. Its highest ideal is the Bodhisattva Vow to deliver all beings from suffering and confusion and bring them to nirvanic peace, freedom, and enlightenment. The Bodhisattva is the ultimate social and spiritual activist. But this kind of selfless, compassionate commitment does not preclude strong, protective action on behalf of the greater good. Traditional scriptural authority backs this up, as in the case of the Buddha himself, when in a previous life as a ship's captain, he had to take the life of a murderous pirate who was about to slaughter five hundred merchants aboard his ship. Even Gandhi, the greatest advocate of *ahimsa* (nonharming) said that nonviolence can be practically applied within forceful action, as in the case of needing to forcibly restrain a violent drunk before he harms more people, or, as he said, in the case of a serial killer, one might even be forced to take a life to save lives. This is a slippery ethical principle, open to misuse, but it is also a powerful reminder of the power of nonviolent action and activism.

Spirituality today must be intelligent, strong hearted, and committed to the long-term greatest good, rather than feel-good quick fixes or mere local concerns. I would like to see more intrepid spiritually centered scholars, writers, and teachers speak up and provide a more muscular form of spiritual discourse. Sitting and cultivating prayerful positive attitudes is fine, but what we also need in our day is to broaden and deepen public discussion by bringing to bear process-oriented Buddhist thought and a rational understanding of impermanence, change, and interconnectedness.

The Dalai Lama has asked Western Buddhists to work against nuclear proliferation, capital punishment, and environmental exploitation, work for human rights and religious tolerance, and to teach children about peace. And we do not all need to be Buddhist masters to bring Buddhist perspectives to public discourse. As concerned citizens, we can and should take more initiative in speaking out by writing opinion pieces or letters to editors, Congress people, and other elected officials; publishing our own magazines and journals; meeting with each other, both privately and at conferences; being active in interfaith dialogue, on the internet, in volunteer and charitable organizations, and by educating ourselves about how other peoples live and worship.

But if we truly want peaceful coexistence in this world in our lifetime—and I firmly believe that we all do—we must address the violence and cruelty in our own hearts and minds. We must learn how to deal with anger and hatred and learn to soften and disarm our own hearts, as well as work in larger contexts to resolve conflicts and create peace. We need to think globally and act locally, beginning with ourselves and each other, at home and in the family, as well as at work and in the community. We need to reach out more and more, in broad, all-embracing circles of collective caring and responsibility. This is the path to a more peaceful future for all of us.

Martin Luther King Jr., who was greatly inspired and influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, said that we have only two choices today: to coexist peacefully, or to destroy ourselves. It is in our higher self-interest to pull together, if we don't want to be pulled apart. □

What Did You Hope America Would Learn?

Margaret Wheatley



This past July, in a crumbled castle in Slovenia, I sat with a group of twenty-four people from fifteen countries and asked them what they hoped America would have learned from September 11.

Participants in this conversation ranged in age from twenty-two to sixty-six, and lived throughout Europe (many were Eastern European), North and South America. As we sat in a circle, surrounded by decayed fortress walls and peaceful fertile plains, I was surprised by how grateful everyone was to be a part of this conversation. As one young man said: "I've been desperately wanting to have this conversation with an American, but no one has wanted to talk with me."

Here is what they shared:

The opportunity for other countries to partner with America was lost.

After the initial outburst of volunteerism in America (which everyone admired) and after the readiness of other nations to leap in and support America, the United States chose to go it alone and become the world's policeman. The possibilities for openness and collaboration gave way to a campaign against evil waged in isolation. Some of the eagerness to partner with the United States came from a desire not to repeat the sins of the past. "Europe jumped in to help so quickly because we are filled with remorse for what we didn't do to prevent the massacres in Bosnia," said one participant; "Germany was hoping that America would do its dirty work so it wouldn't have to," said another.

America is consumed by a great myth.

The story that has gripped the United States is the classic one found in science fiction and many myths. "A few good people must fight great evil, overcoming all odds to tri-

umph." After September 11, Americans asked, "Why do they hate us?" The answer given by U.S. leadership was: "They hate our freedom." In this story, America is the brave and determined defender of freedom-loving people for the

A European gently asked, "How can we help Americans become curious to meet others?"

entire planet. A young leader from England and Pakistan who had just returned from the States described this story as "internally consistent. It has its own logic that you can't argue with." However, a young Slovenian woman added that many Americans believe that the rest of the world envies Americans, but this is untrue. In her world, the term "American" is pejorative.

America acts as though it has nothing to learn.

This theme kept circling through our conversation—it was a source of frustration and emotion. Why doesn't America listen to anyone else? Why isn't America asking for other opinions? Why is it so arrogant and shut off from the world? How can Americans believe they have nothing to learn from the rest of us? A European who noted how, in Europe, you can't avoid meeting those from other countries, gently asked: "How can we help Americans become curious to meet others?"

What goes around comes around.

A young leader from Ireland spoke of the financial support Irish-Americans had given over the years to Irish terrorist groups. "Your money has been responsible for the deaths of over three thousand people in Ireland." A young Ecuadorian woman spoke of the impact of current U.S. policies in Colombia against cocaine growers. "People are fleeing to Ecuador, causing great problems for us. I believe in part because of U.S. policies in this area, that things are going to continue to get worse over the next five years." Many in the room found these two examples consistent with their experience of U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II.

As the conversation deepened, it moved into an exploration of our shared grief for what is happening in the world. I was saddened to hear that all but one of us felt that

(continued on page 64)

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The Dying Living

Lawrence L. Langer

When a survivor of the Rwandan massacres pleaded after the debacle, "Teach us how to live after death," she used words that might have fallen from the lips of a preacher or a member of the congregation appealing to their God for help along the path to salvation. Unfortunately, she was not addressing the question of a future spiritual life-beyond-life, but of a present physical existence beneath the shadow of unnatural and violent death. Each mass atrocity of the last century has shifted our consciousness a little closer to the troublesome realm of this secular entreaty, but without so damaging our hope for a better life in this world as to impair breathing within its shrinking psychological frontiers. Recent events, however, appear to have created a fretful uneasiness in the general population that we can no longer afford to ignore.

During the murderous years of World War II, French novelist Albert Camus foresaw the consequences of failing to confront this issue. "There is but one freedom," he wrote, "to put oneself right with death. After that, everything is possible." He probably should have written that "much is possible," since his extreme position has been shattered repeatedly in the modern era by one atrocity after another. But one hazard Camus prophesied clearly: Unless and until we learn to put ourselves "right with death," our freedom to live as fully as possible will be limited by a constant, if not always conscious, threat to our liberty of movement. We can no longer afford to dismiss the vexations of terror now that they have invaded our own spiritual and intellectual terrain. The most urgent challenge at the moment is to find a fruitful attitude toward this unprecedented invasion of our sovereignty without lapsing into paralysis or despair. We are finally asked to find ways—especially in educating a younger generation—of exploring alternatives to the illusion that the promise of American life is eternally available and secure.

This seems to be a new phenomenon in the lives of many Americans; it should not be. Shortly after the destruction of

the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan, countless witnesses were heard to declare that "nothing would ever be the same again." I was skeptical of this response at the time, authentic as it may have seemed to the speakers, and I remain skeptical today. People who had "put themselves right with death," who had learned to live after death, small as their numbers

may be, would not have spoken this way. Many Holocaust survivors I have interviewed were prone to recall with a grim nostalgia that the only dim light in the days following their rescue was the conviction that never again would the world have to experience what they had been forced to endure. They truly believed that when others had discovered the brutal nature of their ordeal they would initiate a

global program for insuring that it would not be repeated.

Obviously, this has not happened. Commentators like German sociologist Jürgen Habermas have long argued that "Auschwitz has changed the basis for the continuity of the conditions of life within history." Those who felt that "nothing would ever be the same again" after the collapse of the Twin Towers were voicing a similar intuition. What we mean when we use this language is that nothing *should* ever be the same again, in homage to the immense catastrophe from which we seek to recover. But unless such intuitions are internalized in human consciousness, they are doomed to dissipate and join the ranks of well-intentioned patriotic platitudes that replace reflective thinking. This is the premise from which all learning, but especially post-atrocity education, ought to proceed.

Such education does not argue that continuity of life within history is impossible, but that the foundations on which we now build are made of different and perhaps less substantial stuff. It reminds us that the crucial issue is not what we learn from the Holocaust and other atrocities, but what we must *unlearn* from them. This may sidetrack the normal momentum of education, but it is consistent with the belief that events like the destruction of the Twin Towers, to say nothing of the Holocaust, deflect the familiar momentum of human experience. The intensity of that deflection may be open to dispute, but it leaves us with the likelihood that because of such atrocities our sense of the future may be permanently disrupted—and hence, permanently disruptive.

The best way to meet and master this intrusion into the

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placid course of our lives is to understand it. Old adages will not do. The earlier assault on the World Trade Center, together with the Oklahoma City bombing, should have taught us the sheer absurdity of tired slogans like "Never Again!" just as they should have proclaimed how irrelevant was George Santayana's oft-cited aphorism that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Santayana was mistaken: Those who cannot remember the past are simply condemned to forget it. It is a matter of memory, not morality. That is why Holocaust education has long been one hedge against oblivion—an oblivion that is the last refuge of an ignorant mind.

The task before us is to replace maxims with insight. We have had ample opportunity to do this, but the habitual optimism of the American mind has interfered with its fulfillment. The legacy of horrendous death bequeathed by the events of September 11 may make it seem like a unique catastrophe, but it is not. Anyone familiar with the testimony of those who outlasted the Holocaust will know what Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo meant when she wrote in a poem, "Dying

over again/The death of those who died." To the ancient legends of the living dead we must now add painful hints of the dying living, drawn not from the annals of superstition, but from an authentic record of witnessed events. No one who saw it will ever forget the effect of watching the plane explode in flames as it crashed into the second tower. That spectacle, like Delbo's line, kindles not merely a memory of the past but an abiding presence. We are left dwelling in a middle realm where living and dying merge and re-form, but few current intellectual strategies teach us what this means or how to fuse it into contemporary consciousness.

Once we learn how to live after death, we must confront the more difficult labor of learning how to live *with* it. Those of a literary bent might phrase the question this way: How to exist internally in the Isles of the Blest and the Penal Colony *at the same time*. We have heard of the living dead, but never of the "dying living." Perhaps the place to begin is with the search for a new vocabulary consistent with the choices before us. It is the duty of ingenious educators, to say nothing of philosophers, to find a voice for what needs to be said. □

THE HUMAN WASTE DISPOSAL INDUSTRY (from page 42)

the threat was at home, not abroad. The native credentials of al-Mujahir likewise could fix a huge question mark on the planned anti-Iraq crusade and all its yet-unnamed sequels—why plan raids abroad if the danger comes from our own citizens? What was meat to some federal departments smacked of poison to some others. For the moment, those others seemed to get the upper hand, since the neck of the promising affair has promptly, swiftly, and expeditiously been wrung. But not for the lack of trying on the part of its authors and actors.

Modernity turned out, and kept turning out, from the start, huge volumes of human waste.

The production of human waste was particularly profuse in two (still fully operative and working to capacity) branches of modern industry.

The manifest function of the first of the two branches is the production and reproduction of social order. Any model of order is selective and requires cutting off, trimming, segregating, separating, or excising of such parts of the human raw material as are unfit for the new order—unable or not allowed to fill any of its niches. At the other end of the order-building process, such parts emerge as "waste," as distinct from the "useful," because intended, product.

The second branch of modern industry known to turn out continuously vast volumes of human waste is economic progress—which requires the incapacitation, dismantling, and eventual annihilation of a certain number of ways and means of eking out human existence; such livelihoods as cannot and would not meet the constantly-rising standards of productivity and profitability. Practitioners of these devaluated forms of life cannot, as a rule, be accommodated *en masse* by the new, slimmer, and smarter arrangements for

economic activity. They are denied access to such means of livelihood as the new arrangements have made legitimate/obligatory, while the orthodox means, now devalued, no longer offer survival. They are, for that reason, the waste of economic progress.

The potentially disastrous consequences of the accumulation of human waste were, for a better part of modern history, defused, neutralized, or at least mitigated thanks to another modern innovation: the waste-disposal industry. That industry thrived thanks to the turning of large parts of the globe into dumping grounds to which all "surplus of humanity," the human waste turned out by the modernizing sectors of the planet, could be transported, disposed off, and de-contaminated—thereby staving off the danger of self-combustion and explosion.

Today, however, the planet has run out of such dumping grounds, in large part due to the spectacular success—the planetary spread—of the modern form of life (since at least Rosa Luxemburg, modernity was suspected of an ultimately suicidal "snake eating its own tail" tendency). Dumping grounds are in ever-shorter supply. While the production of human waste goes on unabated (if anything, rising in volume due to the globalization processes), the waste-disposal industry has found itself in dire straits. The old ways of tackling human waste are no longer feasible, and new ways have not been invented, let alone put in operation. Along the fault-lines of the world disorder piles of human waste are rising, and the first signs of this waste's tendency toward self-inflamation and imminent explosion multiply.

The crisis of the human waste-disposal industry stands behind the present-day confusion, revealed by the desperate, though largely irrational and off-the-mark crisis management bustle triggered by the September 11 spectacle. □

Enlightenment in an Age of War

Robert Thurman

The following is an abridged version of a speech delivered at the Tikkun Community Founding Conference in January, 2002.

In the context of our newly emerging global community, all forms of violence including war, are totally inappropriate means of settling disputes ... there would be no winners at all if another global conflict were to occur today."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, my mentor in life, made this statement shortly after September 11. He has been making these statements steadily over the past fifty years, since he fled Tibet to live in exile. During a time in which his people have been victims of a genocide that has caused the death of about one-fifth of the population and the remaining population has been subjected to forced assimilation—he has always called for dialogue with the Chinese government.

Many people think this call is completely unrealistic, hopelessly idealistic in the pseudo-realist way of using the term, akin to waving a flag in a hurricane that will be shredded instantly. I think my task from a Buddhist perspective might be to encourage your own view. The impulse to solve what seems to be the intractable problem, to respond to the unforgivable with violence, is no longer survival-enhancing. In fact, it's entirely self-destructive. We are living in an unprecedented historical moment in which the size of the populations involved, the power of the weapons of mass destruction, and the power of the technology and information has made war "totally inappropriate." Our unrestrained scientific and technological intelligence has made it possible for any idiot to gain the power to obliterate the planet.

In the *Marabharata*—which is a sort of *Iliad* for the Indian people—a couple of warriors from the losers' side of the Marabharata War snuck into the victors' camp and slit the throats of all the children of the victorious warriors, cutting off the prosperity of the winners. For thousands of years, people have known about the unviability of violence in the long run. "Who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

The violent impulse needs to be channeled into aggressive self-conquest and self-control, and then forceful and honest dialogue with the opposing parties, even the ones seemingly impossible to speak with—the most heinous ones—because it seems that is the only way of surviving

oneself. In the Buddhist framework, peace is first created through this mastery over self and the ego, through mastery over our internal violence, and from this arises the possibility not only for compassion, but for transformation.

Of course, many people think that Buddhists are socially apathetic—navel gazers seeking Nirvana to avoid the hardships of life. This arises out of a misunderstanding of the First Principle of Buddhism: The unenlightened life is inevitably suffering. People often understand this to mean that suffering is inevitable. This isn't what is meant. The first principle means that unenlightened living inevitably brings suffering. As a prelude to the principle, the Dalai Lama said, "Enlightened living is blissful and all you have to do is come to an end in your ignorance, which makes you unenlightened, and then you'll have a good time." It's so obvious it isn't even esoteric, but people are so accustomed to their misery that they are very suspicious of anyone who tells them there is away to get rid of it.

If you think you're the real thing, that you're "it," you're courting the suffering the Buddha speaks of. You put yourself in the position of the child who never seems to get enough attention because the rest of the world doesn't agree with you. In Buddhist thought, this feeling that we are the real thing, the most important person, the center of everything, is delusory. We are not really any more real than others. Yet we are not totally unreal either. We are all here, we are in it together, we're all eccentrically present, we are all not the center, and therefore others are just as real as we are. And when we experience this, suddenly we are no longer against the rest of the world. We no longer have to be jealous of a person's happiness or success because we can identify with it. We no longer have to compete with them, we no longer have to be proud or contemptuous because we share the human experience—we become interconnected. We viscerally obliterate the illusion that we are the center of the whole universe, and we become happy instead of miserable. I know it doesn't sound too probable, but in fact it is the case.

Many theistic spiritual traditions use the image of God to do this. They say the individual's ego is obliterated in the face of God. In fact, Islam means the submission of the individual's will to the will of God. I'm sure that's the major yoga of Judaism, of Christianity, Vaishnavism, and Shaivism—there is that sense of submitting and realizing the non-centered, non-egocentric nature of life, and finding happiness in a larger spiritual being.

