

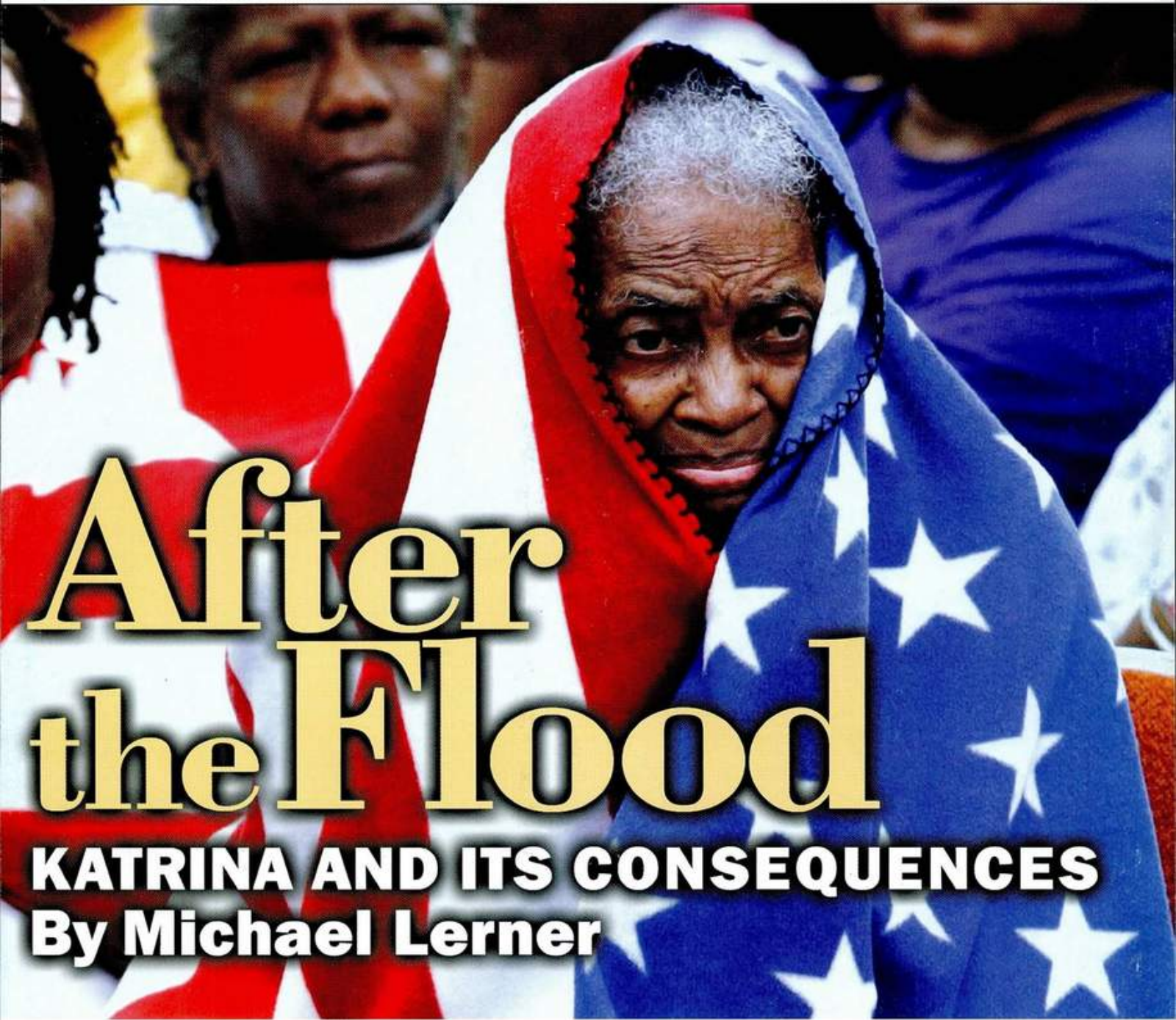
A Critique of Politics, Culture & Society

TIKKUN

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

**Tomorrow's Labor Movement
Richard Zimler Interview
The Music of Sufjan Stevens**

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2005



After the Flood

KATRINA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES
By Michael Lerner

\$5.95 U.S. \$7.95 Canada



NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES FOUNDING CONFERENCE

Jim Wallis | Susan Linn | George Lakoff | Debra W. Haffner

Jim Winkler | Carol Lee Flinders | Mary Elizabeth Moore | Carl Pope

BUT SHE HAD A SON

for Rachel Melamed-Eytan

An acquaintance that began midwinter
ripened by the end of spring.
A kindly woman, conciliatory.
She had a son,
a fallen soldier.
She bakes and cooks
part-time for City Hall.
A hot lunch is always ready on the table.
And everything she does is an absolute refusal
to adjust.

In her own way, as if unperturbed,
she can stop the world short.
It's hard to know what she might do.
Without saying anything much, really,
she stakes her claim.
Didn't they take away her son?
No way will she ever see any justice
in that taking.
And who would dare tell her:
Come, wash your face, it's time,
be strong,
whatever happened, happened.

She sets out on an arduous journey,
a circular journey, to and fro.
With her own hands she heaps coals of fire beneath her,
deliberately strews the embers over her body.

She is Rachel. Which Rachel?
The one who had a son.
And she tells him night and day,
summer and winter, feast day and holiday:
I am Rachel, your mother
of clear mind and free will,
I will not be comforted.

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Faced with unjust war and unsolved poverty, the United States needs a new way of thinking that marries the intellectual analysis of the Left with the spiritual commitment of the Right. In July of 2005, the Tikkun Community hosted the founding conference of the Network of Spiritual Progressives to meet this need. We offer here a sample of the ideas emerging in this exciting movement. **Michael Nagler** (21), **Peter Gabel** (23), **George Lakoff** (26), and **Jim Wallis** (29) provide an overview, while **Michael Lerner** and **Jim Wallis** (32) discuss what it means to engage in spiritual action. **Debra W. Haffner** (36), **Ama Zenya** (37), **Debora Kohn** (39), and **Susan Linn** (40), discuss gender, kids, and politics, while **Mary Elizabeth Moore** (41), **Richard Ufford-Chase** (43), and **Jim Winkler** (45) take spirituality into the public sphere. **Carol Lee Flinders** (48) and **Carl Pope** (51) conclude by tying spiritual activism to political and ecological resistance.

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Front Cover: AP Photo/Eric Gay

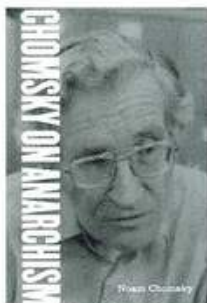
Sikkum

TIKKUN RECOMMENDS...

CHOMSKY ON ANARCHISM

Noam Chomsky, Selected and Edited by Barry Pateman, AK Press, 2005

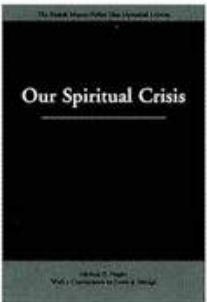
Political economist, media critic, foreign policy analyst, radical historian, dissident Jew, and linguistics professor, Noam Chomsky is the American Left's most famous polymath. Yet even more importantly, for over a generation Chomsky has served as America's conscience, employing his remarkable intellectual energy to speak truth to power throughout every major world crisis since the Vietnam War. Despite this fact, most readers of Chomsky's work have very little understanding of his political orientation. In this moving collection of essays on anarchism, Chomsky quite literally tells all. This is as close to a political autobiography as it gets.