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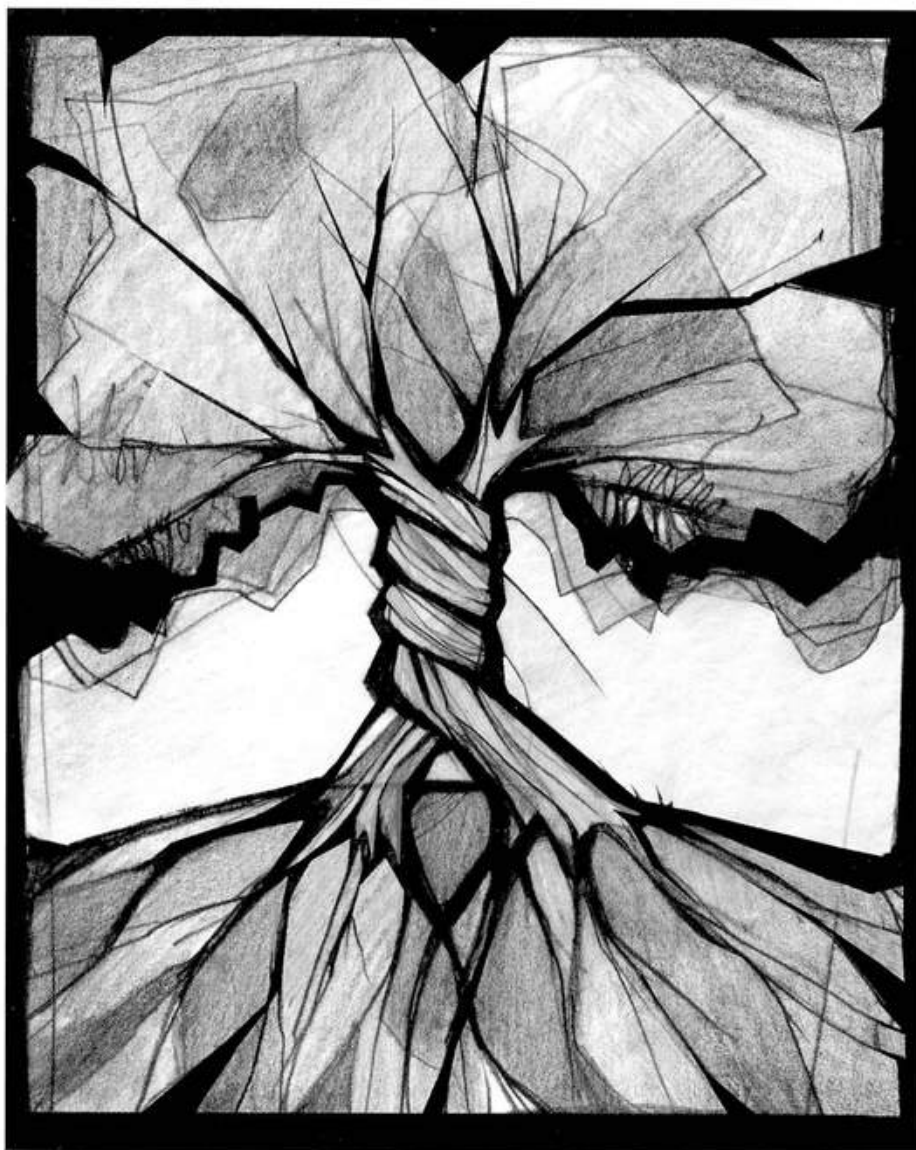
Of course the danger of monotheism from the Buddhist perspective is that one will invest that same egocentric feeling into God. So if God is the big center, and then God tells you—through a priest, through a scripture, through a dogma—that the infidel must be destroyed, then you'll obey, and you'll act just as egocentrically as you project that God is. I personally think that the Jewish people in their conquest of idolatry had a very deep insight in conquering that danger, by not pronouncing the name of God, by stripping away the vowels because consonants are dead without vowels, and having the idea that God is beyond any human being's conception.

From this place of submission of the ego, whether through God or through meditation, it is much easier to access what Buddhists call wisdom of selflessness and wisdom of interdependence—compassion and altruism naturally flow forth. As Shantideva, the Buddhist sage and brilliant author, says, "When you eat food, you don't stop in the middle of the eating, look at your hand and think, 'You are so kind and compassionate to give me that matzah ball.' You don't, because you think it's natural for that hand to feed you, because you and the hand are connected. You're not the same as the hand, but the hand gives you the food, and so when you feel connected to other beings like that, if you feed them, you don't want thanks, you don't expect it, it's just a natural thing to do."

As compassion becomes a natural fact, and the wisdom of non-egocentric living begins to flow, the impetus toward peace, justice, and reconciliation begins to grow. There are many social and spiritual movements in the Buddhist world and within other world religions, who are seeking to bring their liberal and liberative ideas into action: The Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Sarvodaya movement in India and Sri Lanka—there are many more than the mainstream media would have us believe.

As spiritual activists, we have a great deal to gain from dialoguing with each other. While affirming the particularities of our own spiritual practices, we can reinforce the best in each other, support each other's efforts and deepen our sense of interconnectedness.

On a stone pillar from the third century BCE in India, the emperor Ashoka carved, "Do not disparage the religious belief of another. You only reveal the weakness of your own religious practice when you do. And so therefore do not



criticize other religions—and, if the occasion is appropriate for mutual dialogue, then do not criticize immoderately."

It's amazing to think that over two thousand years ago, an Indian emperor was engaged in religious tolerance and compassionate listening. It's important that we carry on this tradition, but it is also critical that we take on the more fundamentalist members of our own communities who want to say, "only our way, only our interpretation, only our scripture," etc., because those sentiments are not only dangerous in the current climate, but fundamentally counter to the deepest truths of the world's religious traditions.

The great challenge before us is "to make the new century one of dialogue and nonviolence," as the Dalai Lama said. The subjugation of the Tibetan people, the boiling cauldron in the Middle East, the increasing levels of alienation and violence throughout the world, are but a few of the challenges we face in the years ahead. Modern "intelligence" has ushered us to the doorsteps of our annihilation, but it has also given us the capacity to see our interconnectedness manifest on a global scale. May Enlightenment see us through. □

The Cancer Within

Mohamad Bydon

In 1958, a little known Iraqi revolutionary—daring enough to assassinate a king—distinguished himself among his peers by arguing that the future of Iraq lay not with the Soviet Union but with the United States and Western Europe. Saddam Hussein ultimately rose to become president of Iraq and became a close, not to mention secular, American ally throughout the 1980s. His invasion of Kuwait had more to do with a steep national debt and plummeting oil prices than anything else; but when the invasion backfired, drawing him into a conventional showdown with the United States and the Western powers, Saddam attempted to garner support for his regime in the Arab world. So he bombed Tel Aviv.

Around the same period, a lanky *mujahid* (Muslim fighter) begged his father not to lease land to American authorities in need of regional military bases in Saudi Arabia. When his father refused to listen, the son began a crusade. Osama bin Laden, whose family originates from a town in Yemen called Hadramawt (literally “death of civilization”), began preaching against the insulting presence of U.S. troops on Saudi soil, the malice of U.S. sanctions on Iraq, and the complicity of the Saudi royal family. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not a vital issue for bin Laden at the time. In fact, he had long considered opposing American intervention in East Africa to be a more significant priority. But after September 11 and before the impending U.S. attack on Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden saw the need to win support for himself on the Arab street, so he declared defiantly that “America will not know peace until peace reigns in Palestine.”

For both men—the first reared in Arab nationalism and the second in Salafi Muslim fundamentalism—the question of Palestine had been of secondary importance. But both Saddam and bin Laden recognized, correctly I might add, that raising the issue of Palestinian suffering is the most reliable path to heroism in Arab society today.

Though heavily mistreated in many of the Arab nations (I witnessed this myself in Beirut’s Sabra and Shatila refugee camps), the Palestinians have come to symbolize for the

The Palestinians have come to symbolize for the Arabs a modern day Ishmael.

Arabs a modern day Ishmael. Within the Palestinian saga, one finds echoes of the biblical and Qur’anic tale of a first born son and his Egyptian mother expelled out of their home for the sake of young Isaac, father of the Jews.

Over these past decades, Arab leaders from Gamal Abdel Nasser to Amr Mousa have learned the political convenience of using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to deflect domestic

anger. It is not always what Israel does, but rather what Israel has come to represent: a tiny non-Arab, non-Muslim state that has in the course of fifty years defeated every major Arab military power while advancing to levels of “first world” economic development. The implications of such a situation in a decisively underdeveloped region of the world have been enormous. Instead of blaming their leaders for their miserable

conditions, the Arab peoples have accepted the explanation that Israel has conspired to retard Arab development. Thus the Iraqi people, who are among the poorest and most mistreated beings, are subjected to thirteen hours a day of “intifada footage” on their major television channels. And countless spokesmen explain the 1991 Gulf War as a Zionist-American plot to destroy what was at the time the most powerful Arab nation in the Middle East.

Far from explaining the state of affairs in the Arab world today, such rhetoric has released Arab dictators from accountability and made reasonable discourse about peace with Israel almost impossible. If Israel is guilty of dispossessing the Palestinian people, then peace would require that Israel compensate the Palestinians and respect their national aspirations. But, if Israel is conspiring with the great superpower of the world to ensure that the Arab nations remain an economically deprived, militarily incompetent group, then peace with Israel is impossible.

Additionally, Arab conspiratorial plots centered on Israel have ushered in a whole new wave of anti-Semitism. Even after Jordan signed a peace treaty with the state of Israel, the Jordanian government allowed the vendors of Amman to continue stocking hateful literature, including translated copies of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and *The Principles of the Elders of Zion*.

Given fifty years of warfare, George Bush’s declaration that Ariel Sharon is a “man of peace,” and European silence over the latest Israeli incursions, the Arab world must realize

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that a just resolution to the Palestinian crisis will not come from third party intervention. It will come from a reasonable and direct dialogue between Israel and the Arab states.

The onus for internal reform falls upon the shoulders of Arab peaceniks, who instead of focusing their efforts on a boycott of Starbucks, should be fighting to promote a more reasonable discourse on peace in the Middle East. Contrary to the claims of Arab leaders, the cancer at the heart of the Arab world is not Israel, but rather the ignorance that made mass-murderers like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden heroes to large segments of Arab society. This is the same ignorance that led entire populations to cheer Saddam's occupation of Kuwait while simultaneously decrying Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Arabs argue that Israel is a state guilty of gross human rights violations against the Palestinian people. They are right. In the West Bank and Gaza, Jews are granted the luxury of driving on well-maintained Jewish-only highways while Palestinians are relegated to sub-par roads. Palestinian homes are demolished and Palestinian land is usurped to make room for an expansion of Jewish settlements, harkening the communal Arab consciousness to the days of French colonial settlement in Algeria. As Israeli cabinet members openly talk about "transferring" Palestinians, the Israeli Defense Forces have enclosed Palestinian cities with ditches and barbed wire, turning entire towns into open-air prisons complete with curfews and restrictions on movement. Recently, the Israeli cabinet approved a bill that would allow Israelis to prevent Arabs from moving into "Jewish" cities in Israel proper.

My Jewish friends understand as well as I do how destructive such measures are both for Palestinians and the state of Israel. At the same time, these friends have taught me that the policies of the current Israeli government contradict Jewish traditions, which uphold a respect for human and civil rights. Indeed, some of the fiercest activists for Palestinian rights are themselves Jewish. A tremendous number of Israelis have mobilized in opposition to their government's policies only to be met with suicide bombers and the rhetoric of hate—the worst of Palestinian society. Too often, Arab demands for the freedom of Palestinians have been couched in calls for the destruction of Israel, rather than assurances of its safety. Arab supporters of Palestinian nationalism have yet to realize the potential alliance with left wing movements across Israel.

Here in the United States, right wing Jewish groups supporting Israel have made egregious miscalculations, similar to those made by their Arab opponents in the Middle East. AIPAC's refusal to criticize the settlement project, its unwavering support for even the most hawkish of Israeli governments, and its recent ties with Christian fundamentalists have

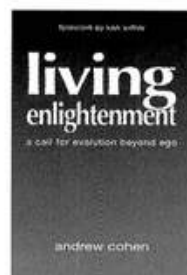
stifled reasonable discourse on the Middle East in this country. The alliance between some Jewish groups and right wing fundamentalist Christians is particularly unfortunate, as it has promoted a language of hate towards Arabs and Islam. The same Christian leaders who have pledged their support to the Jewish state (at least until the Messiah arrives) have made statements referring to Muslims as "evil," with one Christian Zionist leader going so far as to call the Prophet Muhammad, "a demon worshipping pedophile." Such inflammatory language will undoubtedly aid the enemies of Israel in the

Middle East, while disarming the supporters of peace. As a state in the midst of 300 million Muslims, Israel can ill-afford to be associated with Christian fundamentalist, anti-Muslim hate-mongering.

Today, as liberal Jews and Arabs, we find ourselves in a battle against the rhetoric and reality of fundamentalism. Our two groups have drawn a significant number of supporters in

Europe and the United States, but we have failed to realize that our most important alliance will be the one we build with each other. If we succeed in forging ties together, we can begin the arduous process of building neighborly societies. But if we fail, the cancer within may swallow us both. □

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Israeli Settlements

A Human Rights Perspective

Yehezkel Lein

In Israel and in the forum of international public opinion, the issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank is almost exclusively perceived as an abstract political concern. The dismantling of settlements is seen only within the framework of “concessions” Israel may be required to make in order to reach a final status agreement with the Palestinian Authority. This approach ignores the ongoing infringement of Palestinian human rights that stems from the establishment of the settlements, their dispersion throughout the West Bank, and their nature as Israeli enclaves that are separated from and closed-off to the Palestinian population.

The built-up areas of the settlements constitute less than 2 percent of the land in the West Bank (1.7 percent). However, the non built-up areas within the municipal boundaries of the settlements are three times as large (5.1 percent) most of which is already planned for construction. In addition, the settlements control another 35 percent of the land in the West Bank, which is under the jurisdiction of six Jewish regional councils (i.e., local government entities that provide services for their member settlements). This 35 percent is not yet planned for construction, but constitutes land reserves for the future expansion of the settlements.

Altogether, since Israel’s occupation of the West Bank in 1967, successive Israeli governments have expropriated over 40 percent of the land and transferred it to the control of the settlements. B’Tselem has prepared a map detailing these built-up areas and the land reserved for future development of settlements in the West Bank (see map on facing page).

Yet, it is not merely the extensive size of the area controlled by Israeli settlements, but also the specific location of settlements that has resulted in a myriad of human rights violations. A close look at several areas of the West Bank will

provide insight into the nature and extent of these violations.

With the exception of the Jericho enclave, the entire strip of land along the Jordanian border, including the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea coast, was declared the jurisdictional area of two Jewish regional councils (Arvot Hayarden and Megillot). The fewer than five thousand settlers that live in the Jordan Valley consume a huge portion of the West Bank’s water resources for agricultural purposes—equiva-

lent to 75 percent of the consumption of the entire Palestinian population in the West Bank for domestic and urban use. The denial of land and water resources prevents any possibility for the development of Palestinian agriculture. The settlements’ control of the Dead Sea coast also prevents the Palestinians from realizing any of the highly valuable economic opportunities in the fields of industry and tourism.

The settlements established on the mountain ridge that runs down the middle of the West Bank, in which some thirty-four thousand settlers reside, have serious implications for the dense Palestinian population living in the area. Most of these settlements were built alongside or adjacent to Road No. 60, which is the main artery connecting the six largest Palestinian cities in the West Bank. The location of these settlements was not accidental, but rather was explicitly intended to prevent the expansion of Palestinian construction toward the road and the connection of Palestinian communities located on opposite sides of it. The presence of Israeli citizens along densely populated, and sometimes hostile, Palestinian areas has led to a significant military presence in order to protect these citizens. During periods of increased violence against settlers, Israel has responded by imposing harsh restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Palestinian population along this key artery. These restrictions disrupt almost every aspect of everyday life for some two million Palestinians and severely infringe on their right to health, employment, family life and education.

The connection between the presence of settlers and restrictions on freedom of movement is even more apparent

Since Israel’s occupation of the West Bank in 1967, successive Israeli governments have expropriated over 40 percent of the land and transferred it to the control of the settlements.

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in places where Road No. 60 passes within the built-up area of Palestinian communities, such as in the towns of Hawara and Silat Ad-Dhaher (south and northwest of Nablus respectively). Since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the IDF has frequently imposed prolonged curfews on these towns in order to ensure the freedom of movement of the settlers living in the adjacent settlements.

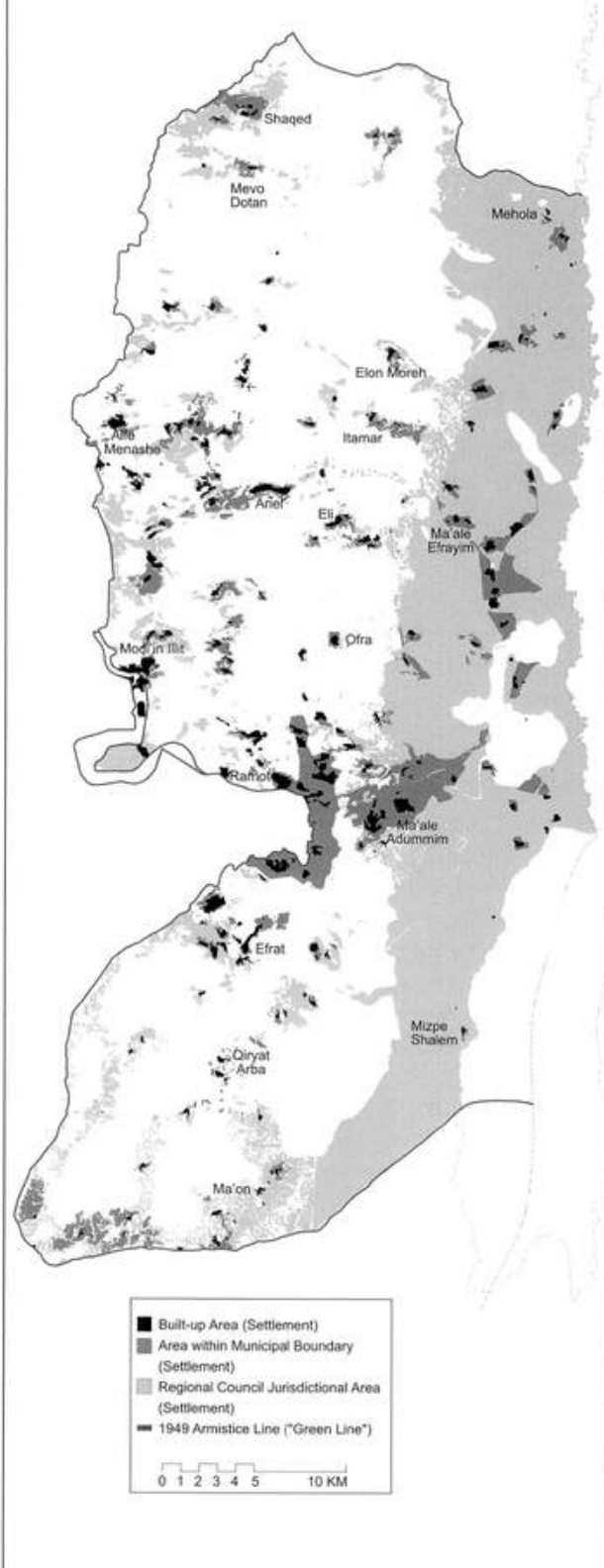
In the mountain ridge area, settlements block the urban development of the main Palestinian cities. For example, the urban area of Nablus, which includes approximately 158,000 inhabitants in eight villages and two refugee camps contiguous with the city, is surrounded on almost all sides by settlements. The settlements of Brakha and Yitzhar lie to the south of the city, the settlements of Kedumim and Shave Shomron to the west, to the east are the settlements of Elon Moreh and Itamar adjacent to the refugee camps of Askar and Balata, and a military base is located to the north, thus blocking the area's development in all directions.