OUR SPIRITUAL CRISIS: Recovering Human Wisdom in a Time of Violence

Michael N. Nagler, Open Court Publishing, 2005

This short but powerful book by the founder of the Peace and Conflict Studies program at U.C. Berkeley is a true gem. Contrasting the deepest insights of the spiritual and religious heritage of humanity with the one-dimensional vision of reality that prevails in public discourse, Nagler develops a powerful case for spiritual practice as a survival necessity for the human race. Hoping for more than human intervention to save us from our current mess—of which the Bush administration is only the most egregious manifestation—Nagler believes that we can use meditation, prayer and Gandhi-inspired right action to make us eligible for cosmic assistance.



THE FLIGHT FROM REALITY IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Ian Shapiro, Princeton University Press, 2005

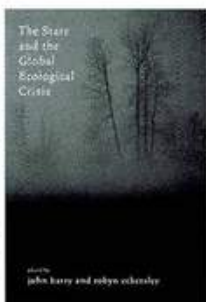
Have you ever had difficulty talking to a political scientist about politics? If so, this book is for you. In a searing indictment of over-professionalization in the humanities and social sciences, Yale University's Ian Shapiro argues that across disciplines, academics have abandoned truth, so to speak, for method. Explaining what the political consequences of this trend are—both culturally and ideologically—*The Flight from Reality* lays the foundation for reengaging scholarship with the historical world, by reminding us of its necessary role in public life. If there is a secular analogy to political theology for academia, this timely book makes its case.



THE STATE AND THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

John Barry and Robyn Eckersley, Editors, MIT Press, 2005

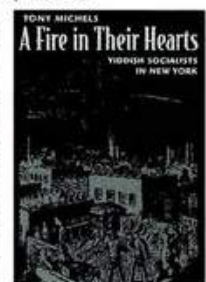
After Hurricane Katrina, the importance of the state in dealing with environmental problems has once again risen to the forefront of public debate. Arguing counter to the neoliberal position of many environmental activists that government cannot provide adequate protection to the environment, editors Barry and Eckersley provide a wealth of essays contending that the state can truly play a positive role in matters of ecological concern. Indeed, if there is one ethos that informs each essay in this volume, it is a belief in the "greening of the state," and how that might be achieved. For those looking for truly contemporary ecological theory, *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis* is essential reading.



A FIRE IN THEIR HEARTS: Yiddish Socialists in New York

Tony Michels, Harvard University Press, 2005

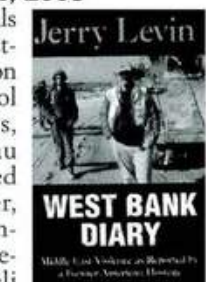
One of the most common myths about Jewish socialism is that it was an ideology imported from Europe that disappeared once Jews became more integrated into American society. According to Tony Michels's groundbreaking study of Yiddish-speaking socialists in New York between the 1880s and 1920s, American socialism arose in response to local conditions, flourishing for well over two decades before it caught on in Eastern Europe. The primary bearers of this political culture were Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants, who were at the same time building a vibrant, Yiddish-language community. Are language and politics so closely intertwined? Read *A Fire in Their Hearts* to find out.



WEST BANK DIARY

By Jerry Levin, Hope Publishing House, 2005

It's a real blessing to know that individuals like Jerry Levin are out there. In this first-hand account of his experiences in Hebron escorting Palestinian children to school and shepherding farmers to their fields, Levin, a former CNN Beirut Bureau Chief and ex-Hezbollah hostage turned Christian Peacemaker Team member, describes the persuasive power of non-violent resistance. Showing us how merely "getting in the way" of the Israeli Occupation becomes a visible act of social consequence, *West Bank Diary* is a remarkable testimony of courage and hope for those seeking a just end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



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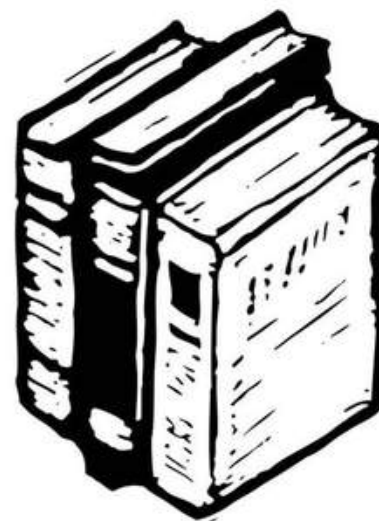
Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Poor Freud! It seems to be the destiny of the greatest thinkers and wisest among us (Darwin, Jesus, and the writer of the Second Amendment come also quickly to mind) to have their words so revered that they are taken out of the context of their originator's times and own experience and used in ways that must—if they do indeed look down at us from above—make them weep.

Richard Shiffman's article about faith-based Psychotherapy in the September/October issue of TIKKUN seems to imply that psychological methods are appropriate for quick fixes for emotional pain, but only religious ones provide lasting solutions for deep problems. What a disservice to the psychological disciplines and to those who might benefit from them!

Mr. Shiffman rightly states that "The real question from the spiritual standpoint is: can mental suffering be radically relieved—not just masked or somewhat alleviated and made bear-



able?" But this is exactly Freud's question as well, and the goal—often, if not always, realized—of in-depth psychoanalysis. One may enter upon either psychotherapy or religious quest in order to "feel better" and then, just as

Articles in TIKKUN do not necessarily reflect TIKKUN's stance on any issue. TIKKUN's positions are presented in our editorials.

TIKKUN (Vol. 20, No. 6, ISSN 0887-9982) is published bimonthly by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. TIKKUN, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704. TIKKUN subscribers are members of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health. Publications mail agreement number: #1549111. Canada mail distributor information: Express Messenger International; P.O. Box 25058; London BRC, ON N6C 6A8. Printed in USA.  Printed on recycled paper.

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Manuscript submission: Do not send letters of inquiry. Unsolicited manuscripts not accepted via email. **Fiction & Non-fiction:** Send to 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704. **Poetry:** Joshua Weiner, Dept. of English, 3101 Susquehanna Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Our evaluation process may take up to four months. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be returned. Copyright © 2005 by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health. All rights reserved.

Letters to the Editor: Via mail or email to magazine@tikkun.org. Letters may be shortened for space.

Advertising and Permissions: Contact Liz Winer, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704; (510) 644-1200; magazine@tikkun.org.

Distribution: International bookstores and newsstand circulation by BigTop Newsstand Services, a division of the IPA. For more information call 415-643-0161 or fax 415-643-2983 or e-mail: info@BigTopPubs.com.

Postmaster: Send address changes to TIKKUN, P.O. Box 460926, Escondido, CA 92046. Periodical-rate postage paid at Oakland, CA and additional mailing offices by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 3137 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609.

often with the one route as with the other, discover that there are deeper goals to be pursued.

The Self of (faith-based) Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" is the same Self as (psychoanalytically-based) Heinz Kohut's "Self psychology." That loving, good, and joyful Self can be found and liberated in a variety of ways, appropriate to the great variety of human experience and culture.

BETSY DAVIS
Oak Park, IL

To the Editor:

In "Out of the Past" (September/October 2005) John Atlas correctly challenges progressive groups to get out of their national offices, to get beyond their websites and to foster face-to-face relationships among like-minded people.

Atlas, however, overuses and misuses the example of so-called abortion rights. In many cases groups that are progressive on labor and community issues turn off grass-roots support precisely because of their pro-abortion stance. Pro-abortion is irrelevant, if not contrary to, championing the poor and working class.

Atlas uses the Industrial Areas Foundation as an example of a progressive group that builds face-to-face relationships. Readers of TIKKUN should be clear that the Industrial Areas Foundation is not, nor has it ever been, pro-abortion.

WILLIAM DROEL
Worth, IL

To the Editor:

I take psychoanalyst Michael Bader's point [in "The Perils and Possibilities of Teshuvah" Sept/Oct 2005] that people should not forgive so quickly if doing so involves not adequately defending themselves against the punishing parental voices that have discounted their worth throughout their lives. Accepting our own innocence as children is a crucial step in psychic health. Bravo!

I imagine if this had been a book and not a short article in TIKKUN, Bader would have gone on also to say that there is such a thing as staying too long in that stage of outrage at how one was treated as a child. A good friend of mine who was intensely involved with his children has a son who at thirty-five years old, and after years of therapy, still blames his father for his own failures as

NEW FROM ZONE BOOKS

THE ORDER OF EVILS: Toward an Ontology of Morals

BY ADI OPHIR translated by Rela Mazali and Havi Carel

What remains of moral judgment when truth itself is mistrusted, when the validity of every belief system depends on its context, when power and knowledge are inextricably entangled? Is a viable moral theory still possible in the wake of the postmodern criticism of modern philosophy? *The Order of Evils* responds directly to these questions. Rather than concentrating on the age-old themes of justice and freedom, Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir offers a moral theory that foregrounds the existential and political nature of evil. He contends that evil is neither a diabolical element residing in the hearts of men nor a meaningless absence of the good but the socially structured order of "superfluous evils," evils that could have—but have not—been prevented.

"I have rarely read a text so precise, methodical, and moving as this sustained reflection on suffering, social oppression, and philosophical critique....The Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands produces a relentless situation for critical reflection for this intellectual inquiry, producing a profound and systematic reflection on the ethical exigencies of critical thought."
—Judith Butler, author of *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning*

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an adult to get a career together and become successful. Sure, he was innocent as a child, but eventually that excuse for adult dysfunction seems rather hollow.

SAM MARKOWITZ, M.D.
New York, NY

To the Editor:

Michael Lerner's editorial [Sept/Oct 2005] about the first of the three conferences TIKKUN is sponsoring on spiritual activism to create a Network of Spiritual Progressives doesn't really acknowledge the importance of other groups who have the same focus. I don't know why he doesn't merge his Network with the Call to Renewal, which was started by *Sojourners'* Jim Wallis and Reverend Tony Campolo. A merger would create a larger and more powerful organization than either one by itself.

MARGARET HUXLEY
Detroit, MI

Editor Responds:

We love and respect the work of Call to Renewal and were delighted to have Jim Wallis keynote our conference. But Call to Renewal is an explicitly Christian and largely evangelical organization, whereas the Network of Spiritual Progressives is interfaith, and open to people who are spiritual but not religious.

Merging organizations that address similar issues and recruit from the same constituencies makes sense. However, neither of these turn out to be what's happening in this case, which is one good reason why our two organizations should work in alliance and coalition rather than merging into each other.

MICHAEL LERNER

To the Editor:

Identifying with both the Jewish and anarchist traditions, I was interested to read Dan Siwek's interview with Dan Sieradski ("An Interview with the Orthodox Anarchist"; TIKKUN, July/August 2005). It gave me a few things to think about, from provocative juxtapositions (like making a *tallit gatan* out of a *keffiyeh* and calling himself an "anarcho-zionist") to some attempts at humor. But I was disappointed that Sieradski and I do not share all that much when it comes to the conundrums we each face by engaging in two traditions that are apparently at odds. I was mostly struck by Sieradski's frivolity about anarchism—a subject that is as central to me as my Ju-

daism. The interview suffered from what Sieradski himself calls his "muddled" understanding of anarchism.

Of primary concern for any self-identified anarchist is the question of the state. So if it is true, as was mentioned by one of his fans, that Sieradski is "the best advocate for [the State of] Israel," then every anarchist will have an objection to him calling himself an anarchist. Anarchists are against the state, period. While anarchists (like Jews in the famous aphorism about two of us having three opinions) disagree on plenty among ourselves, one thing about which all anarchists agree is that states and governments need to be abolished. Not some states that are particularly nasty, but *all* of them. The state of Israel included; the state of the Palestinian Authority included.

The term "anarcho-zionist" is a serious contradiction, even with an understanding of the non-(Jewish)state nature of the Zionism of Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, and perhaps Ahad Ha'am. It's misleading to couple anarchism and Zionism precisely because dominant Zionist discourse and policy has always been concerned with the protection of Jewish property in Palestine/Israel and the creation and maintenance of institutions of governance there. When most people think about the institutions of Zionism, they will quite properly think of the Jewish National Fund, the Histadrut, Hadassah, the Chief Rabbinate, the IDF, or the Knesset—and not the pre-1948 Hebrew University. They rightly associate Zionism with Herzl, not Magnes; Ben Gurion, not Buber; Sharon, not Scholem. This leaves aside the issue of whether Magnes, Buber, and Scholem were recognizable as anarchists in the first place, which, I would argue, they were not; indifference is not the same as refusal.

While it's certainly a pleasant surprise for any kind of anarchism to be taken seriously by a non-anarchist publication, it is unfortunately also not surprising that so many questionable claims would be made.

LAWRENCE JARACH, CO-EDITOR
Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed
Berkeley, CA

Dan Sieradski responds:

Regarding Lawrence Jarach's statement that I am advocate for "the State of"

Israel (words he inserted himself into someone else's sentence), I am not in favor of the State of Israel, and were he to have read any of the writings on my personal blog, he'd likely be aware of that. I actually favor a stateless society comprised of autonomous communities of affinity, which I feel is more in line with both Jewish and anarchist principles. Rachel from Rafah Pundits said I was an advocate for Israel—not the Israeli government, not their actions in the Occupied Territories, not the state in and of itself, which I consistently rail against—but for the people of Israel. The reason she made that remark is because I am critical of the Zionist enterprise, call into question its efficacy and legitimacy, and curse it for its sometimes racist and inhumane policies. Thus I humanize Israelis and Jews as not all being racist, fascist jerks. That makes me an "advocate" for Israel—as in the nation of people, but certainly not an advocate in terms of the state.

Further, as per Jarach's remarks about anarcho-Zionism and the "dominant Zionist discourse," I would say that it is unjust to allow the term "Zionism" to be coopted in entirety by its darkest elements just as it is to allow the term "anarchism" to be coopted and denigrated by its opponents. Anarchism has been turned into a dirty word as well. Should anarchists just lie down and let that stand? Anarchy means chaos! It means havoc! It means people running around in the streets killing each other! It means a complete and total lack of any order whatsoever! It means no rules or coalitions or agreements or anything ever! Wait—is that what anarchy really is? If not, why is Zionism's sole definition the negative one which Jarach ascribes it?

Now, as per Leibowitz, rejecting hierarchical means of domination, control,

and organization would be anarchism. Anarchism's non-statism, I believe, relates simply to the fact that states have never been manifest as non-hierarchical entities of free association. That doesn't mean that they can't be. The Jewish communities in the West Bank, for example, operate as anarchist collectives effectively. Together, singular elected representatives of each yishuv comprise a regional council, which handles issues relating to civil services and "foreign relations" with the Israeli government. The local communities themselves are operated through direct democratic participation and consensus-based decision making, and no spokesman can act or make a decision in the council without his or her community's consent. That's an anarchist "state."

Yes, well—"Against all authority!" Including Jarach's anarchist-know-it-all elitism. Jarach may own Anarchy, the journal, but he doesn't own anarchism or its definition, which I find to be as fluid as Judaism itself.