The strategic location of settlements in different portions of the West Bank also prevents the creation of significant areas with Palestinian territorial contiguity. The most blatant example of this phenomenon is in the western strip adjacent to the Green Line, where dozens of settlements (e.g. Alfe Menashe, Karnei Shomron, and Modi'in Illit) were established following high demand among Israelis for cheap housing solutions, with easy access to the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. Due to the presence of these settlements in this area, Israel retained full control of most areas surrounding Palestinian towns and villages following the transfer of powers to the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords. This resulted in the creation of over fifty enclaves of Palestinian autonomous areas (Areas A and B) surrounded by Israeli controlled territory (Area C). (See the map on page 54.)

One of the main ramifications of this lack of continuity is that, although powers in the field of planning and construction in Areas A and B were ostensibly transferred to the Palestinian Authority, Israel continues to restrict Palestinian construction in the non-built-up areas belonging to these Palestinian communities and their residents. This geographic reality impedes the possibility of creating an independent and viable Palestinian state, and thus constitutes an infringement on the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The settlements established in the Jerusalem metropolis (an area that extends far beyond Jerusalem's municipal boundary) have implications both for Palestinian freedom of movement and the right to self-determination. The municipal area of the Ma'ale Adummim settlement—which is the largest off all the Israeli settlements—together with that of three small settlements to the north of it, create a contiguous bloc in the center of the West Bank that extends over some 17,500 acres, from the eastern boundary of Jerusalem to the western outskirts of Jericho. This area is almost fifteen times larger than the current built-up area of these settlements.

Areas Under Settlement Control

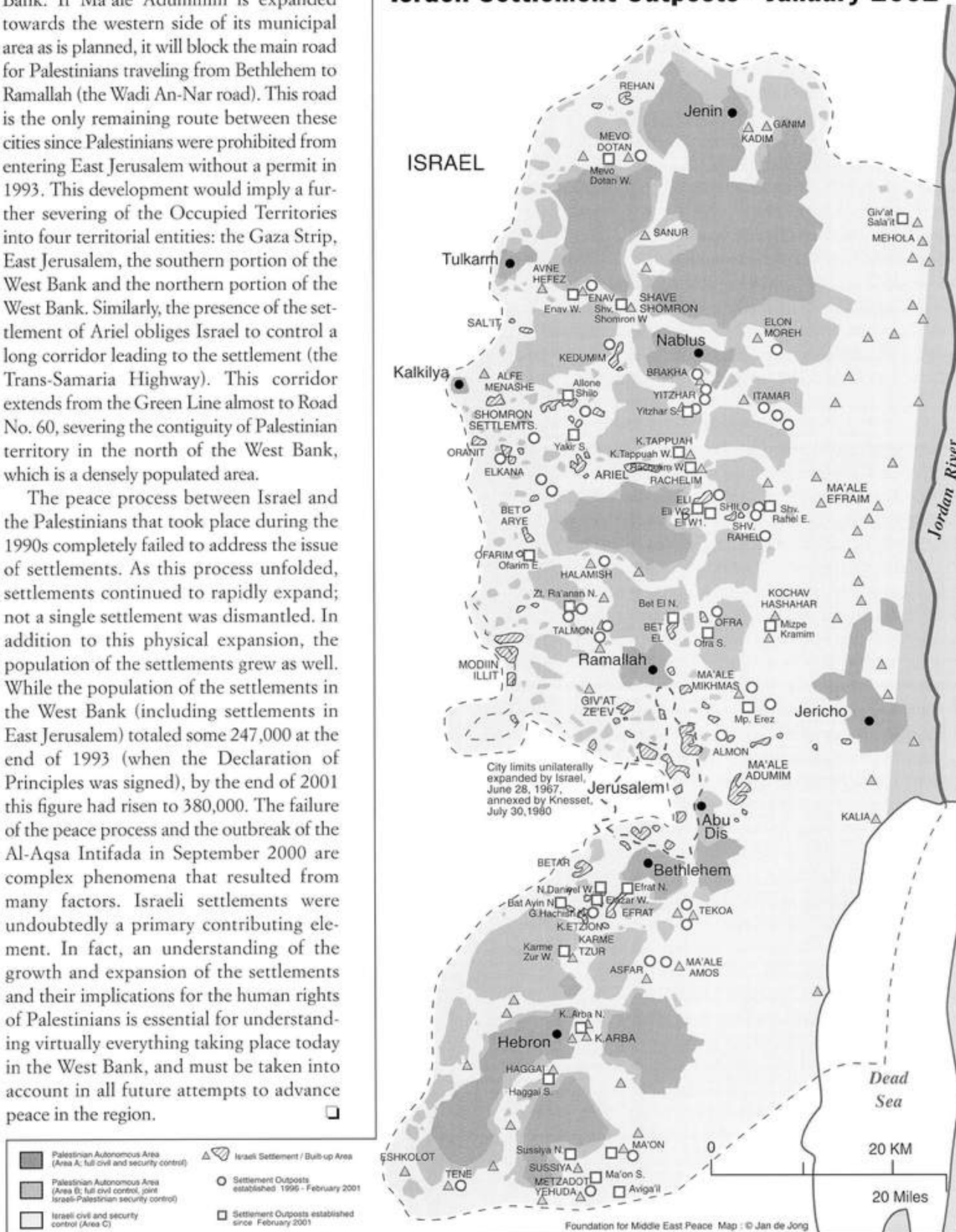


MIDEAST POLITICS

This settlement bloc bisects the West Bank. If Ma'ale Adumim is expanded towards the western side of its municipal area as is planned, it will block the main road for Palestinians traveling from Bethlehem to Ramallah (the Wadi An-Nar road). This road is the only remaining route between these cities since Palestinians were prohibited from entering East Jerusalem without a permit in 1993. This development would imply a further severing of the Occupied Territories into four territorial entities: the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the southern portion of the West Bank and the northern portion of the West Bank. Similarly, the presence of the settlement of Ariel obliges Israel to control a long corridor leading to the settlement (the Trans-Samaria Highway). This corridor extends from the Green Line almost to Road No. 60, severing the contiguity of Palestinian territory in the north of the West Bank, which is a densely populated area.

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians that took place during the 1990s completely failed to address the issue of settlements. As this process unfolded, settlements continued to rapidly expand; not a single settlement was dismantled. In addition to this physical expansion, the population of the settlements grew as well. While the population of the settlements in the West Bank (including settlements in East Jerusalem) totaled some 247,000 at the end of 1993 (when the Declaration of Principles was signed), by the end of 2001 this figure had risen to 380,000. The failure of the peace process and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 are complex phenomena that resulted from many factors. Israeli settlements were undoubtedly a primary contributing element. In fact, an understanding of the growth and expansion of the settlements and their implications for the human rights of Palestinians is essential for understanding virtually everything taking place today in the West Bank, and must be taken into account in all future attempts to advance peace in the region. □

Israeli Settlement Outposts - January 2002



The Jihâd Question

Esther Sakinab Quinlan

Most Americans have some image from September 11 that has stayed with them during the year since the attacks. Mine was not a television image. It was a single line of print: "One of the hijackers left a Qur'an in his rental car at Logan Airport." When I read it, I felt indignant and sad. I wondered if other Americans would draw the conclusion that this criminal had been reading the Qur'an to find justification for the crime he was about to commit. Trying to be optimistic, I told myself that "everyone *knows* the distortion of religious ideals is not new or unique to Islam; everyone *knows* that all religions have been used to mask naked aggression." Yet, accurate as these observations are, how persuasive are they compared to the image of Osama bin Laden stroking an AK47 and saying that jihâd is legitimate against all Americans? He and others like him believe that the Qur'an supports their understanding of jihâd. Even Muslims who reject terrorism have beliefs about jihâd that are unsettling.

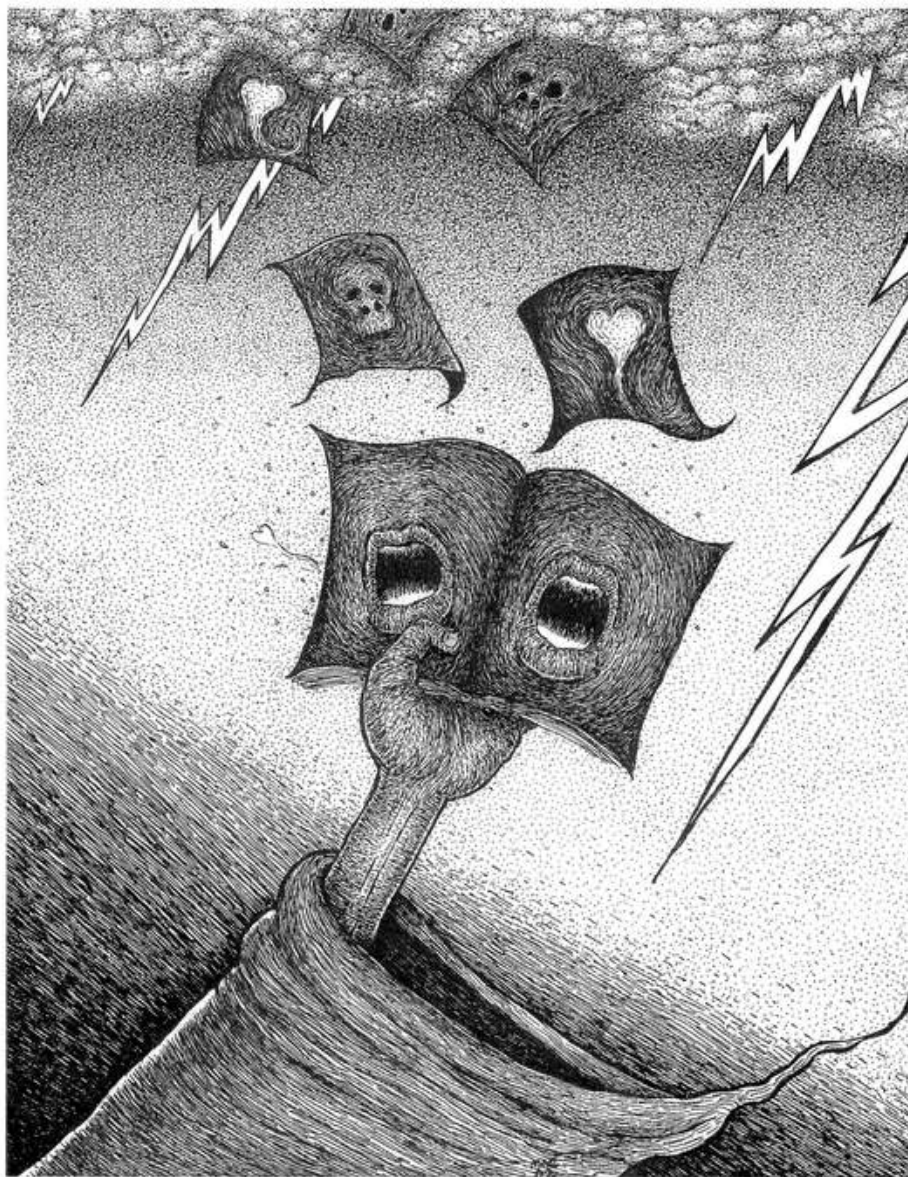
The emotive power of the word *jihâd* was shown at Harvard's commencement this year. Zayed Yasin, a graduating senior, was to deliver a speech entitled "Of Faith and Citizenship: My American Jihad." Many of his fellow students fervently opposed the administration's choice of speaker and his subject. They asked the university to remove him from the program.

At this time, when peace activists feel discouraged and face formidable obstacles in the United States and abroad, an accurate understanding of jihâd could open up a new avenue for discourse with Muslims.

Words

The word "*qur'an*" means *recitation*. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was communicated from God to Muhammad

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*In the Qur'an, jihâd means
restoring goodness.
Terrorism is not jihâd.*

through a mysterious process, with the Angel Gabriel as the intermediary. This is why Muhammad, like Moses, Jesus, and Abraham, is known as a Messenger of God. Muhammad received and transmitted the Qur'anic revelations as they came to him over a period of twenty-three years.

The Qur'an has a power, a kind of grace, known as *baraka*, which is impossible to analyze logically. Memorizing and reciting its verses is a sacred act because, as Professor Sayyed Hossein Nasr explains in his *Ideas and Realities of Islam*, the Divine presence in the text provides food for the souls of human beings. In more conventional terms, we can say that the Qur'an is not a "book" in the ordinary sense because its very words are considered sacred. Westerners, who tend not to respect the power of sacred language, can find such reverence puzzling.

The word *jihād* comes from the verb *jabada*: to struggle, to make an effort, and, by extension, to fight in defense of the faith. Some form of the word appears forty-one times in the Qur'an. Here are a few examples: "Seek the means to come to Him, and struggle in His way" (5:35); "Struggle in God's way with your possessions and your selves" (9:41) and "those who struggle in Our Cause, surely We shall guide them" (29:69).

The expression "struggle in God's way" has both an inner and an outer meaning. The struggle to be a good person and to draw near to God is the inner *jihād*. Muhammad called it the greater *jihād*, the *jihād al-akbar*. The lesser *jihād* is actual combat. Terrorism is not *jihād*. Muslim jurists distinguish four ways to fulfill the duty to struggle: by the heart, by the tongue, by the hands, and by the sword. Different though the word seems from the Hebrew word *tikkun*, *jihād* does have the sense of transforming and putting things right, restoring goodness, order, and justice—restoring those qualities which the Creator meant life in this world to have. When *genuine* *jihād* results in these things, healing has occurred.

The Qur'an and Extremists

Terrorists and radicals have their own sense of what *jihād* means. In a way, extremist "Islamism" is like other "isms"; it is a kind of millennialism. These people yearn for a perfect world, a "pure Islam." They yearn for an end to suffering and injustice; they yearn to topple the imperial powers that they see as the agents of evil. To generate combative, manic energy, they frame the entire world in dualistic terms of light and darkness. They see the United States as king of the forces of darkness because it has the most power and money.

It can be very hard for Americans to understand why these fundamentalists—and sometimes even their more moderate co-religionists—hate us, our culture, and our international policies that have left huge footprints in their world.

Psychologically, Muslims are reacting to a collective humiliation and feeling of powerlessness that can be traced to a steady eight-hundred-year decline in the scope and power of the Muslim world—a decline which the West has manipulated to its advantage. Muslims were once a very proud people with a society advanced in the arts, science, and social organization. At the time of the Crusades, Muslims regarded the crusaders as total barbarians, with some reason. But gradually the Islamic Empire weakened and Western powers reduced the Muslim states to colonies. After World War I, Western powers again carved up the Middle East in ways that served to further their own power. The UN's creation of Israel in 1948 and the Arab's defeat in the 1967 Six Day War left no doubt about how powerless Arab Muslims had become.

After Arab-Muslim countries finally won their independence from the West, they tried to reassert themselves

through Marxism, then Nationalism—both of which failed. Those failures led Arab Muslims to turn to their own indigenous culture: the culture and religion of Islam; this turning has led them to seek in the Qur'an verses which validate their hurt and hold the promise of restoring self-respect. The anger that they feel at their continuing failure to succeed politically and economically becomes displaced and projected onto the West.

Because extremists use the Qur'an to justify their views, those who wish to understand Islam must take a short course in Qur'anic interpretation. Just as the Judeo-Christian Bible can be used by both the Left and Right, the Qur'an is susceptible to radically different readings.

One of the most influential figures in radical Islam is Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian activist in the 1950s, who argued in favor of confronting all non-Islamic power structures with physical force. Even existing "Islamic" states became potential targets. Qutb's book, *Milestones*, epitomizes radical Islam. Even some moderates who reject terrorism respect him as a martyr.

The pages of *Milestones* crackle with the fire of millennialism. Qutb writes that the purpose of Islam's coming into history is "to proclaim the authority and sovereignty of God ... to eliminate all human kingship, and to announce the rule of the Sustainer of the universe over the entire earth." The fact that the Sustainer of the universe already has authority over all of creation seems to have escaped him. But projecting perfection into the future characterizes millennialist thinking.

Sayyid Qutb believes that "Islam is a declaration of the freedom of every man or woman from servitude to other humans." How will this heady freedom happen? Qutb says that Islam will take the initiative (read "hostile action") because

it has the right to destroy all obstacles in the form of institutions and traditions that restrict man's freedom of choice. It does not attack individuals nor does it force them to accept its beliefs. It attacks institutions and traditions in order to release human beings from the pernicious influence which distorts human nature and curtails human freedom.

What then is Sayyid Qutb's Qur'anic justification for such destruction, for such a radical vision of *jihād*? He and other thinkers claim that the Qur'anic verses promoting liberation of the oppressed are a *carte blanche* for destruction. What of Qur'anic verses advocating restraint? Qutb draws his answer from Islamic history. In the early days of the Prophet's mission, Qutb argues, Muhammed had no armed forces; therefore, God prescribed restraint, patience, and the making of treaties with unbelievers, Jews, and others. It was during this period that the verses forbidding the initiation of *jihād* were revealed. However, when the Muslim community was secure in Medina in the later years of the Prophet's life, verse 9:29 was revealed.

And fight those who have not faith in God,
Nor in the Hereafter, and [who] forbid not
What God and His Prophet have forbidden,
And [who] are not committed to the religion of
Truth among those who have been given the Book,
Until they pay the tribute and are humbled.

Qutb and those Muslims who believe that the above verse authorizes an on-going jihād look back to a mist-shrouded Golden Age—to the time when Islam ruled most of two continents and when non-Muslims were required to pay a small but symbolic tax. The reference to humbling (literally *made small*) soothes the sense of powerlessness and humiliation that many Arab Muslims feel. At the same time, the reference also upsets Americans because of our ideals of equality before the law and the separation of religion and law. Not reacting with aggression or denigration to this view severely stretches and tests our capacity for tolerance. Because the stakes are so high now, we must understand and not demonize those who test us. If we demonize them, we make them more powerful.

The Qur'an and Moderates

In contrast to the historical and literalist interpretations of Muslim extremists lies the interpretive practice of moderate Muslims and the Sufis, who represent the esoteric, mystical dimension of Islam. In contrast to the extremists, when moderate Muslims, and especially the Sufis, read the Qur'an, they understand that the accounts of the prophets are not just historical. They are also accounts of the struggle in each human soul. While terrorists like Qutb read the Qur'an literally or as an external political allegory, moderates will read the Qur'an as an internal allegory of the soul. For example, extremists read Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, ironically, as a political allegory for the Muslims' confrontation with the United States (and the Jews!). Moderates, on the other hand, tend to read Pharaoh as representing an inner evil that we must work to overcome.