DAN SIERADSKI
Jerusalem, Israel

ERRATA

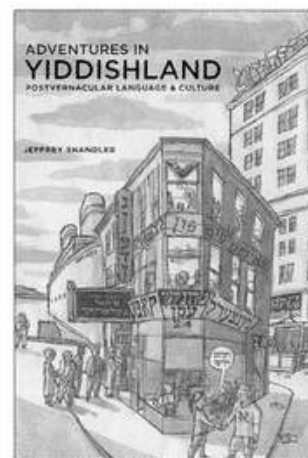
In our July/August issue, there are three corrections to make. First, in "An Interview with the Orthodox Anarchist," the photo credits for Sieradski's portraits were not included in the caption. These shots were taken by Kitra Cahana, an aspiring photojournalist and a relative of the late Meir Kahane. Second, in the same article, we reported that "Klalim Gedolim" are the precepts of the general Jewish population. They are in fact "Klal Israel." Third, Sieradski is quoted as saying that he was attacked by bloggers on the Rafah Pundits website. He was in fact attacked by a reader of Rafah Pundits.

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

Publication Title: TIKKUN. Publication Number: 0887-9982. Filing Date: 9/29/05. Issue Frequency: Bimonthly. Number of Issues Published Annually: 6. Annual subscription price: \$29. Complete mailing address of office of publication: 3137 Telegraph Ave., Oakland CA 94609. Complete mailing address of office of publisher: Patricia and George Vradenburg, 2901 Woodland Dr. NW, Washington DC 20008. Publisher: Patricia and George Vradenburg, 2901 Woodland Dr. NW, Washington DC 20008. Editor: Michael Lerner, 2342 Shattuck Ave. #1200, Berkeley CA 94704. Managing Editor: Joel Schalit, 2342 Shattuck Ave. #1200, Berkeley CA 94704. Owner: Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 3137 Telegraph Ave., Oakland CA 94609.

Total Number of Copies (Net Print Run): yearly avg. 17,755; most recent 18,243. Paid/Requested Outside County Mail Subscriptions: yearly avg. 7710; most recent 7,762. Paid In-County Mail Subscriptions: yearly avg. 0; most recent 0. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: yearly avg. 8033; most recent 8170. Paid/Requested Circulation Other Classes Mailed thru USPS: yearly avg. 15; most recent 17. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: yearly avg. 15,758; most recent 15,949. Free Distribution by Mail Outside County: yearly avg. 187; most recent 164. Free Distribution by Mail Inside County: yearly avg. 0; most recent 0. Free Distribution by Mail/Other Classes Mailed through USPS: yearly avg. 0; most recent 0. Free Distribution Outside the Mail: yearly avg. 252; most recent 580. Total Free Distribution: yearly avg. 439; most recent 744. Total Distribution: yearly avg. 16,197; most recent 16,693. Copies Not Distributed: yearly avg. 1,558; most recent 1550. Total: yearly avg. 17,755; most recent 18,243. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: yearly avg. 97.40%; most recent 96.00%.

Cultural Identities



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BY JEFFREY SHANDLER

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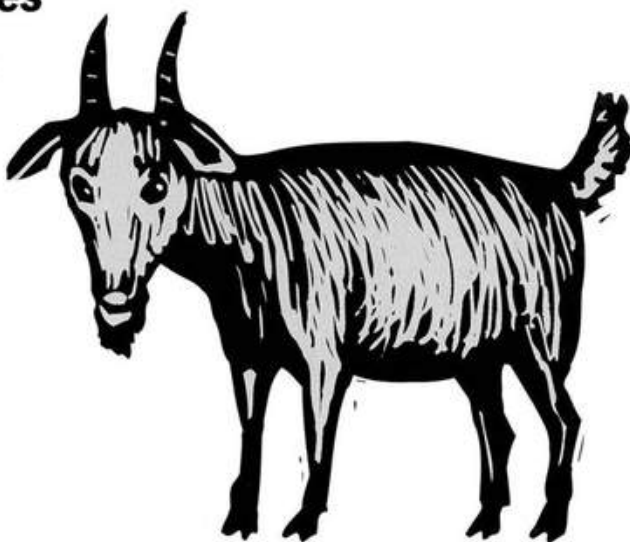
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Everything Lives

In the background of the Disengagement, on the periphery of the swarm of settlers, soldiers, and journalists, a number of veterinarians and dedicated volunteers chased down frantic chickens and braved the pecking frenzy of hungry parakeets in a rescue operation orchestrated by the Israeli animal rights group, Hakol Chai, or "Everything Lives." The organization's director, Merav Barlev, explained the group's initiative to rescue an ark's worth of dehydrated goats and other abandoned settler pets with a simple principle: "Israel's expressed intention to be sensitive and behave responsibly during the Disengagement should apply to all living beings."

The problem? They never mention the other "living beings" to whom Israel should "behave responsibly": the Palestinians. We do not mean to trivialize animals' rights—but in the context of forty years of military Occupation, and with a name like "Everything Lives," Hakol Chai needs to get its priorities straight. While well intentioned, their work does more to obscure the militarization eroding progressive Israeli society than to address it. This is because Hakol Chai, like many "progressive" environmental, feminist, and animal rights groups in Israel, withholds criticism of the Occupation in exchange for national recognition. As a



result, they reinforce Israel's moral blind spot by generating sympathy for the rescue of settler pets but remaining mute when the homes and lives of Palestinians are systematically destroyed.

The larger consequence is

that the anti-Occupation Israeli Left does not have the support of otherwise progressive groups that shy away from criticizing the Occupation—even when the Occupation is a primary cause of the issue at hand. For in-

stance, mainstream Israeli environmental groups work for a green Israel, yet say nothing about the IDF's unregulated pollution of the land, water, and air. This environmental nationalism, so closely and uncritically aligned with Israel's security ideology, is unable to criticize one of Israel's largest environmental calamities. Similarly, if Hakol Chai wants to address the root of animal suffering in Israel, they must challenge the culture of violence encouraged by the military and demand that the Knesset provide adequate funding for animal shelters and medical supplies, not for the expansion of settlements and a lavish military budget.

—Max Schmookler

Conservative Judaism Backed Roberts

While liberal organizations struggled to build a coalition to stop the Supreme Court nomination of ultra-conservative John Roberts, the organization representing Conservative synagogues around the United States wrote a letter in support, telling Republican Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania (chair of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, and himself a Jew) that they had determined Roberts was qualified. Roberts, who is expected to weaken abortion rights, civil liberties, and the separation of church and state as a Supreme Court justice, can thank members of Conservative synagogues around the United States for their support. Major leadership figures of Conservative Judaism's United Synagogue organization also had supported the nomination of John Bolton for U.S. Representative of the United Nations, an organization he promises to torpedo any way he can. —Michael Lerner





A Bible for Everybody?

According to Len Budd, the Bible is “very user unfriendly.” The “hurried and harried generation” is put off by its size and the literary complexity of its sixty-six books. What we need is a version of the scriptures for people with short attention spans. Budd, the former chairman of the deanery at Canterbury Cathedral, has come up with a novel solution: *The 100 Minute Bible*.

Now the proprietor of the appropriately branded 100 Minute Press, Budd published this fifty-seven page pocket edition to great media fanfare at the end of September. Receiving prominent coverage from the likes of the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the BBC, this miniaturized version of the Bible takes its rightful place among numerous versions of the Holy Scriptures aimed at introducing secular, Bible-illiterate people with one of the most important and influential texts in Western civilization.

Like any abbreviated edition of such an important book, the *100 Minute Bible* is

not without potential problems. Admitting to the *Guardian*'s Ed Vulliamy that it is a dumping down of the scriptures, Budd unselfconsciously states, “Yes, but that's the world today.” According to Vulliamy, the *100 Minute Bible* focuses primarily on the Gospels (which have been rewritten as one narrative) and gives the prophetic books, Psalms, Moses, the crucifixion, and the resurrection one page each, while the Book of Ruth and the Song of Songs are simply omitted. Aware of the controversial nature of his editing decisions, the project's author, Reverend Michael Hinton, told the *Daily Telegraph* that the Bible's “poetry has been sacrificed for the sake of clarity” in order to make it accessible to the widest audience possible, “from the age of ten, upwards,” while Budd expressed to the BBC that he sees the edition as “a book for adults,” that is “written in a style to encourage readers to keep turning the pages without resorting to any literary gimmicks.”