Moderates and Sufis also take a different approach from the extremists when it comes to interpretive dilemmas. Extremists tend to disregard verses that contradict verses that support their goals. Moderates and Sufis, on the other hand, both agree that all verses on a particular issue must be examined before making any determination about which verse to follow. In particular, this way of reading the Qur'an is based on the principle that an interpretation of a verse is valid *only* if it does not contradict another verse in the Qur'an. Application of this principle prevents the distortion

that occurs by taking quotations out of context.

To better understand this all-important principle, we can turn to the work of Iranian scholar Ayatollah Mutahharri, who has demonstrated in his lectures (available online at www.al-islam.org/short/jihad) the intellectual and religious dishonesty of using the Qur'an to justify terrorism and murder. Readers may wonder at the validity of using an Iranian scholar for this purpose when Iran itself waged a ghastly and ultimately futile nine-year "jihād" against Iraq. Although the Iranian government is overseen by religious authorities, not all religious scholars can be manipulated to say what the state wants them to say. Mutahharri is respected for the independence and integrity of his arguments.

Both Qur'anic scholars like Mutahharri (and Sufis such as the poet Rumi) differentiate between conditional verses and unconditional verses. According to Mutahharri, "when both an unconditional and a conditional command exist, i.e., when there is an instruction that in one place is unconditional but in another place has a condition attached, then ... the

unconditional [one] must be interpreted [in light of] the conditional [one]." In other words, when Muslims cite verses that command them to fight, they must interpret those verses *together with* other verses that restrict fighting to specific circumstances. Here is an example of this method of interpretation.

Extremists like bin Laden and Qutb quote *unconditional* verses about fighting, verses such as this one: "slay them [enemies] wherever you find them" (4:89) or this one: "O Prophet, fight against the unbelievers and hypocrites and be stern against them" (9:73). (The verb in these verses is *qatala*, to fight, slay.) Terrorists cite this type of verse because it suits their political purpose. According to the scholars like Mutahharri, however, taking verses out of context is an illegitimate way to use the Qur'an. Thus, the command to fight against unbelievers is qualified by the command that permits fighting against those who begin aggression. "Defend yourself against your enemies, but do not attack them first; God hates the aggressor" (2:190). No permission is given to fight or kill anyone except those who begin the aggression.

There are two other situations in which actual fighting is permitted. The first case directly involves religion and religious practice. The Qur'an explicitly forbids compelling anyone to adopt a religion. "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). At the same time, other people do not have the right to forbid people from being Muslims. Doing so is considered a form of aggression. Yet even when Muslims find their faith under attack, says Ayatollah Mutahharri and

Muslims are reacting to a collective humiliation and feeling of powerlessness that can be traced to a steady 800-year decline in the scope and power of the Muslim world

other authorities, "It is not permissible for us to fight with that nation, with those people who are blameless and unaware. Nevertheless, it is permissible for us to fight against that corrupt regime."

The second Qur'anic condition that makes the use of force valid is the obligation to fight those who oppress others. The Qur'an says: "Permission is given [for warfare] to those who have been attacked and definitely wronged." (22:39) Coming to the aid of victims of injustice, regardless of their religion, is an obligation. This idea is identical to the Christian concept of the just war. It is also part of America's justification for intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, in World War II, and now in Afghanistan.

Sayyed Hossein Nasr, in *Islam and the Question of Violence*, writes that

Even in war ... the inflicting of any injury to women, and children is forbidden, as is the use of force against civilians. Only fighters in the field of battle must be confronted with force, and it is only against them that injurious physical force can be used. Inflicting injuries outside of this context ... is completely forbidden by Islamic Law.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, would not allow his soldiers to fight when he returned in triumph with an army to Mecca, the city that had driven him and his followers out. Many enemies of Islam remained there. But because believers were mixed together with unbelievers, and civilians were mixed with warriors, he forbade combat. The terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center—where only civilians worked, and where there certainly was a mixture of believers and non-believers—ignored not only the Qur'an's guidelines, but also Muhammad's example.

The Qur'an advocates peace and reconciliation whenever possible. It says that "peace is better" (4:128) and "O you who have found faith, enter peace wholly" (2:20), and, even more to the point, "And if they incline to peace, then you incline to it" (8:61). Perhaps the most important verse about peace is this one: "Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer peace, God does not allow you to harm them" (4:90). When peace is *not* possible, the sacred text places clear conditions on the use of force in order to control the human inclination to be unjust and aggressive.

The situation in seventh-century Arabia was not really so different from our world today. As we know, aggression and injustice require a response. Sometimes that response includes combat. The Qur'anic principles regarding the regulation of combat are designed to (1) limit and control the use of force in order to restore justice, (2) permit self-defense, and (3) when necessary, protect the free practice of religion.

Israel-Palestine

The subject of terrorism and jihād cannot be separated from the current situation in Palestine. Indeed, as Thomas Friedman said, the subject of Israel is the Iron Curtain dividing America and the Arab-Muslim world. This is especially true now. In the last year, the situation has deteriorated into bloody suicide bombings echoed by bloody Israeli reprisals. To Arab Muslims still pained by the wounds of colonialism, Israel is an European-American colony in the midst of an Arab nation. To them, Israel represents their

greatest failure. It is a constant reminder of their lack of power. Almost all the suicide bombers have a personal reason that supports their insane act: the death, maiming, or imprisonment of a loved one at enemy hands. For them, the general feeling of humiliation and powerlessness has materialized in a concrete way. A high percentage of these suicides seems to be more of a personal act than a religious one.

For ordinary Muslims who are not extremists, Palestine is a collective wound. They feel that they cannot turn their backs on their suffering brothers

and sisters there, the religious bond being stronger than the national bond. They relate these lines from the Qur'an to the Palestinians:

Why should you not fight in the cause of God when weak men, women, and children are imploring: "Our Lord, deliver us from this community whose people are oppressive" (4:75).

Taking these lines completely out of context, bin Laden saw the September 11 terror as a strike against Israel as well. Few Arab Muslims have taken that extremist position. Many, however, while condemning the September 11 attacks, have coupled their condemnation with reference to the injustice the Palestinians endure. For example, Shaykh al-Qaradawi calls the September 11 acts a "heinous crime in Islam," but goes on to suggest that the Palestinian attacks on Israel belong to a different category: The category covered by the verse that sanctions fighting to liberate those who are oppressed.

To support suicide bombings, pro-terrorist Muslims quote this verse:

Those who fight in the cause of God are those who forsake this world in favor of the Hereafter. Whoever fights in the cause of God and then is killed, or attains victory, We [God] will surely grant him a great recompense (4:74).

Here again, we need to apply the basic principle of Qur'anic interpretation: that one interpretation must not contradict another. In two verses (17:33 and 4:29) the Qur'an, by implication, condemns suicide. In 2:195, it does so explicitly: "Cast not yourselves into destruction by your

Almost all the suicide bombers have a personal reason that supports their insane act: the death, maiming, or imprisonment of a loved one at enemy hands.

own hand.” Therefore, the above verse concerning the reward for martyrdom cannot be interpreted in a vacuum. It must be tempered and re-interpreted along side the Qur’anic prohibition against taking one’s own life.

Besides, common sense tells us that suicide is not a way to fight, nor does it leave to God the option of whether one lives or dies during battle. It is a taking of one’s life in one’s own hands, an act which usurps the right belonging to Him alone who gave that life. In addition, suicide bombings are designed to kill innocent civilians, an act expressly forbidden by the Qur’an. For these two reasons, suicide as a method of jihād cannot be justified according to Islamic principles, as moderates understand them.

Conclusion

It is natural to ask, “Why didn’t God just put all the guidelines about jihād together in one place in His Book and arrange it so that there is no room for misunderstanding? If He had done that, then the hijackers piloting their planes into the World Trade Center could not have looked to the Qur’an for support.” Another Sufi scholar, Frithjof Schuon, has an answer. He explains that “A sacred text with its seeming contradictions and obscurities is ... like a mosaic, or even an anagram.” Because of this divine design, only a holistic hermeneutics will do.

This mosaic design of a sacred text tests those who look to it for truth. Whatever our faith, we want truth to be easy to grasp; we want our sacred texts to read like a clear textbook. But they do not. In fact, as Christians and Jews well know, sacred texts are difficult. Pope Pius XII said that God has made them this way “in order that we may be stimulated to read and study them with greater attention.”

Today, we must do more than read and study our sacred texts. We are in the grip of huge historical forces. In order to carry the Light in the Darkness of these times, we can do several things. We can refuse to accept a hate-filled reading of the Qur’anic concept of jihād and refuse to demonize Muslims.

On the political level, we can pressure leaders to see that it is not in America’s best interest to support repressive Middle Eastern regimes or regimes which exclude all Islamic parties from the political process. Such policies provide terrorists the hooks on which to hang their millennialist projections.

Offering secularism as the antidote to religious violence, as some journalists propose, plays into the hands of those who see their role as combatants, “soldiers of God” in the fight against atheist rule. The infiltration of secularism into the Muslim world ignites feelings of humiliation and powerlessness. To most Muslims, religion and culture are a single package. However, the primary responsibility for intervention rests with Muslims themselves. Islam contains within it the means to correct the distorted use of its holy book. Consultation (*shur’ah*) is encouraged in Islam. Muslims must counter the terrorists’ perverted use of the

Qur’an—not directly—but through education and dialogue. Some of this is happening, but not nearly enough. In some places, challenging the extremists endangers one’s life. It may well be that North American converts to Islam and immigrant Muslims, who are free to speak out without risk here, should shoulder much of this responsibility. What Muslims are thinking and believing here filters back to the countries the immigrants came from.

In addition, there is a role for Americans of other faiths. Inviting Muslims to engage in dialogue can be invaluable for both parties. True dialogue is not just the exchange of viewpoints. The information exchanged is secondary to the recognition of the divine heart in all people. Every time this happens, the forces of darkness are reduced a little.

Such a recognition happened to my husband when he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. While out walking, he met an old shopkeeper in a tiny store selling teapots, little polyester prayer rugs, and cigarettes. The old man asked where he came from. My husband said, “America.” With wonder in his voice, the old man repeated “America! America!” and then burst into tears of joy and hugged him. This is what we need more of. □

ON TRYING NOT TO GET POLARIZED (from page 27)

alternative that massive retaliation is the most sure path to further Palestinian violence—does not rest on who is more or less “in denial;” it rests on matters of personal world view, ideological preference, and other factors that are more a matter of value than of who is more in touch with “what is really going on.” There is too much going on for anyone to know what is really going on, and the meaning of it all is too open to various interpretations for an appeal to “the facts” to carry the day. We must, then, acknowledge that those who support some or all of what the Sharon government is doing are not plain wrong, even if we passionately disagree with them and believe that their views are leading to incalculable human suffering.

I am not espousing a paralyzing relativism. There *are* facts about what is going on in the West Bank, for example, that *can* be denied by people in the service of justifying their political position. I believe, however, that we should be seeking some balance, or tension, between “calling a spade a spade,” and making room for multiple perspectives, including those that we feel have destructive consequences. Too much certainty leads to authoritarianism; too little leads to paralysis, sometimes in the face of atrocities. Clearly, it seems to me, we need to define some sort of middle ground. Finding that middle ground is a precondition to being able to argue one’s case with passion and simultaneously to respect one’s adversary; it is all the more difficult to respect one’s adversaries when so much—matters of life and death—is at stake. But, if there is ever to be any kind of settlement in the Middle East, that is just what the participants, with guns pointing at their heads, will have to do. □

An Ocean with Many Shores

Jorge N. Ferrer

It's very reassuring to think that all the different religions and spiritual traditions in the world are aimed at sharing the same basic truths—and that we are all heading in the same direction. The hopes of eliminating wars and tensions between spiritual traditions is a noble goal for a humanity that has been torn apart by religious wars. No wonder it's an attractive alternative to imagine that we could all agree that there is really one basic or perennial truth—we might then find ourselves in a world with less war and less conflict. Apparent differences could be explained away: Differences between different traditions would be seen as little more than problems of translating from one spiritual language to another. Differences in behavior might be understood as reflecting different stages in the development of consciousness toward the higher rungs of this perennial truth. The task of humanity would be to find a common spiritual language and to accelerate the development of those in a “lower” place to a “higher” place. Spiritual education could solve human problems, and spiritual harmony (even the elimination of wars over religious differences) could be achieved once we developed the best techniques for facilitating or supporting people through the stages of spiritual development.

I call this a “Perennialist” position, and, though I can easily understand the appeal of such a picture, I'm afraid that it doesn't really tell an accurate story of spiritual reality. The Perennialist position ignores the way spiritual reality itself is in a process of evolution, and the role human beings and human choices play in shaping that evolution. In my view, we can't talk about people being at a certain stage of some pre-existing spiritual grid, but we can talk about the choices we make that continually shape and evolve that grid.

Despite their professed inclusivist stance, most of the prevailing universalist visions in the modern West tend to distort the essential message of various religious traditions, favoring certain spiritual paths over others and raising seri-

ous obstacles for spiritual dialogue and inquiry. Instead, I would like to suggest that spirituality emerges from human co-creative participation in an always dynamic and indeterminate spiritual power. This participatory understanding not only makes hierarchical rankings of spiritual traditions appear misconceived, but also reestablishes our direct connection with the source of our being and expands the range of valid spiritual choices that we as individuals can make.

*Spiritual knowing
engages us in a connected,
often passionate, activity*

The Participatory Nature of Spiritual Knowing

Spiritual knowing is a participatory process. What do I mean by “participatory”? First, participatory alludes to the fact that spiritual knowing is not objective, neutral, or merely cognitive. On the contrary, spiritual knowing engages us in a connected, often passionate, activity that can involve not only the opening of the mind, but also of the body, the heart, and the soul.

Although particular spiritual events may involve only certain dimensions of our nature, all of them can potentially come into play in the act of spiritual knowing, from somatic transfiguration to the awakening of the heart, from erotic communion to visionary co-creation, from contemplative knowing to moral insight, to mention only a few.

Second, the participatory nature of spiritual knowing refers to the role that our individual consciousness plays during most spiritual and transpersonal events. This relation is not one of appropriation, possession, or passive representation of knowledge, but of communion and co-creative participation.

Finally, “participatory” also refers to the fundamental ontological predicament of human beings in relation to spiritual energies and realities. Human beings are—whether we know it or not—always participating in the self-disclosure of spirit. This participatory predicament is not only the ontological foundation of the other forms of participation, but also the epistemic anchor of spiritual knowledge claims and the moral source of responsible action.

Spiritual phenomena involve participatory ways of knowing that are presential, enactive, and transformative:

1. Spiritual knowing is presential: Spiritual knowing is knowing by presence or by identity. In other words, in most

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spiritual events, knowing occurs by virtue of being. Spiritual knowledge can be lived as the emergence of an embodied presence pregnant with meaning that transforms both self and world. Subject and object, knowing and being, epistemology and ontology are brought together in the very act of spiritual knowing.

2. Spiritual knowing is enactive: Following the groundbreaking work of neuroscientists Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, my understanding of spiritual knowing embraces an enactive paradigm of cognition: Spiritual knowing is not a mental representation of pregiven, independent spiritual objects, but an enaction, the bringing forth of a world or domain of distinctions co-created by the different elements involved in the participatory event. Some central elements of spiritual participatory events include individual intentions and dispositions; cultural, religious, and historical horizons; archetypal and subtle energies; and, most importantly, a dynamic and indeterminate spiritual power of inexhaustible creativity.

3. Spiritual knowing is transformative: Participatory knowing is transformative at least in the following two senses. First, the participation in a spiritual event brings forth the transformation of self and world. Second, a transformation of self is usually necessary to be able to participate in spiritual knowing, and this knowing, in turn, draws forth the self through its transformative process in order to make possible this participation.

An Ocean with Many Shores

Given a participatory account of human spirituality, we can begin to explore the radical plurality not only of spiritual paths, but also of spiritual liberations and spiritual ultimates.

Let us begin our story by departing from a classic Perennialist account. Perennialism generally postulates a single spiritual ultimate which can be directly known through a transconceptual, and presumably ineffable, metaphysical intuition. This insight, so the story goes, provides us with a direct access to “things as they really are,” that is, the ultimate nature of reality and our innermost identity. Central to this view is the idea that once we lift the manifold veils of cultural distortions, doctrinal beliefs, egoic projections, a sense of separate existence, and so forth, the doors of perception are unlocked and the true nature of self and reality is revealed to us in a flashing, liberating insight. From a classic Perennialist perspective, every spiritual tradition leads, in practice, to this identical, single vision. Or to use one of the most popular Perennialist metaphors, spiritual traditions are “like rivers leading to the same ocean.”

I do believe spiritual traditions have a common “ocean,” to use the Perennialists’ metaphor, but the ocean shared by most traditions does not correspond to a cross-cultural spiritual ultimate or to “things as they really are.” Perhaps more



humbly, what religious and spiritual traditions share is the interest in overcoming our narrow self-centeredness and thus liberating ourselves from our correspondingly limited—and limiting—perspectives. For the sake of brevity, and mindful of the limitations of this metaphor, since most traditions identify the liberation from self-centeredness as pivotal for this transformation, I will call this common element the “Ocean of Emancipation.”

I thus agree with the Perennialists that most genuine spiritual paths (be they knowledge of Brahman in Advaita Vedanta, the cleaving to God in Judaism, or the commitment to visionary service in Shamanism) involve a gradual transformation from self-centeredness towards a fuller participation in the Mystery of existence. In almost every spiritual path we witness a liberation from self-imposed suffering, an opening of the heart, and a commitment to a compassionate and selfless life. It is in this spirit, I believe, that the Dalai Lama thinks of a common element in religion:

“If we view the world’s religions from the widest possible viewpoint, and examine their ultimate goal, we find that all

of the major world religions are directed to the achievement of permanent human happiness. They are all directed toward that goal. To this end, the different world's religions teach different doctrines which help transform the person. In this regard, all religions are the same, there is no conflict."

I also concur with Perennialism in holding that the entry into the Ocean of Emancipation may be accompanied, or followed by, a transconceptual disclosure of reality. Due to the radical interpenetration between cognizing self and cognized world, once the self-concept is deconstructed, the world may reveal itself to us in ways that transcend our mental conceptualization. Nevertheless—and here I depart radically from Perennialism—I maintain that there are a multiplicity of transconceptual disclosures of reality. Perennialists erroneously assume that the transconceptual disclosure of reality must be necessarily One. In other words, Perennialists generally believe that plurality emerges from concepts and interpretations, and that the transcending of this sort of conceptual proliferation must then result in a single apprehension of "things as they really are."