Republican Multiculturalism

Though White House inaction during Katrina exposed the abiding lack of interest by the Bush Administration in the fate of all poor people, regardless of race, the GOP is still hoping to break the traditional association of blacks with the Democrats by funding African-American Republican candidates in several high-profile congressional and gubernatorial races—including Lynn Swann (running for governor of Pennsylvania), Keith A. Butler (running for senate in Michigan), and Maryland's Lieutenant Governor, Michael S. Steele (who is considering running for senator).

Will African Americans

forget that during the past two presidential elections, Republican officials actively abetted the disenfranchisement of thousands of potentially qualified voters, a disproportionate percentage of whom were African American? A test case will be J. Kenneth Blackwell (shown above), an African American who is running for governor of Ohio. Currently Ohio's secretary of state, Blackwell spearheaded a 2004 Bush campaign election lawsuit that allowed Ohio to successfully challenge the eligibility of 35,000 voters, most of whom hailed from minority and urban areas. Will voters be able to see past color to the underlying political issues? —Rachel Meresman

With the U.K. having one of the highest literacy rates in the world—99 percent—the problem with Budd and Hinton's version of the Holy Scriptures is that they have such a low opinion of their target market. Surely the “dif-

ficult” nature of biblical narrative is not a serious factor in reader disinterest. If Budd and Hinton want more people to read the bible, they ought to be advocating for a society that allows people time for spiritual pursuits. —Joel Schalit

What is the Vision for New Orleans?

George Vradenburg

The images of devastation and desperation coming out of the Greater New Orleans region grab the heart. Many reports will analyze the causes of Katrina: the causes of the hurricane (systemic global warming or cyclical weather patterns?), the breakdown of the levees (inadequately maintained due to war spending or badly constructed?) and the blame for the slow response (a mayor and governor that didn't execute their emergency plans or national leadership out of touch with local suffering?).

But in the aftermath of Katrina, the front-and-center issue is how much the nation should dedicate to rebuild the New Orleans area. Greater New Orleans has an opportunity few major cities will ever have: to execute its vision for a better future during a moment when the entire country is ready to support the effort. But that opportunity has a short and narrow window: Greater New Orleans must articulate what it wants in a manner that engages the American people. It must do that very quickly and without losing the sympathy of the rest of the country. And it must avoid short-term choices that compromise its vision.

Stakeholders in the future of New Orleans must come together in an inclusive and comprehensive process to decide on their future. This is a job to be led by those who live, work, and play in Greater New Orleans, but it must be done with a vision that excites the imagination of the nation and also with a deep respect for the views of those whose support is needed. This visioning process must involve all of the stakeholders of Greater New Orleans, not just the business and lobbying interests representing the moneyed class.

Other regions of this country have engaged in citizen-centered efforts that have created local visions reflecting a broad consensus of business and civic perspectives. Utah is the leading example, but Greater Chicago has done it too, and California and Florida are currently engaged in state-wide visioning efforts.

The challenge in Greater New Orleans is made more difficult by the fact that no one knows who among the evacuees will return, and thus who the future citizens of Greater New Orleans will be. Will businesses and professionals return in the absence of consumers and clients? Will low-income residents return to their homes or find greater opportunity in the



communities to which they have been evacuated? Of course, engaging citizen stakeholders in an inclusive planning process can encourage their return.

And the challenge is also exaggerated by the sheer magnitude of the project: trying to create a vision of what Greater New Orleans is to become while also addressing the immediate needs associated

with "restarting" the city—the renovation of the housing stock, the repair and possible enhancement of the levee/pumping/canal system, and the restoration of basic services and infrastructure (such as sewers, water, power, electricity/gas, and communications). Yet, engaging all stakeholders on those immediate issues can create hope for the longer-term future of the region.

These greater-than-normal challenges are offset by the opportunities to build a distinctive, well-branded community passionately committed to the fresh and modern, with a greater sense of social justice and equity and funded by resources of unprecedented magnitude from the rest of the country.

However, the availability of those national resources will depend very much on the willingness of the American people to bear the burden of supporting Greater New Orleans. And that in turn will depend on the ability of Greater New Orleans to articulate to the rest of the country a vision of its future that connects to the hopes and dreams of all Americans: a vision of social justice, inclusion, and opportunity; a plan for economic development that contributes to national prosperity; and an effort to sustain a local culture that makes Greater New Orleans a valued and distinctive thread in the larger national fabric of American communities.

Greater New Orleans is asking all Americans to sacrifice for years in order to rebuild this region. In doing so, Greater New Orleans is asking us to become stakeholders in its future. Americans will be reluctant to do everything Greater New Orleans asks unless there is an inclusive process for deciding on that future that the American people trust, one that provides the American people an opportunity to contribute to the vision for a new Greater New Orleans Region. The American people are poised to help. Now is the time to invite them to participate.

Without a process that includes the larger American community, Greater New Orleans may soon lose access to the resources it needs to rebuild. □

CHRISTOPHER MORRIS/VII

George Vradenburg is co-publisher of TIKKUN.

After the Flood

Michael Lerner

It didn't have to happen. And it didn't have to result in so many deaths and social chaos. There is much to be learned, and there are many ways to move forward.

Hurricane Katrina represents a classic case of the law of karma. In a key section of the Jewish prayer service, the *Shema*, we recite a passage from the Torah that warns of environmental disaster ("And it shall come to pass, if you pay attention to the path I've shown you..."), unless we create the just and loving society the commandments require. Scientists who study global warming talk about watching the chickens come home to roost, saying that what goes around comes around.

Environmentalists make a strong case that the growing number and ferocity of hurricanes is a direct product of global warming, caused in large part by our reliance on fossil fuels. Meteorologists similarly argue that the frequency and intensity of hurricanes, and perhaps of tsunamis, are increasing as a direct result of the warming of the seas. The persistent refusal of the United States to join the nations of the world in implementing the Kyoto Accords emission limits and to impose serious pollution restrictions on cars are major factors in global warming.

Residential and commercial development along the shores of the Mississippi, combined with massive oil and gas investments along Gulf Coast shorelines, destroyed the natural protections from storms that the region's coastal wetlands had previously provided. According to the *Times-Picayune*, funds that were specifically allocated to rebuild New Orleans's levees and improve its storm defenses were cut from the federal budget so that President Bush could use these moneys to wage war in Iraq and increase funding for homeland security initiatives. The hun-

dreds of billions of dollars now needed for rebuilding could have been saved had the federal government spent a fraction of that amount on the preventative measures that everyone knew were necessary to avoid such a catastrophic natural disaster.

The white majority of the people of Louisiana helped re-elect President Bush, and have elected congressional representatives who enthusiastically support the war in Iraq and the Bush Administration's irresponsible environmental policies. When economic devastation hit workers in Northern cities over the past several decades, Louisianans voted to downsize the federal government and to let citizens fend for themselves. Some talked about the glories of relying on the free market rather than on the "hand-outs" from a national government that they abhorred. Or they told the poor and the homeless in Northern cities that if they worked harder, had better habits, or were smarter, they'd be employed and wouldn't have to depend on others' help. Or they saw the suffering of others as "the hand of God."

And yet, the law of karma or the warnings of Torah don't work on a one-to-one basis, delivering "just rewards" to those who have been directly involved in causing evil, as Job noted in the Bible, and as we can note watching global warming play out. The terrible truth is that the poor and the most vulnerable are always the first to suffer. The wealthy built their homes on higher ground, had better information, more insurance, and more avenues of escape. When facing the rising waters—whether it's in Bangladesh or Malaysia or Louisiana and Mississippi—it's going to be "the least among us" who will suffer most immediately.