But to enter the Ocean of Emancipation does not inevitably tie us to a particular disclosure of reality, even if it is transconceptual. In contrast, what the mystical evidence suggests is that there are a variety of possible spiritual insights and ultimates (Tao, Brahman, Sunyata, God, Kaivalyam, etc.) whose transconceptual qualities, although sometimes overlapping, are irreducible and often incompatible (personal versus impersonal, impermanent versus eternal, dual versus nondual, etc.). Perennialism typically accounts for this conflicting evidence by assuming that those qualities correspond to different interpretations, perspectives, dimensions, or levels of a single ultimate reality. As I see it, however, this interpretation is not only unfounded and problematic, but also covertly posits a pre-given spiritual ultimate that is then hierarchically situated over other spiritual goals.

A more fertile way to approach the diversity of spiritual claims is to hold that the various traditions lead to the enactment of different transconceptual disclosures of reality. Although these different spiritual realities may apparently share some qualities (e.g., nonduality in Sunyata and Brahmajñāna), they constitute independent religious aims whose conflation may prove to be a serious mistake. In terms of our metaphor, we could say, then, that the Ocean of Emancipation has many shores.

Whereas Ken Wilber and other transpersonalists have rightly identified certain parallels across contemplative paths, contextualist scholars of mysticism have correctly emphasized that the enactment of different spiritual insights requires specific mystical teachings, trainings, and practices. Or, put in traditional terms, particular "rafts" are needed to

arrive at particular spiritual "shores": If you want to reach the shore of Nirvana, you need the raft of the Buddhist Dharma, not the one provided by Christian praxis. And if you want to realize knowledge of Brahman (Brahmajñāna), you need to follow the Advaitin path of Vedic study and meditation, and not the practice of Tantric Buddhism, devotional Sufi dance, or psychedelic Shamanism and so forth. In this account, the Dalai Lama is straightforward about the uniqueness of each tradition when he states: "Liberation in which 'a mind that understands the sphere

of reality annihilates all defilements in the sphere of reality' is a state that only Buddhists can accomplish. This kind of *moksa* or Nirvana is only explained in the Buddhist scriptures, and is achieved only through Buddhist practice."

What is more, different liberated awarenesses can be encountered not only among different religious traditions, but also within a single tradition itself. Listen

once again to the Dalai Lama:

Questioner: "So, if one is a follower of Vedanta, and one reaches the state of *satcitananda*, would this not be considered ultimate liberation?"

His Holiness: "Again, it depends upon how you interpret the words, 'ultimate liberation.' The *moksa* which is described in the Buddhist religion is achieved only through the practice of emptiness. And this kind of nirvana or liberation, as I have defined it above, cannot be achieved even by Svatantrika Madhyamikas, by Cittamatras, Sautrantikas, or Vaibhasikas. The follower of these schools, though Buddhists, do not understand the actual doctrine of emptiness. Because they cannot realize emptiness, or reality, they cannot accomplish the kind of liberation I defined previously."

What the Dalai Lama is suggesting here is that the various spiritual traditions and schools cultivate and achieve different contemplative goals. He is adamant in stressing that adherents to other religions, and even to other Buddhist schools, cannot attain the type of spiritual liberation cultivated by his own. Alternative understandings of emptiness exist even among the various Buddhist schools. To lump together these different awarenesses into one single spiritual referent reachable by all traditions may be profoundly distorting. Each spiritual shore is independent and needs to be reached by its appropriate raft.

Although the metaphor of an ocean with many shores is helpful to illustrate the variety of spiritual realities, it is ultimately inadequate to convey the participatory and enactive nature of spiritual knowing. As with all geographical metaphors, one can easily get the mistaken impression that these shores are pre-given, somehow waiting out there to be reached or discovered. That view, of course, would automatically catapult us back to a kind of perspectival

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Perennialism, which accounts for the diversity of religious goals in terms of different perspectives or dimensions of the same pre-given Ground of Being. This participatory account should not then be confused with the view that mystics of the various kinds and traditions simply access different dimensions or perspectives of a ready-made single ultimate reality. Such a view merely allows that the same pre-given spiritual referent can be approached from different vantage points. In contrast, the view I am advancing here is that no pre-given ultimate reality exists, and that different spiritual realities can be enacted through intentional or spontaneous co-creative participation in an indeterminate spiritual power or Mystery.

Admittedly, to postulate that human intentionality and creativity may influence or even affect the nature of the Divine—understood here as the source of being—may sound somewhat heretical, arrogant, or even inflated. It is heretical from a conventional standpoint. Why, however, are we so convinced that the Divine is an isolated and independent entity disconnected from human agency? When we understand the relationship between the divine and the human as reciprocal and interconnected, we can, humbly but resolutely, reclaim our creative spiritual role in the divine self-disclosure.

The idea of a reciprocal relationship between the human and the divine finds precedents in the world of mystical literature. Perhaps its most compelling articulation can be found in the writings of ancient Jewish and Kabbalistic theurgical mystics. For the theurgic mystic, human religious practices have a profound impact not only in the outer manifestation of the divine, but also in its very inner dynamics and structure. Through the performance of the commandments (*mizvot*), the cleaving to God (*devekut*), and other mystical techniques, the theurgic mystic conditions divine activities such as the restoration of the sphere of the *sefirot*, the unification and augmentation of God's powers, and even the transformation of God's own indwelling. As Moshe Idel puts it, the theurgic mystic "becomes a cooperator not only in the maintenance of the universe but also in the maintenance or even formation of some aspects of the Deity."

As scholars Louis Dupré and Bernard McGinn observe, this understanding is not absent in Christian mysticism. In the so-called affective mystics (Richard of Saint Victor,



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Teresa of Avila, Jan van Ruusbroec, etc.), for example, we find the idea that the love for God substantially affects divine self-expression and can even transform God himself. In relation to Ruusbroec's mysticism, Dupré points out: "In this blissful union the soul comes to share the dynamics of God's inner life, a life not only of rest and darkness but also of creative activity and light. The contemplative accompanies God's own move from hiddenness to manifestation within the identity of God's own life." And he adds: "By its dynamic quality the mystical experience surpasses the mere awareness of an already present, ontological union. The process of loving devotion realizes what existed only as potential in the initial stage, thus creating a new ontological reality." The idea of a spiritual co-creation—"one that many have assumed but few have dared to express" (Dupré)—is also present in devotional Sufism, as well as in many Indian traditions such as Shaivism and Buddhism. The point is not, however, that spiritual co-creation is a universally accepted notion (clearly that is not the case), but

merely to show that it has been maintained by a variety of mystics from different times and traditions.

Once enacted in a co-creative process, spiritual shores do become more easily accessible and, in a way, "given" to some extent for individual consciousness to participate in. Once we enter the Ocean of Emancipation, spiritual forms which have been enacted so far are more readily available and tend more naturally to emerge (from *mudras* to visionary landscapes, from liberating insights to ecstatic types of consciousness, etc.). But the fact that enacted shores become more available does not mean that they are predetermined, limited in number, or that no new shores can be enacted through intentional and co-creative participation. Like trails cleared in a dense forest, spiritual pathways traveled by others can be more easily crossed, but this does not mean that we cannot open new trails and encounter new wonders (and new pitfalls) in the always inexhaustible Mystery of being.

It is fundamental to distinguish clearly this position not only from perspectival Perennialism but also from spiritual relativism and anarchy. While I have argued that there is no one spiritual reality, I do believe there is a spiritual power or Mystery out of which everything arises. Although indeterminate, this Mystery does impose restrictions on human

visionary participation. As Varela, Thompson, and Rosch suggest in relation to evolution, the key move “is to switch from a prescriptive logic to a proscriptive one, that is, from the idea that what is not allowed is forbidden to the idea that what is not forbidden is allowed.” That is, although certain enactions, like killing people for religious purposes, are invalid, an indefinite number of spiritual enactions are still feasible. We do not have to define the sphere of possible enactions; we only need to agree on the very few which are prohibited.

A central task for spiritual inquirers and participants in the interreligious dialogue, then, is the identification of these restrictive conditions for the enaction of valid spiritual realities. If I were to speculate, I would suggest that the nature of these parameters may have to do not so much with the specific contents of visionary worlds, but with the moral values emerging from them—for example, the saintly virtues in Christianity, the perfections (*paramitas*) in Buddhism, and so forth. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, although there are some areas of tension, religions have usually been able to find more common ground in their ethical prescriptions than in doctrinal or metaphysical issues. In any event, the regulative role of such parameters can not only free us from falling into spiritual anarchy, but also pave the way for making qualitative distinctions among spiritual insights and traditions.

Conclusion

In sum, the common ocean to which most spiritual traditions lead may not be a pre-given spiritual ultimate, but the Ocean of Emancipation, a radical overcoming of self-centeredness which can be accompanied by a variety of transconceptual disclosures of reality. Some of these disclosures have been enacted already by the world's spiritual traditions, while an indeterminate number have not yet come into being and will require a more creative participation, a co-creation with the divine, to come into being. Although there are certain constraints on their nature, the number of feasible enactions of spiritual worlds may be, within these boundaries, virtually limitless.

While I cannot consistently maintain the superiority of this account over others, I can highlight its advantages. In brief, the participatory understanding of spiritual realities is more generous than other meta-perspectives in terms of recognizing the infinite creativity of Spirit, contributing therefore to the actual generativity of spiritual unfolding (e.g., allowing, impelling, and catalyzing Spirit's creative urges through human-embodied participation). Participatory understanding better honors the diversity of spiritual traditions, insights, and realities than other approaches, affirming, supporting, and legitimizing the largest number of spiritual perspectives on their own terms. A participatory understanding provides a more fertile ground for a constructive and egalitarian interreligious dialogue, as well as for greater respect and harmony among people holding

different religious beliefs. Finally, participatory understanding has emancipatory consequences for our individual participation in the self-disclosure of reality—for example, in terms of expanding the range of creative viable options to cultivate, embody, and express the sacred.

In such a participatory cosmos, human intentional participation creatively channels and modulates the self-disclosing of Spirit through the bringing forth of visionary worlds and spiritual realities. Spiritual inquiry then becomes a journey beyond any pre-given goal, an endless exploration and disclosure of the inexhaustible possibilities of an always dynamic and indeterminate Mystery. □

WHAT DID YOU HOPE (from page 45)

we were not at all represented by our governments, and felt powerless to change this. Decisions are being made in our name that we absolutely disagree with. (Only one person felt they were living in a country where democracy was gaining strength, and that was The Netherlands.) As one young leader from England now living in Holland remarked, “I see all these decisions being made by men in ties. I feel so f_____ angry. I see the youth not being heard, getting pissed off and going to the streets in protest, and look at what happens to them!”

These expressions of shared powerlessness helped shift us into a conversation about our own capacities. What was the role we wanted to play in this world, right now? We spoke about the new story we wanted to help create, shifting the storyline from violence, greed, and economics to compassion and humane values. Some, who had just heard the Dalai Lama speak in the Balkans, quoted him as saying, “War is out of date.” A Bulgarian woman enjoined us to make something of ourselves, and not wait any longer for organized efforts to solve these problems, while another young leader urged, “Be your own leader, work with your own fears. Choose to live your life honoring and serving life.”

Together we explored how we might move out of the debilitating sadness and fear we so often feel. The Bulgarian added that we each need to transform our own violence and fear, in our own way. “There is no one recipe for doing this.” A young European encouraged us to go into the depths of our despair, for there we would find our most empowering moments. An older woman commented, “It's better to show the sadness behind the anger. We are sad that the connection between us has been broken.”

As our circle drew to a close, a physician and mother from Mexico expressed her fear about the influence that America was having on her children being raised in Mexico. She did not want her children to become Americans, because she found us to be lonely, fearful, and disconnected from our spiritual natures. Very quietly she said, “We need to help bring spirit back to those humans who have forgotten that they're part of us.”

As a troubled American, I can only say “Amen.” □

For Our Sins

Eric H. Yoffie

As we approach the anniversary of the second intifada, the themes of the High Holidays have special resonance for Jews of all political stripes. I say this knowing that most of us are not comfortable with the blunt language of the High Holiday liturgy, which reminds us of the human capacity for sin and demands that we repair our conduct and change our ways. The High Holiday prayers do not deal with sin in an abstract or philosophical manner; in the *Al Cheyt* prayers, repeated ten times during the traditional Yom Kippur service, the sins listed are the stuff of everyday life. The rabbis were practical people who knew that it made no sense to talk about sin unless one concentrated on the specific vices to which we are all so prone—deception, slander, envy, and gossip.

It is difficult for us to truly understand the concept of sin, because the psycho-babble of modern culture explains everything in terms of impersonal forces—social, economic, psychological, and genetic—that release us from individual

responsibility. Furthermore, like Jews of all ages, we are experts at self-justification and eternally resistant to change. We recognize righteousness only in our own beliefs and are quick to pigeonhole those around us, enemies and friends alike, assigning them to impermeable categories that permit us to ignore what they say without truly listening.

With Israel living in the shadow of war, with terror erupting day after day, with casualties mounting on both sides of the conflict, one might hope that this is the time for Jews on both sides of the political divide to overcome their natural inclinations and do what Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur ask us to do: to look within and engage in serious and searching moral accounting. My experience is that in times of crisis, we are more resistant than ever to changing ourselves, scrutinizing our innermost thoughts, and confronting our own sins. Nonetheless, given all that is at stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, let me suggest additions to the *Al Cheyt* prayers for Jews of the Left and Jews of the Right.

For Jews of the Left:

For the sin we committed by making excuses for Arab terror and blaming Israel for the sins of others.

We perfunctorily condemn suicide bombings, but immediately shift the blame to Israel by talking of Israeli occupation. We tend to suggest, at least by implication, that the terror is somehow Israel's fault. We describe terrorism as the last resort of desperate people who have no other options; but in fact, there are always other options, and we know that terror would not be justified even if there were not. We claim to love Israel but magnify her sins and minimize her virtues, and we patronize Palestinians by not holding them to the same moral standards to which all peoples at all times must be held. We are always ready to believe the worst of Israel, even when her soldiers stand accused of massacres they never committed; later, lamely and without contrition, we justify our own credulity and silence by saying, "What Israel did was bad enough." And, perhaps worst of all, we never muster the outrage that the systematic killing of Israeli civilians deserves, that our moral credibility requires, and that the values of Torah and the civilized world demand.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie is President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

For Jews of the Right:

For the sin we committed by encouraging hatred, ignoring the pain of the Palestinians, and compromising our most fundamental values as Jews.

When Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz makes a reference to the suffering of the Palestinian people at a rally in Washington, we join in the booing, or remain silent and satisfied. When Washington attorney and Jewish leader Nathan Lewin suggests executing the families of suicide bombers as a means of ending the attacks, we say nothing. When Israel's cabinet designates areas of the Jewish state as "Arab-free" zones, we utter not a word of protest. We reject desperation as an excuse for Arab terror but accept it as an explanation for Jewish extremism. We forget that without dignity for the Palestinians there can be no dignity for Israelis, and that without peace for the Palestinians there can be no peace for Israel. We forget the humanity of the Palestinians who live under Israeli control, and we ignore their suffering. We forget that even now—indeed, especially now—the Jew must sympathize not only with his own people but also with the stranger, the Other.

Forgive us all sins, O God of forgiveness, pardon us, grant us atonement. □

Turning

Bradley Shavit Artson

At the very core of what the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, are all about is the notion of *teshuvah*, which translates more or less to “repentance.” Yet the actual root of the word, “*shuv*,” means “to turn” or “to return.”

Let’s return to a few different aspects of *teshuvah*, of what it means to turn. The beginning place, as with any return, is of having a place from which we start, a home base, a point of origin, a beginning. Indeed, the Jewish tradition speaks about the notion of return as restoring us to something that happened earlier, that marked a more pure beginning. Our secular tradition has a similar notion: modern psychology posits that a person’s childhood establishes the core traits of our personality, which we then re-enact, hoping to get it right at some point in our adult lives. The psalmist speaks of such a beginning, such a return, when he says, “Restore us, Holy One, God of Hosts, let Your face shine, and we shall be saved” (Ps. 80:4). Indeed, Jewish prayerbooks repeat a similar prayer, recited in the evening and on the Days of Awe: *Hasivenu Adonai Elecha V’nashuva Hadesh Yamenu K’kedem*. [Restore us, Holy One, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.] The first turning is to know from whence we have come, and then to turn back to that time of beginning, to that pure time, to that sacred time, to that start.

What is your home base? What is the place to which you can always return, the place for which you long? How do you go home again? The Talmud, in one of its more enigmatic phrases, in the tractate Yoma which deals with this very season, observes, “All the turns that a person should turn, should be only to the right and to the east.” You will notice, if you watch observant Jews at prayer, that when they turn, they turn only to their right when they’re in the sanctuary. That practice derives from this verse. But the aspect that catches my attention is that, whichever way we are turning, we are turning toward the east. And surely every Western Jew knows that in turning to the east, we are turning towards Jerusalem. That city is our home. It is there that we began. And it is from Zion that goes forth Torah.

Perhaps that’s why the great Hasidic master Rebbe

Nachman of Breslov observed, “Everywhere I go, I am going to Jerusalem.” He meant that every decent thing he did and every new thought he thought was one step closer to returning our people to its ancestral home. His colleague, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdechev, modified the phrase when he quoted it. He said, “Everywhere I go, I am going to myself.” The difference is that for Rebbe Nachman, the purest time in the Jewish people’s history was when our people and our land and our Torah were one. Since then we have been journeying the world, sometimes in triumph, often in tribulation, but ever seeking to return to that ancient and pure beginning. For Rebbe Nachman, turning is always returning.

For Levi Yitzchak, however, turning has more to do with finding our center. So I move now to the second type of turning—the turning of finding our essence, of finding our core. When I was younger, I used to enjoy molding ceramic objects. I would shape pots at the potter’s wheel, which in the days when I was a teenager was a tool you moved by kicking. Nowadays, they push an electric pedal and the wheel turns. What remains the same, though, is that the ceramicist takes a lump of clay and places it on the center of the wheel, and then as the wheel spins, helps the clay to remain centered. By giving a nudge, by adding pressure, the potter hopes to keep the clay in its proper balance, centered, allowing the pot to grow. We speak of this very image in a prayer that we will soon recite, *Hinei ka-bomer b’yad ha-yozzer*. [We, Holy One, are like that clay, and You are the artist.] That is a prayer to be centered, to know our core and to keep that core at the very center of where we are.