This is why it is inappropriate to blame the victim: because the way the world has been created, the conse-

quences of past social injustice, war, and ecological irresponsibility are indiscriminate; they haunt everybody. From a cosmic perspective, we are one. We are all interdependent. Thus, those who suffer most are frequently those who least deserve it.

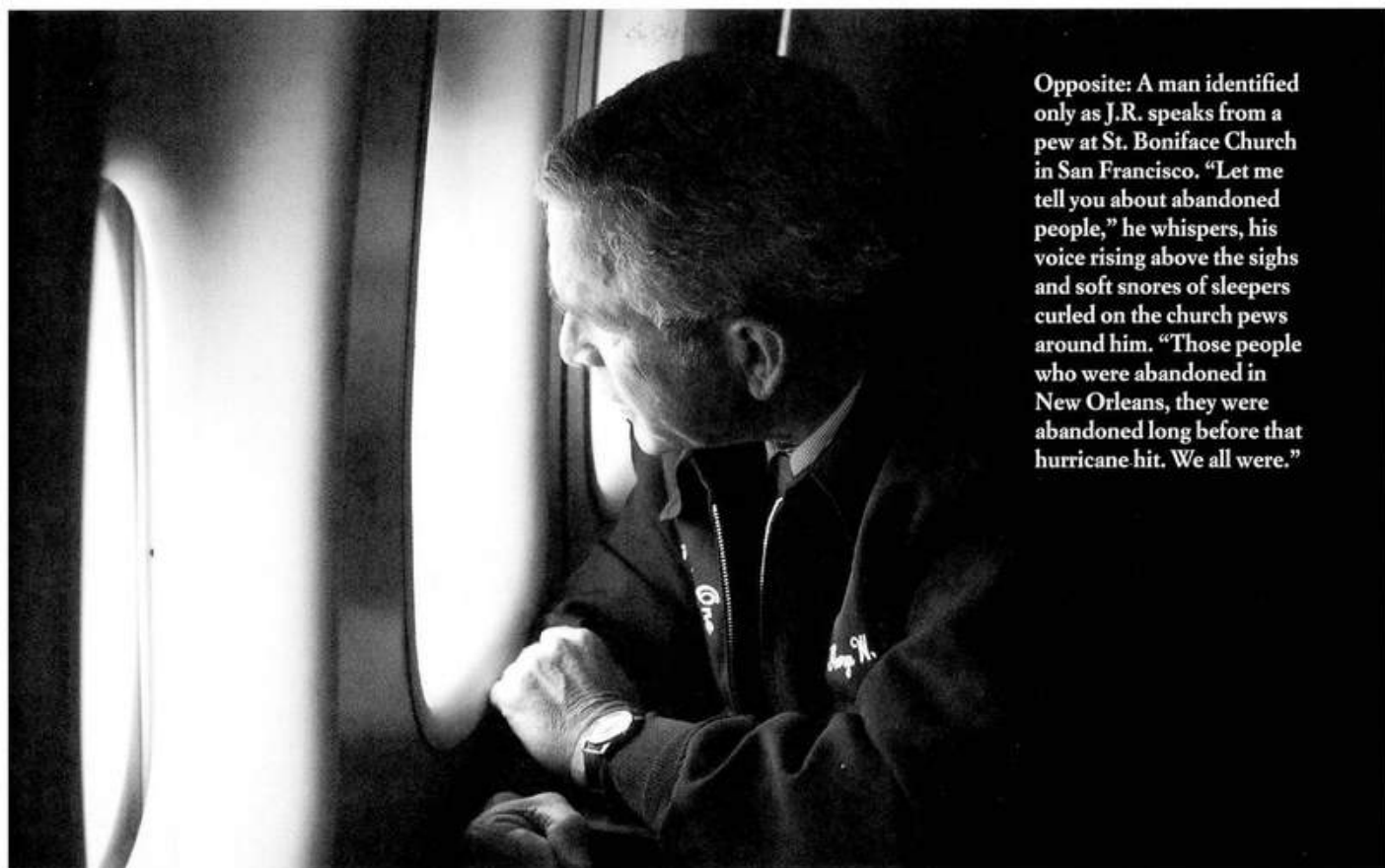
When some Christian fundamentalists talk about natural disasters like Katrina as signs of an impending apocalypse, they are laughed off as irrational cranks. It's true that these fundamentalists see no connection between natural disasters and the reckless environmental policies of the politicians they support. And some religious figures, such as Sephardi ultra-Orthodox leader Ovadia Yosef, rationalize Katrina as God punishing America for supporting the Disengagement, while some Christian fundamentalists point to a planned conference of homosexuals in New Orleans as God's reason for intervening. Such interpretations of the catastrophe can't be dismissed simply because their politics are bad. They intuit that there is a relationship between environmental crises and human behavior, even if they don't quite get what that connection is. If they understood that it was the selfishness and immorality of corporate plundering of the earth that is causing global warming, which is manifest in tsunamis and hurricanes of greater intensity and frequency, they'd have a more appropriate target for their outrage.

The fundamentalist message is deeply misleading because it suggests that people have no control over their own lives. For them everything happens for a reason, and so these environmental disasters are inevitable. They are not. The Bible insists that the choice between life and death is in our hands. After laying out the consequences of abandoning a path of justice and righteousness, the

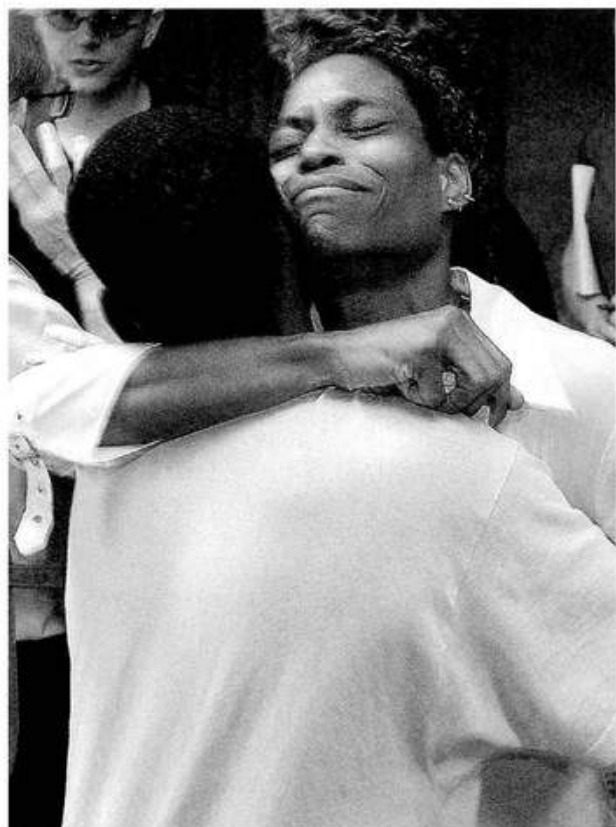
(continued on page 12)



AP PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) BEN MARGOT; CHRISTOPHER MORRIS/VII;
RON HAVIV/VII; PAUL CONNORS; ROB CARR; RICK BOWMER



Opposite: A man identified only as J.R. speaks from a pew at St. Boniface Church in San Francisco. "Let me tell you about abandoned people," he whispers, his voice rising above the sighs and soft snores of sleepers curled on the church pews around him. "Those people who were abandoned in New Orleans, they were abandoned long before that hurricane hit. We all were."



(continued from page 9)

Torah makes it clear that it is up to us. *Choose life*, it tells us.

Choosing life means transforming our social system in ways that neither Democrats nor Republicans have yet been willing to consider—toward a New Bottom Line of love and caring, kindness and generosity, ethical and ecological responsibility, and awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe; and away from a narrow utilitarian approach to nature.

Absent from the responses of our national leaders was the ability to respond with love and caring to the suffering that was being repeatedly broadcast on our television screens. For well over a month after the hurricane took place, America was continually reminded of the economic and racial specificity of Katrina's victims. Overwhelmingly African American and poor, those suffering reminded America of the racism and poverty that continue to plague it.

Of course, conservative media pundits and politicians did everything possible to minimize public empathy for hurricane victims by claiming that there was massive looting and raping. Subsequent reports show that while some of this did indeed take place, much of the looting, for example, was done out of necessity. Curiously, it wasn't labeled "looting" when television or newspaper pictures depicted white people scavenging for necessities.

But even with these diversionary efforts, the humanity of many in the media overwhelmed ideology, and the reporters on the ground began to break out of the normal "objective mode" of reporting and respond as real human beings to the suffering of others. For a brief moment, the corporate media was unable to hide the suffering of the powerless, which is, after all, a daily reality in America and around the world—even when there is no hurricane.

The problem is that the humanity of the American people, touched at that moment, is usually unnoticed in the political debates that go on in Washington. What too frequently happens with dis-

asters like this is that everyone gets momentarily worked up about helping the victims, then a few weeks later the whole thing is forgotten. Rarely do we get a serious discussion (much less follow-through) about how to solve the underlying problems. Let's not let that happen again.

For me, this is a prayerful moment. American society needs to repent for what it is doing to the earth, and make a dramatic turnabout.

The Bush Administration and Republicans in Congress have predictably focused on rebuilding the housing and industry that will benefit the wealthy with large spending programs and attempts to fund their corporate cronies with huge construction contracts. They have had pathetically little to offer the poor, the sick, and the powerless. Not surprisingly, it will be mostly African Americans whose needs are ignored in the rebuilding process, though the President acknowledged that current poverty is connected with a long history of racial discrimination. Meanwhile, the massive spending program that the Republicans will administer is likely to be another opportunity for corporate plunder. To their shame, Republicans are using this moment to suspend more environmental, health, safety, and minimum wage protections for the poor while seeking tax cuts for the wealthy, allegedly to spur reinvestment.

Unfortunately, Democrats have been far too timid in responding to the failures of the Bush Administration, concentrating their criticisms on the competence of the federal response, but largely ignoring the underlying economic and racial issues that systematically place the poorest and most vulnerable at highest risk. Without strong intervention on behalf of the poor, reconstruction and resettlement efforts will again be tilted in ways that are insensitive to the most vulnerable. We've already seen this process begin: people being moved from New Orleans into cities where they are given priority access to under-funded city services, thereby pushing the poor and homeless of those cities away from the al-

ready inadequate services available. Rather than pit these new victims against the victims of past injuries (including the injuries inflicted by downturns in the economy and the relocation of jobs overseas), we need a comprehensive plan to eliminate domestic poverty.

The dangers here are dramatic. The Republicans, crying fiscal restraint and budgetary poverty, are proposing that the rebuilding of New Orleans be financed without any restoration of taxes on the rich or cuts in the defense budget, but instead through cuts in social programs. For example, according to "Operation Offset," a spending cut-plan sponsored by the Republican Study Committee and published on Sept 21, funding would be eliminated for nearly 6,000 federal projects, including the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, the Minority Business Development Agency, the Legal Services Corporation, state and community grants for energy conservation, and federal grants for wastewater infrastructure. Thus the poverty and ecological irresponsibility that led to the disaster in the first place will now be spread to other cities, and the people who will be asked to bear the greatest burden will be the most needy and vulnerable. This is so immoral and disgusting that it is almost beneath contempt.

The alleged fiscal problems are all tied up with the real priorities of the Republicans (and too often a significant "centrist" section of the Democratic Party as well): serve the rich (who, coincidentally, provide the bulk of funds raised from Americans for political campaigns) and let the poor fend for themselves. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities demonstrated in a report September 19, "the rhetoric about an explosion in federal spending is not supported by the facts." The report goes on to make the following points: Even with the hefty Katrina relief and recovery costs, total projected federal spending will be lower, as a share of the economy, than federal spending in every year from 1975 through 1996.

Even with the large relief and recovery costs, deficits will stem more from lower-than-normal levels of tax revenue than from unusually high levels of spending. The tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003 cost more each year than the total amount likely to be spent on Katrina.

The cost of the tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003 is \$225 billion this year alone and will climb to higher levels each year in the future, as more of the tax cuts enacted in 2001 take full effect. The costs of the war in Iraq also are likely to exceed the costs of Katrina. According to the Congressional Research Service, a total of \$192 billion has been appropriated for the war in Iraq. Spending for Katrina will add relatively little to the large deficits already projected for the next 10 years.

If total funding for the response to Katrina equals \$150 billion, the deficit will be increased by a total of \$230 billion over the next ten years (\$150 billion in direct costs, plus \$80 billion to pay interest on the \$150 billion that will have to be borrowed and thus will be added to the debt). This will be on top of the deficit of \$4.5 trillion projected for 2006 through 2015 without the hurricane's costs. The projected deficit thus will be increased by about five percent.

Our Domestic Marshall Plan would cost much more, and could only be offset by a full reversal of the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, a move that is now politically possible were it to be presented in a framework that fully explained to the American people the costs of not stopping global warming and not eliminating poverty.

But to get mass support, we face one of the underlying ideological issues that the Democrats must address powerfully and repeatedly: the mythology of the "deserving poor" versus the "undeserving poor." The American people have been taught that victims of a hurricane, flood, fire, or earthquake are "deserving" because they were simply victims of something out of their control. On the other hand, the millions of poor and homeless people in our country are seen as "undeserving" because, the story goes, they didn't work hard enough, get

the right skills, or maintain the right work habits to get a job. Though Americans know that many of their jobs have been shipped out of the United States as corporations seek a cheaper workforce and unregulated manufacturing conditions, the existence of a small group of people who will not work or who seek to scam the system is used as slander against all poor persons, who are dismissed as "undeserving" of both work and state protections.

This same fundamental mythology is then applied to people around the

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world, as though they had brought their economic misery on themselves, as though it had nothing to do with the international capitalist marketplace and the conditions that have been created by the legacy of colonialism and Western economic domination.

What Americans need is a leadership that can state unequivocally that not only every U.S. citizen, but every human being on this planet, is equally deserving of our caring, and that any solution to our problems in America requires a new understanding of the interconnectedness of all with all, of our mutual interdependency. And, if the Democrats had an ounce of spiritual sensitivity, they might add that this recognition flows also from our connection to the sacred and from our recognition of the biblical truth that all human beings are created in the image of God and as such should be treated with dignity and respect. As the Bible makes clear, from this follows our responsibility to care for every per-

son and to give priority attention to the needs of the poor and the powerless. In a spiritual view of the world, there is no such thing as "undeserving poor."

Moreover, it is precisely distinctions like "deserving" or "undeserving" that make it so hard to mobilize people into politics. When people feel that they are being asked to work for the general interest, rather than for some particular interest to which they feel connected, they are less motivated. Americans would like to help the citizens of New Orleans, but their level of interest is much less likely to be sustained by that than by a vision that would touch their own communities as well. That's why the New Deal generated far more excitement than the reconstruction proposal the Democrats floated in mid-September.

In early September, we proposed a massive Domestic Marshall Plan, and the Democrats soon picked up on that language, but without the substance of what we are saying. Their vision is tepid and unlikely to produce mass support precisely because it offers too little (lots of money, but concentrated only in one area). So let us state it again.