What is your core? What is your center? What is that part of yourself that you cannot abandon without walking away from who you truly are? Is your life balanced, centered? This kind of turning is not a turning to get back to some earlier time; it is a turning to remain true.

The events of the past year have sent us spinning in an entirely different way; the turning that we have been doing is one of spinning out of control. We have been reeling in pain and in agony and in sorrow. This kind of turning has no center, it simply spins, and the spinning itself takes over. It hopes for no return to some earlier, purer state; it is wild and uncontrolled. And yet that spinning out of control, while terrifying, can also be intoxicating, can also be liberating. In being out of control, we may also find our truest self. Rabbi Eliezer, one of the great sages of antiquity, taught

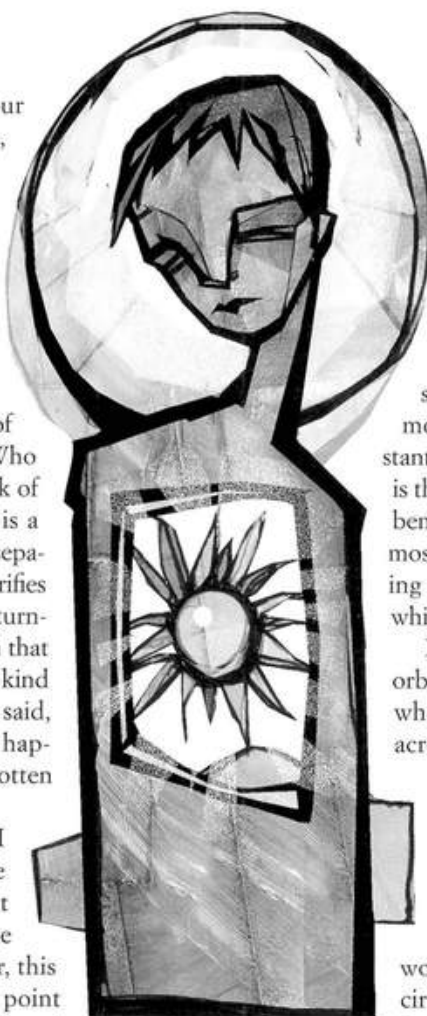
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his disciples, "Turn one day prior to your death." And his students said to him, "Master, how can anyone know what day is one day prior to their death?" And his response to them was, "Therefore, repent today, because tomorrow you may die" (*Shabbat* 153a).

Rabbi Eliezer summons us when spinning out of control to make spinning what we do, to turn again and again now and not to postpone the important work of returning to who we are meant to be. Who knows, but tomorrow we may die? I think of certain laboratory tests, in which there is a planned spinning out of control, used to separate different kinds of ingredients. One purifies by spinning rapidly. And I pray that our turning will also bring that kind of distillation that will lead to clarity. Perhaps God had that kind of cleansing spinning in mind when God said, "You are as if newly created. What had happened in the past has already been forgotten (*Sifre Devarim, Piska* 30)."

I can't help it; I'm a rabbi, so when I think about turning, I think about how we read the Torah, which is, itself, a constant act of turning and returning. But unlike the kinds of turning we've considered so far, this one has neither center nor starting point because we are always engaged in the reading of Torah. I think again of the lines of the psalmist, *Torat elohav b'libo* [the teachings of his God are in his heart] (Ps 37:31). One can be no more centered than when placing the Torah at the core. We are always turning those *Atzei Hayim*, those trees of life, and reading new passages. As soon as the Jewish people finish the end of *Devarim*, we start that same day with the beginning of *Bereshit*, the Book of Genesis. The paradigmatic Jewish turning is a turning of Torah. *Yohanan ben Bag Bag omer, Hafoch ba, V'hafoch ba, d'cula ba*. [The great master Yohanan ben Bag Bag said, "Turn it, and turn it, for all is contained in it."] (*Tanna De-Vei Eliahu Zuta* 17:8). This kind of turning stands outside of past or present. The Torah is always now, an eternal present. And it stands outside of geography. No coincidence that we receive the Torah after slavery and prior to entering the land. The Torah is always on the journey. And when you think about whom you encounter when you are outside of time and outside of space, in eternal present and eternal now, why, you meet the Holy One, who stands likewise outside of space and outside of time.

Of late I have become very interested in physics and cosmology. So I want to share with you a little tidbit about planets and turning. Before I got into this diversion of mine, I used to think that when the moon orbits around the earth



it is turning in a circle. I have learned, however, that an orbit is free falling. That is to say, objects naturally fall in a straight line. An orbit occurs when an object falls in a straight line but is continuously deflected from that line by the gravity of something very large, very close. The moon, were the earth [and sun] not here, would just zip along straight. But because it is so close to its mother, the Earth, its straight line is constantly deflected into what becomes a circle. It is the pull of earth that makes the moon's line bend. And this kind of turning is perhaps the most important of them all. This is the turning of recognizing that we turn toward that which is summoning us.

I wonder if perhaps what is turning our orbit is not the Ancient One of Days, the one who has been tapping us on the shoulder across the millennia, and bidding us to turn yet again? My colleague, Rabbi David Blumenthal, writes, "The way to Adonai is not straight, it has ups and down, twists and turns. Perseverance is the method. Returning is not a triumphal march. Like any real therapy, if one works hard at it, healing moves forward by circling backward. Repentance, turning, is a backstitch."

When I focus on this great cosmic free fall, deflected by the gravitational pull of something large and steady and constant, I think about turning and turning without end. Turning without end is just another word for a dance. It may be that the turning we are called to do before God is one of rapture and joy, of dancing in the presence of the Holy One, as did King David when he returned to Jerusalem with the Ark. Maybe the turning that we should focus on is not one of sorrow and mourning, but of exultation—that we are in the presence of something so magnificent, so unpredictable, so unanticipated and unearned that all we can do is click our heels and spin and dance. And so I end with the unlikelyst of quotes, from a German mystic from the thirteenth century, Matilda of Magdenberg, who turned a phrase,

I cannot dance, O Lord,
Unless you lead me.
If you wish me to leap joyfully,
Let me see You dance and sing.
Then I will leap into love—
And from love into knowledge,
And from knowledge into the harvest,
That sweetest fruit beyond human sense
And there I will stay with you, turning.

□

Is it Time for G-d to do Teshuvah?

Shmuley Boteach

I am writing these lines having just read that yet another Palestinian suicide bomber killed seven innocent victims in Jerusalem, this just after a bomb the day before killed nineteen. And I sit here and wonder, Is G-d watching all this? Israel clearly can't stop the bombings. If someone is determined to kill themselves and blow themselves up, they're going to do it and take a lot of innocent victims along with them. But can't G-d prevent it? Jews have been slaughtered for thousands of years, and here it is happening before our very eyes, and G-d is just allowing it to happen. How can He be so silent? Even the Pope, long accustomed to condemning both Palestinian and Israeli "violence"—as if you could compare the deliberate murder of innocent civilians with military retaliation designed to defend against such attack—recently declared that "those who perpetrate these abominable acts will have to answer before G-d." Oh really? Then why is G-d so silent? Why didn't the suicide bomber have a coronary moment before he ignited his bomb so that the victims would have been saved?

Isn't it fascinating that around the High Holy Day period we focus on man's guilt and man's sin, but there is no comparable time to focus on G-d's sins. The great Hasidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, was known for his unconditional love for humanity. One year on the eve of Yom Kippur, when hundreds of people who came to pray with him were waiting for him to begin the *Kol Nidre* prayer, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak stood standing with his back towards the congregation. He stared silently at the holy ark where the Torah scrolls were kept. The congregation waited one hour, two hours—people were standing on their feet and beginning to sweat. Finally the *shamas* went over to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and said, "You know, Rebbe, the people have to get home." So the great Rebbe said, "OK, I'm done."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then turned to the people and said, "I want to bring you into the conversation I was having with G-d. I said to G-d, 'I come here before you on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement to ask that You atone for my sins.' But then it suddenly struck me that in the past year, I haven't



brought any plagues upon any part of the world. Nor have I made any woman a widow. Nor have I made any child an orphan. Nor have I caused anyone to go bankrupt and thereby not be able to sustain and support their children. Yet, G-d has done all of these things. And then it struck me, why isn't He coming to us and asking *us* for forgiveness? So I said to G-d, 'In the past year, I have caused no death. I have brought no plagues upon the world, no earthquakes, no floods. I have made no women widows, no children orphans. G-d, you have done these things, not me! Perhaps You should be asking forgiveness from me. So I'll make a deal. You forgive us, we'll forgive you, and we'll call it even.'"

It sounds like a simple tale but it is imbued with deep theological meaning. In the contemporary Jewish relationship with G-d, we might indeed ask, "Where has the Jewish backbone gone? Why are we not more demanding of G-d? Why focus only on our own need to do *teshuvah* when, sixty years after the Holocaust, Jews are still targeted for murder and persecution? Where are the modern day Abraham's to declare before G-d, 'Shall the Judge of entire earth not act justly?' Where are the modern Moses' who demand, upon hearing that G-d intended to wipe out the Jewish nation, 'Remove my name from the book you have written.' On the contrary, the finger is pointed always at the Jewish nation, but never at their Father in heaven. If Germans slaughter us, it's because we wanted to be more German than Jewish. If Palestinians attack us, it's because we are occupying their land, even though there was no such protest when the same land was occupied by Egypt and Jordan. But can't anyone detect a pattern here? G-d is still allowing Jews to die for the mere act of being Jewish."

Surely if we as human beings hold ourselves accountable for our role in human suffering, it is not unreasonable to hold G-d accountable for His. This attitude is hardly a

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new one. The rabbis of the Talmud said that Moses initially described G-d to the Jewish people as the "great Lord, the mighty, the awesome" (Deut. 10:17). But later, Jeremiah saw that strangers were destroying G-d's Temple. How then, he said to himself, can G-d be called "awesome"? So Jeremiah omitted the word "awesome" from his prayer to G-d.

King David says in Psalms, "Who are like you among the mighty, Oh G-d?" and the ancient Rabbis of the Talmud answered: *b'aileem*, which means "among other gods," and comes from the Hebrew root *b'illmim*, meaning "among the silent." So the verse now reads: "Who is like you O' G-d? Who is dumb and deaf to the call of the needy?" (Gittin 56b) Rather than seeing King David as praising the Almighty, the ancient rabbis of the Talmud saw this as a condemnation. But the psalmist, himself, says:

*Rouse Yourself; why do You sleep, O Lord?
Awaken, do not reject us forever!
Why do you hide Your face,
Ignoring our affliction and distress? (Ps. 44:24-25)*

Isaiah said it even more powerfully: "Our holy Temple, our pride, where our ancestors praised You, has been consumed by fire, and all that was dear to us is ruined. At such things will You restrain Yourself, O Lord? Will you stand idly by and let us suffer so greatly?" (Is. 64:10)

To be sure, we all know our sins, and I am not advocating that we overlook them this year on the High Holy Days this year. I want to grow every year, in my love for G-d, in my devotion to my family, and in my service to humanity—and the High Holy Days provide the perfect time for introspection and commitment. But it's also a time for us to make demands of G-d. We not only want life, we deserve life. Jewish suffering must finally be brought to an end. It's simply unfair for Jews to go to an El Al ticket counter in Los Angeles to visit the Holy Land and come back from the airport in a coffin.

We need more Jewish Jobs who, when afflicted by G-d, not only look internally at what sinful actions might have caused their suffering, but also look outward and rail and thunder against the seeming divine injustice. "By G-d who has deprived me of justice, who has embittered my life, as long as there is life in me ... my lips will speak no wrong.... Until I die I will maintain my integrity" (Job 27:2-5)

Perhaps justice will not come into the world until the words of the Midrash Israel are finally fulfilled: "The Jews wish to be comforted by G-d, but will accept no comfort from G-d until they rebuke Him for his conduct (Pes. R. 30:4)." The Midrash ends by saying that G-d will accept the reproof of His children and admit He "acted foolishly" with Israel. And then, and only then, can both parties be said to have repented. Until then, we must vigorously protest to our Muslim brothers and sisters that we share a common ancestor, Abraham, who distinguished himself by protesting to G-d against human suffering, rather than causing suffering in G-d's name. □

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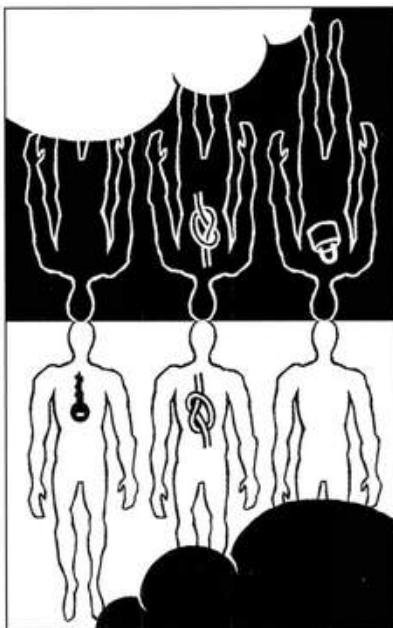
Image, Likeness, Memory

Arthur Green

The faith of Judaism has been characterized throughout its history by commitment to a *personal* religious language. The biblical legacy that describes God as a super-person, one with both emotional and something like physical characteristics, has never been fully overcome, despite many attempts to do so. Jewish philosophers were embarrassed by this language and sought to explain it away. The mystics chose rather to absorb these personal images in a great sea of metaphor, one in which *all* of language was a way of speaking about God. But Jews everywhere continued to use the personal address form of prayer, speaking both to and of God as though a person.

The origin and nature of being, seemingly the most abstract of all questions, is addressed in personal terms. "Lift up your eyes," says the prophet (Isa. 40:26), "and see *who* created these." This religious language is being seriously challenged in our day. The new encounter with Eastern religions has taught many in the West that it is possible to have a deep religious life outside this personalist language. Yet Judaism, even that of the most sophisticated Jewish thinkers, continues to insist on it for an important reason. The personalist view of God is the basis for Judaism's most central moral teaching: Every human being is created in God's image. That statement in the opening tale of Genesis is the basis for all of Jewish ethics. It is, according to some of the ancient rabbis, the most basic rule of Torah.

The Genesis account begins with two words for what we call "the image of God." *Tselem* is "image" in an almost physical sense, the way in which the child is "the spittin' image" of the parent. The old Targum renders the word by the Greek "icon;" every human being is God's icon. No wonder we have no icons in the synagogue; the synagogue is



filled with icons as soon as we walk in! The word *tselem*, by the way, is the basis for the modern Hebrew *matslemah*, the word for "camera," a device that can capture this sort of image. The second term, *demut*, is somewhat more subtle. "Likeness" is probably the right word for it. To be "like" something is to be comparable to it. But here we have a great problem. The prophet says quite clearly, speaking in God's name: "To whom will you compare Me, that I be likened?" and "To whom will you compare God? What likeness can you offer to Him (Isa. 40:18, 25)?" Can we indeed be "like" God?

Tselem refers to our hard wiring. We have within us a soul or a spark of inner divinity that is absolutely real and uncompromised. The entire macrocosm, the Self of the universe, is there within each human self, along with the ability, each in our own way, to discover that truth. But *demut* is all about potential. To continue the computer imagery, it is the program we create on the basis of that great hardware, the life we live. We *are* the *tselem* of God; we can choose to *become* God's *demut* as we work to live and fashion our lives in God's image.

Memory is one aspect of what it means to be in God's image. Memory begins as soon as there is humanity; humanity begins with memory. The treatise *Pirkey Avot*, the wise sayings of the Mishnaic Masters, contains a strange list of "Ten things created on Friday, as the sun was setting: the Mouth of the Earth, the Mouth of the Well, the Mouth of the Ass; the rainbow, the manna, the staff, and the worm; the script, the inscription, and the tablets; (some add: the demons and Moses' burial place) and Abraham's ram (and some add: and tongs, which are made with tongs)." What a strange list! If we delete the "some add" additions, we realize that all these last-minute creations have to do with miracles, moments when resort to the supernatural was required in order to help God's children out of an impossible situation. (How good are you at Bible stories? The Mouth of the Earth swallowed up Korah and the rebels against Moses, the Mouth of Miriam's Well provided water in the wilderness,

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and the Mouth of the Ass kept Balaam from cursing Israel. The rainbow concluded the flood, the manna sustained Israel for forty years, and the worm bored through the stones used to build the Temple, so they would not be cut with a weapon that could make war. Three miracles are devoted to the writing of the Ten Commandments on the tablets, and the ram replaced Isaac as a sacrifice.)

But there has to be a story behind this list. Why were these things created on Friday at sunset? Why not earlier? Why not just as they were needed? Here is my account of how it happened (all in the language of the old Creation story to be sure. You may translate it, if you like, into post-Darwinian). Each day had its own creations, and after each day God said that it was good. On Friday the land animals were scheduled to be created, and indeed they were. Still God felt there was something missing; it could not yet be called "good." So God turned to whoever God turned (a big puzzle, but not our concern right here) and said: "Let us make humans...." But as soon as the first human beings were there, something new and unanticipated happened to God: *History* opened up before the Throne of Glory.

As long as the world had been inhabited only by plants and animals, there was no history. Plants and animals live, reproduce, and die without leaving memory behind, except in their genes. But as soon as there were humans, there was all of human history stretched out for God to see. And there were humans looking back at God, saying: "You remember the whole thing." You, Lord, are a God of memory. But in fact "remember" was a new word for God, for whom what we call past, present, and future are all one, always. Now God looked "ahead" down this unfurled path of human memory and began to see where humans would get in trouble. Wherever possible, some device was created to help them out; these were the miracles. And if you ask: "Why are there no miracles in our day?" the answer is obvious. The sun set, and God's time to make miracles ran out. Had creation gone on, God would have violated the first Sabbath, and no one would ever have kept it. For the rest of history after Moses, in other words, *shabbat*—the ability to step off the treadmill of humdrum existence—is our only miracle.

To be human is to remember. To lose memory is to lose a piece of ourselves. To lose all of memory is one of the great human tragedies; some part (though surely not all) of the divine light in us goes out with it. We remember our own lives as individuals, and each person's uniqueness develops over time out of the memories that he or she carries. But we also remember as families, as tribes, nations, and societies. Civilization is built on the passing down, celebration, and interpretation of memory. Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, in one of his famous *Tales*, asks: "Who remembers the oldest thing?" One of the speakers in the story remembers infancy, another recalls being in the womb, still another remembers the moment of his own (or the world's) conception. But the youngest of the company, who was also

the greatest rememberer of all, says: "I remember nothing." This, of course, is the great Nothing that precedes creation. "And all agreed," Rabbi Nahman concludes, "that this memory was indeed the greatest."

We Jews are *commanded* to remember. We believe that all humans share the command to remember Creation and the covenant with Noah, of which we are all a part. The covenant is God's promise not to destroy the world. The memory of Creation has to be our promise to do the same. Today it is we, and not the blind forces of nature, that are the more likely enemies of the world's survival. To remember Creation is to remember that we are here for a purpose: to become aware. We are here to know, articulate, celebrate, and share with all others the truth that being is one, that H-W-Y-H, "being," is Y-H-W-H, that there is none other.

Our Human Task: To Re-Member

Here we can turn from the old Creation story to the new one, the sacred version of the tale of evolution that is just beginning to emerge in our day. If the evolutionary process is the ongoing struggle of the divine One toward intelligent and articulate life forms, as I have suggested, we need to ask ourselves what it is that the One within us needs from us. Why are we here, we creatures who have begun to have some inkling of the process and of the One within it? The answer is that we are here to *re-member*, or to rejoin the links of a creation that has been rent asunder. The job of each human being is to teach every other human being that we are all one, and to find ways in our behavior, as well as our thought, to include all other creatures within that vision of oneness as well.

This is the basis of all religion. Judaism teaches us that there are two kinds of commandments: those "between person and God," referring to the spiritual and ritual paths, and those "between person and person," encompassing the moral/ethical life. Both of these categories, I believe, may be seen as rooted in the universal and natural mysticism I am suggesting here. We exist in order to become aware, to lend self-articulation to the One. That, if you will, is the first commandment of nature. But it is also the first commandment of Sinai, or at least of its opening words: "I am Y-H-W-H your God." All the rest of religion, insofar as it applies to the realm "between person and God" is just a spelling out of this, a creation of forms through which we remember the single truth. The forms themselves vary from one religion to another; ultimately they are all arbitrary. We change or restrict our behavior in a certain way, we say certain words or undertake certain actions, in order to remind ourselves, on a regular basis, of the truth of God and the oneness of all being. In this sense we must admit that all the forms are of human origin; it is people and societies that create or evolve religions. But all of these forms are created as a way of *responding* to an inner, almost instinctual drive to recall that deeper truth. In this sense they are also of divine origin, and

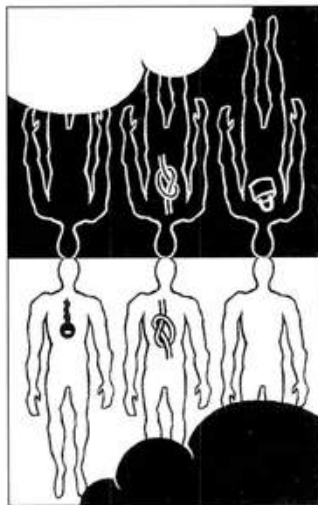
in this very abstract way we may say that a divine imperative stands behind them.

Our second job as religious people is to share this realization of oneness with others. We do so most successfully not by preaching, but by actions. We let others know that we and they are part of the same One when we treat them like sisters and brothers, or like parts of our same single universal body. "Love your neighbor as yourself," interpreted to include *all* our neighbors, indeed is a good "basic principle of Torah." Here all the commandments "between person and person" have their natural root. And here too the forms of sharing are based on human experience and forms of social interaction that are wholly ours, yet the imperative that lies behind them comes from a deeper place. We are called upon to proclaim the oneness of being throughout the world and to enable all those with whom we come in contact to feel themselves as part of that oneness as well. And we might think about how to extend that sense of "neighbor" beyond the human to the rest of our fellow-creatures.

But we Jews have some other things we have to remember. "Remember that you were a slave in the Land of Egypt," we are taught. And also "Remember the day you came out of Egypt, all the days of your life (Deut. 16:3)." Both slavery and liberation need to be remembered. These are an essential part of our Jewish vision of being human. Why? The memory of being slaves is our way of identifying with human suffering, especially the suffering of the oppressed. The Torah tells us to remember slavery when it instructs us on how to treat the stranger who lives in our midst. To recall that we were slaves has to make it impossible for us to enslave or oppress others; to do so is a betrayal of our own worst nightmares. To remember the liberation from Egypt is to recall the struggle to become free. We have to remember that Pharaoh made things worse once we became troublemakers; we also have to recall that we did not leave Egypt empty handed, but loaded down with gold and silver vessels that had belonged to our oppressors.

All these memories serve to help us when we look upon others' struggles for freedom from bondage and are called upon to help. They stood by us in the early days of America's Civil Rights struggles and in the battle for change in South Africa. Of course there were Jews who resisted identifying with the causes of others, thinking of the Exodus as our own exclusive story. But the narrowness of this reading of Torah was obvious to most. There are other times, however, when the message of remembering Egypt becomes much harder to hear.

I write these words (in Jerusalem, as it happens) in the midst of a terrible time within Jewish history, a period when we, the Jewish people, are involved in the oppression of another people, the Palestinian Arabs who dwell in the Land



of Israel together with us. This book is not a political treatise and I will not pretend in it to have the answer to one of the most vexing political conflicts of our time. Nor do I in any way seek to diminish the Palestinian leaders' and people's responsibility for the terrible atrocities they continue to commit. Some claim that the conquest of 1967 and the ensuing occupation was forced upon us by Palestinian intransigence, and was a requirement of self-preservation. Perhaps it was, but it should have been resolved by a truly generous solution long ago. Our complicity in the ongoing long-term Occupation and settle-

ment remains great, especially since we have profited so much from it. However complex the genesis of this situation, there is a terrible incongruity of our people's returning to the land of our ancient freedom, the place where we came after we ceased to be slaves, only to find ourselves ruling over others in order to keep them from destroying us. Judaism, as a teaching that demands human freedom, cannot thrive in such a context. I fear to say that all of us Jews, as well as the rich Jewish expression that has flourished in the years since conquest and occupation, will have to struggle long and hard to free ourselves of the taint of *'osbek*, ill-gotten gain attained through the oppression of others.

Remember slavery and remember liberation. Let them give you a bad conscience. Sometimes you need it.

The memories of Egypt and of the Exodus are part of our individual spiritual lives as well as our collective heritage as Jews. They help us to fight our own personal struggles for freedom and give us hope that we can defeat whatever it is that enslaves us, defeat it so fully and finally that we can see it sinking in the deep waters of the sea as we walk across to freedom. The kabbalists say that the divine power that saved us from Egypt was the force of *binah*. *Binah* represents the great mother figure within God, the womb of rebirth. Israel comes forth reborn after crossing the sea; liberation is like a new birth. This is our Jewish way of saying that you can be "born again." It is a vital (in the literal sense of "life-giving") message to all those who are caught up in the throes of enslavement to compulsive behavior, to addictions, or to whatever it is that leads to slavery or degradation of self. Freedom is a real possibility. The day may yet come when we will dance at the far shore of that sea.

Even that isn't the end of the story, to be sure. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness still lie ahead after we come out of Egypt. Sometimes we even think we want to go back. For those moments my favorite verse of Scripture is "Just as You have carried this people from Egypt to here ... (Num. 14:19)"—when things get bad we only have to remember how far we have come. The God-given strength that has carried us this far through our wanderings can surely take us the rest of the way as well. Just remember. □

No Enemies, No Demands

Miki Kashtan

If there were more people like you in the Left, if I ever felt such true compassion and understanding, I would, despite all the pain involved, (... pause ...) consider moving to another place in Israel."

After only thirty minutes of receiving empathic listening, Judy (not her real name), a Jewish settler in the West Bank, could imagine moving from the West Bank into internationally recognized Israeli territory.

Secular, left-leaning Jews in Israel often believe that only force will get Jewish settlers to leave the settlements and find their homes within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. Many still remember the traumatic evacuation of the settlement of Yamit when Sinai was returned to Egypt, and anticipate, with horror, similar struggles in the West Bank. Left-leaning Jews tend to see Jewish settlers in the West Bank as fanatics who are oblivious to the plight of others.

In this heated climate, in the mid-1990s, a different conversation took place between Judy and Arnina, a Non-violent Communication trainer in Israel. Instead of arguing with Judy, instead of trying to take apart her position, insisting on the moral bankruptcy of her views, or trying to convince her to change her mind, Arnina simply reflected back to Judy her understanding of Judy's deeper feelings and needs. Here are some excerpts from their dialogue:

JUDY: People forget who we are, and our history. [The Jewish people] go back thousands of years. We were chosen by God and given this land. How can they forget this?

ARNINA: So you are feeling devastated, because you would really like to know that the deep meaning of 'settle in this land' is understood and preserved?

JUDY: The secular leftists think we are blind and obstinate, while we are holding on to the most precious symbol of our existence.

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Social change requires changing ourselves within while working on changing external structures.

ARNINA: Are you in pain because you so much want to find a way to dissolve the separation between you and leftists, because for you we are all one people?

The conversation between Judy and Arnina continued, with Arnina reflecting back to Judy Judy's own pain, anger and fear. Finally, when Arnina was confident that Judy was fully heard, she stopped, looked at Judy for a long while, then asked gently: "Would you be willing to hear what's going on for me now, and how I see all this?" Judy nodded silently.

Arnina then told Judy how much she shared with her the deep wish to see Israelis living in unity, bringing gifts to the world. Then she added: "I want you also to hear just how frightened I am when I see the price we are paying for this. I am wondering if you could conceive of the thought that, if we all really united in our wish, and not against each other, we might find other means of keeping this legacy, while at the same time saving so many lives?" It was in response to this question that Judy expressed her tentative willingness

ACTIVISM

to consider leaving the land she had so tenaciously held on to for so long. It was the experience of being fully heard which made the transformation possible.

The practice of applying empathy in the service of social activism is based on a combination of practical considerations and deep spiritual values. On the practical level, listening with empathy to those with whose positions we disagree increases the chances that they will want to listen to us. Until Judy's needs were acknowledged, she would not have been able to hear and consider Arnina's request. Once Judy's experiences were heard fully, magic happened, her heart opened, and a profound shift took place in her.

When we use force, blame, and self-righteousness instead, even if we manage to create the outcome we want in the short run, we distance ourselves from those whose actions we want to change. This is true for all peace work—whether we are trying to prevent the building of a chain store or a nuclear power plant, trying to create peace in Israel-Palestine, or working to transform global capitalism. Success that comes from intimidation rather than dialogue, or arguing rather than listening, will not lead to the transformation we so wish for, neither in ourselves nor in those we are trying to change. Sooner or later, those with more power will prevail, and we will be left bitter and defeated. This cycle is a major cause of “burn-out” among activists.

Being able to listen with understanding is not easy. It is a spiritual practice, requiring us to draw on and act upon the fundamental values of compassion and nonviolence. In order to put aside our thoughts of right and wrong—if only for the space of one conversation—we must be able to find in ourselves a deep well of trust in the abundance of the universe and in the fundamentally benign nature of human needs. The spiritual premise which gives rise to this trust is that human needs, as opposed to human strategies, are universal and shared by all: tenderness, closeness, understanding, safety, the need to be understood, to contribute, to matter to others, to be valued. Our conflicts arise from having different strategies to try to meet the same basic set of needs, not from the needs themselves.

Even when we want to embrace compassion, structures of domination are deeply ingrained in us. According to theologian Walter Wink, we are all indoctrinated in the myth of redemptive violence: The basic belief that violence can create peace. We are trained to enjoy watching the “bad guy” get “what he deserves.” Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, believes that our use of language reinforces “enemy images” of others. When we refer to corporate executives as “profiteers,” our

use of language implies greed; when we refer to lower-level managers as “bureaucrats,” we imply uncaring. Learning to practice empathy requires being able to recognize in others’ actions fears and longings similar to our own, and looking for strategies of meeting our own needs that would allow others’ needs to be met as well. The alternative to punishing the “bad guys” is *not* passivity, but a subtle dance between genuine empathy for the other’s needs and uncompromising expression of our own needs.

As a result, if we want to engage in social activism based on mutuality, trust, compassion, and nonviolence, we are likely to find that social change requires changing ourselves within while working on changing external structures. As the world around us remains captive to right/wrong thinking, we also need to allow for time for organizing a supportive community for our social change efforts. We cannot wait until we are “ready” before embarking on social action, and we cannot wait until we have life-serving institutions before we let ourselves take time to attend to

our personal struggles and relationships. Combining the two allows us to embody the values we are seeking to manifest in every action we take, even while structures of domination still continue to exist.

Part of what makes it possible for me to keep striving towards the grounding of my actions in faith and a sense of possibility is the cultivation and nurturing of my vision of a different world. I see a time when structures and institutions are organized around the principle of need satisfaction. (Remember that needs are different from strategies!) I see leaders acting as servants, and dialogue and power-with approaches replacing power-over tactics; I see people raised to nurture their needs and support each other in fulfilling dreams; and I see autonomy and interdependence as the grounding values for all human relationships. It is my ultimate faith that under those conditions human beings can grow up to be people who are able to balance their well-being with that of others and of the planet spontaneously and gracefully. □

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Resources

1. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion*, by Marshall Rosenberg
2. The Center for Nonviolent Communication, which offers trainings and materials worldwide. Please visit our website: www.cnvc.org for trainer contact information and other suggestions for what you can do to apply these principles in your life. There are currently over 100 trainers teaching Nonviolent Communication in 35 countries.
3. Trainings by Miki Kashtan and her colleagues can be found at www.baynvc.org

Witness for the Prosecution

Judith Bolton-Fasman

- *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, by Benjamin Wilkomirski. Schocken Books, 1996.
- *A Life in Pieces: The Making and Unmaking of Benjamin Wilkomirski*, by Blake Eskin. W.W. Norton, 2002.

In the summer of 1996, a publicist at Schocken Books told me that they were publishing a ground-breaking work in Holocaust literature. She ran through a list of exalted writers—Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Jerzy Kozinski. And then she added a new name to that pantheon—Benjamin Wilkomirski. She sent me a galley of *Fragments*, a spare yet harrowing memoir of Wilkomirski's early childhood in Majdanek and Auschwitz. Riveted and repelled, I read the slim book in one sitting.

I caught up with Wilkomirski that autumn at a small Jewish Community Center in suburban Boston. His audience of thirty was mostly elderly, many of them survivors. A professional clarinetist, he played the doleful music of *Kol Nidre* wearing a tallis-like shawl and a blue velvet kippah. He read a section of *Fragments* in which a brutish female guard leads him to a dying woman whom he is told is his mother. Under penalty of death, mother and son are forbidden to speak to each other. During their brief encounter the woman gives Benjamin "an unknown object ... [with] jagged edges and corners ... coarse and hard." It turns out to be a piece of bread, the ultimate gift of life in the camps. "You have to

soften it in water, then you can eat it," the guard tells young Benjamin.

After finishing the book I was struck by the brilliant and recurring image of jagged edges. Wilkomirski writes that his recollections "are a rubble field of isolated images and events. Shards of memory with hard knife-sharp edges which still cut flesh if touched today. Mostly a chaotic jumble with little chronological fit: shards that keep surfacing against the orderly grain of grown-up life and escaping the laws of logic."

This self-exemption from adult logic caused Wilkomirski's original publisher in Germany some misgivings at first. But the book was released and in short order it won awards from Jewish Book Councils in the United States and Great Britain; it was eventually translated into fifteen languages. The accolades placed Wilkomirski in the vanguard of child Holocaust survivors, most of whom were undocumented, traces of their young lives having disappeared along with their sense of whom they were meant to be. Wilkomirski's persona as a child survivor relied on this very lack of documentation, on a paper trail that had been swept into oblivion during the war, and on the dubious therapeutic process by which he reestablished his identity.

Over lunch Wilkomirski told me that he and his friend Elitsur Bernstein, an Israeli psychologist, had been working together for over a decade to recover Wilkomirski's memories of the camps. He described his work with Bernstein as "very interdisciplinary,"

combining "historic and geographic realities" to enable him to recover his memories of the Holocaust and ultimately his identity. He claimed that sudden recollections during his therapy allowed him to draw detailed maps that were identified by experts as the children's section of the Majdanek concentration camp. Another sketch that also seemed to come from nowhere was determined to be of Auschwitz, a place of which Wilkomirski also had no recollection.

"I did not want this to be true," he told me, all the while absentmindedly tracing on the table with a butter knife.

As the old adage goes, be careful what you wish for because

As the old adage goes, be careful what you wish for because it may come true.

it may come true. An enterprising Swiss journalist and son of survivors named Daniel Ganzfried started to delve into Wilkomirski's story and located his birth certificate. Bruno Grosjean was born to a single mother in Biel, Switzerland on February 12, 1941, making him three years younger than he said he was. Yvonne Grosjean tried to raise her son, but eventually gave him up for adoption to the Dössekkers—a middle-aged doctor and his wife—then living in an affluent suburb of Zurich. Wilkomirski retains little affection for his parents and blames them for forcing him to repress his memories of the Holocaust.

There are other details too numerous to count that point to Wilkomirski's fraud. Among them is his contention that he was in a Krakow orphanage that was not opened until he was living in Switzerland. Many of his descriptions of the concentration camps do not match historical records. He said he

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had no relationship with Yvonne Grosjean, but in 1981 he accepted a small inheritance from her on the grounds that she was his birth mother.

Blake Eskin was intrigued by the story because Wilkomirski was the name of Eskin's maternal family, who changed it to Wilbur after coming to America from Riga. Eskin, then arts editor of the *Forward*, wanted to find out if Benjamin Wilkomirski, who claimed to have been born in Riga, was indeed a long lost relative as well as a good scoop. Eskin's personal memoir of identity and his journalistic investigation of Wilkomirski come seamlessly together in *A Life in Pieces: The Making and Unmaking of Benjamin Wilkomirski* (Norton).

At his mother's behest, Eskin contacted Wilkomirski and invited him to his parents' apartment for a family reunion of sorts. "He is late," writes Eskin, "and as we wait we enjoy a prolonged moment in which everything we imagine, and everything we imagine he imagines, is possible. A rupture can be healed, a childhood can be restored, a family can be reunited, history can be rewritten, fate can be outwitted, miracles can happen to ordinary people, the world can be made whole again. Our guest is late, and for the time being everything will be perfect."

The Wilbur clan embraces Benjamin as one of their own but Eskin, skeptical of him, writes, "I'd treat him like a cousin without making him one, if that's possible." Part of his ambivalence may have stemmed from survivor guilt, the fact that the Wilburs sat out the war in the safety of the United States. Wilkomirski potentially supplied Eskin with a direct tie to the Holocaust "... I would think less about statistics or Anne Frank's diary. I would approach [the Holocaust] through the story of the ... improbable survival of my cousin [Benjamin] now living in Switzerland."

But Eskin began to see Wilkomirski's improbable survival as virtually impossible. As doubts about his identity continued to surface, Wilkomirski

and his dwindling number of allies vehemently condemned such investigations, contending that children who survived the Holocaust were commonly given new identities. The crux of Wilkomirski's story came down to semantics. "Legally accredited truth is one thing—the truth of a life is another," he wrote in *Fragments*. Wilkomirski's defenders accused his

Writing Fragments was a narcissistic act, doing the kind of damage of which a Holocaust revisionist only dreams.

critics of putting him through a "second Holocaust," a phrase that originated before the Wilkomirski affair with Dori Laub, a professor of psychiatry at Yale Medical School. Laub uses the phrase in a book he co-authored in 1992 called *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, a work about the collection of videotaped Holocaust testimonies at Yale. In the book, Laub explores the relationship between testimony and historical truth, and concludes that inaccurate testimony can still represent the truth.

But Wilkomirski tampered with the essence of the truth. "Benjamin," writes Eskin, "innoculates himself against doubt by making it an essential element of his story. By setting aside 'the ordering logic of grown-ups' at the outset of *Fragments*, by calling attention to his own uncertainty throughout the book, he gets readers to accept their confusion rather than follow up on it." It was a risky strategy that spectacularly backfired on Wilkomirski.

But it also explains why the Wilburs and the Jewish community at large initially embraced him. Strangers have always had a special place in Jewish life. Every so often God would come to our ancestors disguised as a stranger to

make sure they were more than adequately welcoming. Invite the stranger to the Passover seder. Feed the stranger on the Sabbath. Benjamin the stranger came to us as the child who lived through the unthinkable and remembered it for us in achingly exquisite detail. During our interview he told me that at first his very public coming out as a child survivor was overwhelming, akin to Moses feeling like a stranger in a strange land. It would have been shameful had he continued to feel like a stranger among us.

Wilkomirski also preyed on a fundamental dream of Diaspora Jewry—finding a long lost relative who authenticates the past. "Much as I felt a strong connection to the world my ancestors inhabited, I couldn't imagine it," writes Eskin. "What indistinct notions I did have came filtered through my mother's vision of life in Riga, which was itself already a fantasy." Wilkomirski also counted on the post-Holocaust world to accept unquestioningly his claim that he witnessed events that were essentially unwitnessable. Laub, a survivor, explains that "not only in effect did the Nazis try to exterminate physical witnesses of their crime, but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witness even by its very witnesses."

That was Bruno Dössekker's alibi and Benjamin Wilkomirski's downfall. Wilkomirski, a lost child himself, wanted to embody a living memorial to the children who died in the Holocaust. That afternoon we spent together, I was moved by him and moved when he saw my daughter's car seat and said that he wrote *Fragments* for his three grown children, and for children like my daughter.

Now I know that writing *Fragments* was a narcissistic act, doing the kind of damage of which a Holocaust revisionist only dreams. Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoir, in its most generous description, is simply historical fiction. What kind of legacy is that for the children? □

Wilkomirski the Adoptee

Betty Jean Lifton

■ *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*, by Stefan Maechler. Schocken Books, 2001.

The riddle of the true identity of Benjamin Wilkomirski, an adoptee and author of the once-acclaimed memoir *Fragments*, was finally solved in March by a DNA test that reveals him to be the son of a birth father he never knew. The test proves conclusively what legal documents couldn't: that he is not the Jewish child survivor of the Holocaust he claimed to be, but rather the Swiss Protestant boy, Bruno Grosjean, relinquished by his single, working class birth mother at the age of two.

Until the DNA blew his cover, Wilkomirski had insisted that his papers were switched with the real Bruno Grosjean, a four year old who looked just like him, when they were residents in a Swiss children's home. It was that boy who was born to Yvonne Grosjean on December 12, 1941, while, he, Benjamin Wilkomirski, was born in Riga, Latvia, a few years earlier.

Now we know that there was no switch. But DNA can only solve genetic riddles while the psychological ones remain. Why would a Swiss Protestant musician claim the identity of a Jewish Holocaust survivor? Does that make him an impostor, a fraud, a liar?

Yes, Wilkomirski may be all of these, but he is also an adoptee and, as such, is another kind of child survivor. As a psychologist, who is also an adopted person, I have observed that adoptees who have lost their birth

parents and all their birth family members often feel like survivors, though they usually do not know what it is they have survived. Moreover, the secrecy around their origins suggests dark and illicit happenings, which leaves them feeling like survivors without honor. They are not seen by the outside world as motherless children who have suffered a psychic trauma they need to mourn, but rather as throw-aways, who are fortunate to have been rescued by their adoptive parents. I am not trying to equate what I call cumulative adoption trauma with the cumulative trauma of child survivors of the Holocaust—they are different—but to a young child the pain and deprivation may feel similar. They share a feeling of being abandoned, alone, and powerless.

Certainly little Bruno Grosjean had had enough trauma for a lifetime even before he was adopted. Separated by the child welfare system at the age of two from a devoted mother who could not support him, he must have been overwhelmed with grief and panic at her sudden disappearance. He was shunted about for the next two and half years from three foster homes to a children's home, as surely as his book's narrator was shunted from one concentration camp to another. His nine traumatizing months with one abusive and demented foster mother may be an important psychological source of the horrific experiences that he describes in *Fragments*. But even parting from his birth mother each time she paid brief visits to the foster homes must have been devastating. She was in the hospital recovering from a botched

abortion attempt when he was abruptly taken from the children's home to become Bruno Dossekker, the adopted son of a prominent, but formal, Swiss couple. As for so many adoptees, there was no explanation as to why his mother disappeared forever from his life. He was left to face the world alone, just as Benjamin Wilkomirski is alone in the memoir.

Benjamin writes that he does not know what the word "mother" means. But adoptees are mother-haunted children, and *Fragments* is a mother-haunted book. The boy is told by other children in the camp (who sound something like the Lost Boys in Peter Pan) that "everyone has a mother" and "if you have a mother she belongs just to you!" His own lost mother makes a cameo appearance in the memoir as a dying woman in Majdanek. He is taken to her by a camp guard who warns him not to speak to or about her, or he will be killed. His mother, shrouded in a blanket on the floor, holds out a precious piece of stale bread to him so that he can survive. It is another gift of life. She is both the idealized, self-sacrificing mother here, as well as the abandoner who leaves him yet again on his own.

In exposing Wilkomirski as a fraud, a Swiss newspaper said that he had spent his wartime years in the "safety" of his neutral homeland. But safety is a relative term. Although he was considered lucky to be taken in by the wealthy Dossekkers, the boy never felt safe or that he belonged there. It was a bad match: Dr. Dossekker, who was old enough to be his grandfather, wanted a son to carry on the medical tradition of the family—an expectation that was dashed when Bruno turned to music. And Bruno seems never to have accepted Mrs. Dossekker as his

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replacement mother, perhaps out of the divided loyalty that adoptees feel toward the missing birth mother. ("You're not my mother!" Benjamin cries out to her in the memoir.) Another factor might be that despite giving Bruno their name, and presenting him as their son, the Dossekkes waited twelve years before legalizing the adoption because the grandparents could not accept the boy.

Like many adoptees, Bruno would speak of himself as being a "good actor," "playing the rules of the game," not feeling real. He hid his former identity as Bruno Grosjean, the illegitimate Protestant working-class kid, from his wealthy friends, and even from his first wife, for fear of being discovered as the impostor he felt himself to be. But he also felt like an impostor as Bruno Dossekker, the Protestant upper-class kid. And so eventually he would morph himself into Benjamin Wilkomirski, the Jewish child survivor, even though that identity made him a real impostor.

Adoptees have a hard time shaking off their impostor self. The writer and adoptee Harold Brodkey, who also lost his mother at the age of two, once told me in an interview: "I am only equivocally Harold Brodkey." When we consider that the original self shares its identity with the adopted self, it is easy to see why doubling comes naturally to adoptees. In Wilkomirski's case, even the double's double has a double in the form of the imaginary Swiss boy whose documents he insisted were switched with his. But why would Bruno want to invent such an outlandish story?

Perhaps he began to crave that identity during his eight months in the children's home, where he lived among Jewish refugee children who were brought from the camps to regain their health. They were treated as special, while he was just a poor Swiss orphan. He must have sensed they knew a darkness like his. Perhaps one group came from the Baltics, because from the time he was in high school, he told his friends that he was a Jewish refugee from there. Over the years, he

experimented with names and identities until he finally settled on Benjamin Wilkomirski, who hailed from Riga, Latvia. But he did not put Benjamin in the death camps until after something unforeseen happened in 1981.

On that day Bruno Dossekker received a letter from a lawyer that Yvonne Grosjean, his birth mother, had died. He was not left anything in the will, but he had the right as her son to make a claim on her modest estate, which he did. The legal procedure involved going to her apartment with the lawyer. What it was like to enter that ghostly realm and reconnect with his mother and his original self he has not articulated in his writing or interviews. But it must have been like falling through a time machine into the dark place in his psyche that was left when he lost his mother. He reconnected not only with his mother, but with the unresolved trauma of losing her. He was ill after that for years with various maladies that he told his friends were fatal. During this period, his marriage fell apart and his adoptive parents died, losses that must have re-activated his early loss.

When he was finally able to function again, Benjamin Wilkomirski had buried Bruno Grosjean and Bruno Dossekker. Slowly with the help of a new woman friend and a therapist, he began translating his past traumas into the harrowing memories of little Benjamin in the death camps. In the process, he came to believe that he was the little boy who narrated the book, and he was able to convince child survivor groups and Holocaust experts throughout Europe and this country. He had grown into Benjamin, like an author who has turned into his character. Benjamin could express the pain better than Bruno, whom nobody had heard or taken seriously. As the Swiss historian Stefan Maechler wrote in his comprehensive expose of Wilkomirski's life and work: *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (Schocken, 2001): "Bruno Grosjean has probably fallen silent forever—that

is unless it is he who is speaking through Wilkomirski's words."

When he was first challenged on his identity as Benjamin Wilkomirski, the only comfortable role he ever played, he responded in an afterword to his memoir: "Legally accredited truth is one thing—the truth of a life is another." Benjamin wanted to have his "imposed identity annulled." He hoped that his memoir would help other people in the same situation to find the "necessary support and strength to cry out their own traumatic childhood memories." He wanted them to know "that they are not alone."

Now that the DNA test has sided with the legally accredited truth, Bruno Grosjean/Dossekker is once again alone. Yet, in an interview with a Swiss newspaper, he still clung to his belief in his "memories." He spoke of having "medical proof" that he had been abused as a child and declared that it didn't matter if this abuse happened "in a camp or in a barn."

As shocking as this statement is, we have to take it seriously. A witness has verified that Bruno Grosjean was traumatized as a child during one foster care placement. But Bruno also suffered the trauma of so many adopted children who are separated from their birth mothers and are not able to resolve their grief. Of course, most adoptees do not reinvent themselves in such an extreme way. But if Bruno Grosjean/Dossekker/Wilkomirski's story tells us anything, it is that adoptees cannot build an authentic sense of self when society does not recognize their trauma of being cut off from their origins.

When the narrator in Wilkomirski's fictional memoir is told that he cannot speak to or about his dying birth mother in the camp under penalty of death, the author is literalizing the taboo that he, as an adoptee, lived under: Thou Shalt Not Know or Speak of Thy Birth Mother. Wilkomirski's book is a cry of pain against that taboo: a pain known to all children who try to survive losing their mothers, no matter the circumstances. □

A Provocative Look at Jewish Reinventiveness

Susan Olinger

■ *The Woman Who Laughed at God: The Untold History of the Jewish People*, by Jonathan Kirsch. Hardcover: Viking Press, 2001. Paperback: Penguin, 2002

The continuing chaos in the Middle East today has polarized the Jewish community and forced many Jews to reflect on their identity. What does it mean to be Jewish at a time like this? What has it meant over the course of history?

In *The Woman Who Laughed at God: The Untold History of the Jewish People*, author Jonathan Kirsch reminds us that Judaism itself has never been a cohesive religion, and that "diversity rather than orthodoxy is the real core value of Judaism." Starting with the title story of Sarah, the laughing matriarch, Kirsch recalls the "untold history" of the freethinkers and revolutionaries throughout Judaism's 3000-year-old recorded history, whose courageous acts defied orthodoxy and illustrated the unique reinventiveness of Judaism. It is the very freedom to question oneself, one's teachers, and perhaps even God, Kirsch says, which is the heart of Judaism.

Written much more in the style of his early *Harlot by the Side of the Road*, rather than his subsequent biographies of Moses and King David, Kirsch's book is both a recounting of surprising tales and a virtual primer of Jewish history. Illustrative of Kirsch's own openness is his willingness to consider

several controversial positions on traditionally accepted Jewish history, including the current revisionist theory that the separateness of the ancient Israelites and Canaanites is more myth than biblical history, and that Josiah, the late seventh-century BCE king, may have been "the single most crucial figure in all of Jewish history, the man who literally invented biblical Israel" when he unearthed the book of Deuteronomy, redefining the faith of Israel.

As for the ancient Israelites and Canaanites, both groups may have "actually emerged from within the native-dwelling peoples of Canaan at a date far earlier than the supposed period of the Exodus." Current Palestinian archaeologists are claiming outright kinship with the ancient Canaanites (pre-dating the Jewish claim of having been "on the land" first). Both concepts, of course, are nearly impossible to prove or disprove. The concrete archaeological evidence needed to make a final determination is undiscovered, and revisionists use the absence of evidence to bolster their claims that a biblical person or event is mere myth and not history. Someday these claims may be settled. After all, how long did the Valley of the Golden Mummies lay hidden, or the 4000-year-old archer's grave recently discovered at Stonehenge?

In the meantime, Kirsch proposes that perhaps this connection between ancient Israelites and Canaanites isn't a totally exaggerated idea, and that, by claiming kinship with the Canaanites,



the Palestinians also claim kinship with the Jews. He also asserts, and there is indeed some physical archaeological evidence to confirm it, that the earliest ancient Israelites weren't monotheists to begin with, and that even after monotheism was the foundation of their religion, they weren't always exacting about it. He delineates a very compelling history illustrating that Moses, himself, may not have believed exclusively in monotheism even during the Exodus. Kirsch uses Moses' own attributed words to advance his point that the ancient Israelites may have been more polytheistic than you've been brought up to believe.

In addition to old stories and new countertraditions, Kirsch looks at Jewish mysticism and militarism, a feminist side to Judaism, and offers four specific lessons to be learned from the Holocaust. The Jewish men and women who have changed the course of Jewish history either by challenging orthodoxy or by the uniqueness of their actions are subjects for Kirsch's singular insight. But perhaps the strongest value of *The Woman Who Laughed at God* is Kirsch's positive approach to the question, "Who is a Jew?" He shows us that change has been a central characteristic of Judaism from ancient times to the present and, in so doing, opens our eyes to a Judaism that is flexible, evolving, inclusive, and very much alive. □

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Noah: He Shall Comfort

Chaim Bertman

Underlying the biblical account of a devastating Flood is an instructive parable about war and its roots in the wild impulses within even the most noble human beings.

Noah's story falls into the pattern of a classical tragedy, spanning the rise and fall of a person destined for greatness.

At birth, Noah's father, Lamech, prophesies that his son will comfort humanity in its arduous labor. This is a play on Noah's name, in Hebrew, *Noach*, which resonates with the word for comfort, "*nachem*." The child's name is, of course, his destiny, which is to remove an ancient curse upon the soil. It also points to Noah's lesser known role as the first cultivator of grape wine, and foreshadows his later fall into drunkenness. "*Nachem*," comfort, is Noah's fatal flaw, his strength and his weakness, source of his greatest triumph and source of his greatest "*yinachem*," his greatest regret. In typical biblical fashion, the root word, N-CH-M, contains the whole story.

Lamech's prophecy, *yinachameinu*, he will comfort, ultimately has its root in the Hebrew word to sigh, *yinachem*: Through Noah, humanity will sigh with relief. But immediately after Lamech's prophecy, a greater problem than human toil is presented—the impending destruction that grows out of it. We read here that the earth is filled with violence; and so, *yinachem*: God sighs that He had made the earth.

With great poetical economy, a variation on this word appears one last time toward the narrative's end. When Noah first sends the dove out, it finds no rest, *manoach*, for the sole of its foot. This drives home the point of the entire parable, the yearning of the dove to find the comfort of dry land, that is, an end to bloodshed.

I think it is safe to assume that Torah intends the closing passage, depicting Noah's regression into drunkenness, to strike a note of world weary irony. Humanity can hardly be expected to sustain this dryness even for one generation; and it is almost understandable that the old man found some comfort in drinking.



Why does this parable about violence and peace hinge on something as seemingly banal as comfort? This point is illuminated by two soliloquies of God, which together frame the narrative with great literary grace.

First, before the Flood, God sees that humanity only exercises the *yetzer ha-ra*, the destructive impulse, and He sighs that He created the earth. At this point, only Noah is said to walk with God; that is, he alone struggles against the destructive impulse within himself.

But after the Flood, God takes a position of compassion, and declares that humanity is destructive because of its immaturity. This implies an optimism, that humanity can still learn.

Yet the narrative does not end on a note of wishful thinking. The actions of the elderly Noah underscore just how difficult it will be for humanity to develop wisdom. Having done a great deed, this *tzaddik*, this saint, relaxes, and grows comfortable with his own destructive impulse.

Here, we are taught a hard lesson: There are no spiritual giants of such stature that they can ever completely rest from their toils, that is, from struggling with their own destructive impulse. Yearnings for a revolution or a Messiah that would heal the Earth forever, however comforting, seem immature beside this ancient paradigm of housekeeping: The house continues to get messy. We can attend to it joyfully, but eternal comfort is not for the living.

Throughout the tragedy of Noah, we see how comfort is a double-edged sword. Like a sigh, the yearning for comfort comes from the longing to resolve conflict—through peace or violence. When the heart of a people is filled with anger, the comforting optimism of the dove may be mistaken for drunken confusion. Likewise, the pessimism of those who cry out for war expresses a longing for relief from terrible frustrations.

Ultimately, the greatness of Noah is that, even as the waters rose, even when the dove first returned without a sign, he did not allow himself the comfort of pessimism. When it mattered most, Noah understood that the comfort that comes with peace is the result of optimism, the belief that we can find dry land. □

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