The Domestic Marshall Plan must address not only the problems of New Orleans, but also the problems facing America that have been revealed through the Katrina disaster. This must have three foci:

1. The permanent elimination of poverty in the United States. This can be accomplished by:

- A massive housing program to provide adequate housing for every person living in this country, citizen or not. End homelessness and replace shabby ghetto housing with well-constructed, ecologically sound apartments constructed in central cities or in areas close to potential employment.

- Guaranteed full employment through massive construction work and other socially necessary programs funded through federal taxes.

- A national single-payer health plan providing universal coverage for everyone residing in the United States.

2. A total environmental transforma-

tion. In order to make it sustainable, we must rethink how we organize our society and must begin to repair the damage being done to the earth. This can be accomplished by:

- Ending our reliance on fossil fuel. This means immediately requiring that cars produced in this country be hybrid, and that they be entirely free of dependence on oil, or other destructive fuels within a specific number of years. Similarly, the production of energy for our factories and residences must be converted to environmentally safe forms, and this conversion must be completed without constraints imposed by those with investments in oil, gas, and coal. Meanwhile, we must adopt and enforce emission standards stricter than those in the Kyoto Accord.

- Retooling factories to produce in environmentally sustainable ways.

- Developing a global labeling of products that have been produced in a manner that is ethically appropriate (in terms of the conditions under which

workers produced and delivered them to market) and ecologically sensitive—and then committing the U.S. government to only buying goods with such a label, plus encouraging American consumers to do likewise with an ad campaign similar to those used to discourage smoking.

3. A massive retooling of the infrastructure of our cities, including bridges, levees, ports, and all other parts of the infrastructure that might fail in a natural disaster.

What does this have to do with New Orleans? Everything.

It is precisely because we didn't take these steps that we faced the New Orleans tragedy, and it is only if we take these steps that such events can be averted in the future. And the tragedy is not just for us, but for the entire earth. We are not talking about fifty or seventy years from now. The global crisis predicted years ago when the Republicans, along with many Democratic colleagues, buried their heads in the sand is now upon us. It will get worse. New Or-

leans is but one dramatic manifestation.

However, there is one beautiful thing that sometimes happens during these kind of emergencies: the cynical realism that teaches us that people only care about themselves—a teaching that makes most of us feel scared to be “too generous” or “too idealistic”—temporarily falls away, and people are allowed to be their most generous and loving selves. When the restraints are momentarily down, there is a huge outpouring of love, generosity, and kindness on the part of many Americans. People do things like advertise on the Craig's List online community that they are willing to take into their home a family that has been displaced by the floods. This kind of selflessness is something that people actually yearn to let out, but under ordinary circumstances fear to do so.

That goodness and generosity of spirit must be tapped now, before it recedes again, which is all the more reason why this country so badly needs a spiritual politics with a global vision.

Christmas and Chanukah

Christmas and Chanukah share a spiritual message: it is possible to bring light and hope into a world of darkness, oppression, and despair. Building on pre-existing celebrations in the ancient world in which people lit lights in symbolic enactment of the hope that even in physical darkness, humanity could remember the light and affirm our certainty that it would return again, both Christianity and Judaism turned this message from its focus on the cycles of heaven into the realities of history.

In recent years, the Religious Right has correctly noted that there is a huge spiritual vacuum around these holidays as they are celebrated in the United States, but they have blamed that spiritual vacuum on Jews and secularists.

Many fundamentalists have argued that the holidays have been diminished because civil libertarians, secularists, and Jews have forced Christians to keep the singing of Christmas carols out of the public schools and kept Christmas nativity scenes from being erected on city property. As usual, the Right starts with a correct perception (spiritual crisis) but then has a wrong analysis that leads them to blame the wrong people.

In order to understand this more fully, let's first reclaim the spiritual messages of the holidays, then see what undermines them. We'll look at Chanukah and Christmas in chronological order.

Chanukah celebrates the first recorded national liberation guerrilla war, waged by an entire society seeking to remake the world through struggle

against an oppressive political and social order: the Greek conquerors (who ruled Judea from the time of Alexander in 325 B.C.E.) and the Hellenistic culture that they sought to impose.

Though the holiday, celebrated by lighting candles for eight nights, recalls the victory of the guerrilla campaign led by the Maccabees against the Syrian branch of the Greek empire, and the subsequent rededication (*chanukah* in Hebrew) of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C.E., a more difficult struggle took place (and in some dimensions still rages) within the Jewish people between those who hoped for a triumph of a spiritual vision of the world embedded (as it turned out, quite imperfectly) in the Maccabees, and a cynical realism that had become the common sense of the merchants and

priests who dominated the more cosmopolitan arena of Jerusalem.

The cynical realists in Judea—among them many of the priests charged with preserving the Temple—argued that Greek power was overwhelming and that it made far greater sense to accommodate to it than to resist. The Greek globalizers promised advances in science and technology that would benefit international trade and enrich the local merchants who sided with them, even though the taxes that accompanied their rule impoverished the Jewish peasants who worked the land and eked out a subsistence living.

Along with Greek science and military prowess came an entire culture that celebrated beauty both in art and in the human body, presented the world with the triumph of rational thought in the works of Plato and Aristotle, and rejoiced in the complexities of life presented in the theatre of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes.

To the Maccabees (the guerrilla band that Jews assembled to fight the Greek Empire and its Seleucid dynasty in Syria) and to many of the Jewish supporters of that struggle, the issues of Greek militarism, social injustice, and oppression were far more salient than the accomplishments of Greek high culture. Whatever might have been the value of Athenian democracy, the reality that it exported to the world through Alexander and his successors was oppressive and exploitative.

The “old-time religion” that the Maccabees fought to preserve had revolutionary elements in it that went far beyond the Greeks in articulating a liberatory vision, not only in the somewhat abstract demand to “love your neighbor as yourself,” “love the stranger,” and pursue justice and peace, but also concretely in Torah prescriptions to abolish all debts every seven years, allow the land to lie fallow every seven years, refrain from all work and activities connected to control over the earth once a week on the Sabbath, and redistribute the land every fifty years (the Jubilee).

The miracle of Chanukah is that so

many people were able to resist the overwhelming “reality” imposed by the imperialists and to stay loyal to a vision of a world based on generosity, love of the stranger, and loyalty to an invisible God who promised that life could be based on justice and peace. It was these “little guys,” the powerless, who managed to sustain a vision of hope that inspired them to fight against overwhelming odds, against the power of technology and science organized in the service of domination, and despite the fact that they were dismissed as terrorists and fundamentalist crazies. When this kind of energy, what religious people call “the spirit of God,” becomes an ingredient in the consciousness of ordinary people, miracles ensue.

In Jewish history, Chanukah was always a minor holiday. Yet it was one of many aspects of Jewish culture that helped to sustain hope during the many centuries of Jewish homelessness and persecution. It had particular poignancy for Jews during the Holocaust—the memory of a moment when Jews had been more successful in fighting against oppression. Yet it was given a different meaning by the Zionist movement, which made Chanukah into a major holiday, because they saw in the Maccabees the historical precedent for a new kind of Jew that was emerging in Israel—tough, able to fight, and capable of overcoming overwhelming odds through military prowess. Soon enough, that would and did produce a new kind of cynical realism—in which power and domination over others was accepted as the vindication for past suffering. Jews became the Hellenists proclaiming the ultimacy of nuclear arms and superior military skills, scornful of the ideas of reconciliation and atonement for the sins we had committed in our domination over the Other. Tragically, the arrogance of the Maccabees in power is being relived today, and as that happens, the power of the original message of Chanukah gets lost.

Chanukah has not fared well in the United States either, where it lost its powerful message for still another reason: the deep desire of a significant sec-

tion of the Jewish population to “fit in” to the grand celebration of American materialism and power. In that culture, the anti-Hellenistic idea of Chanukah, its rejection of the ultimacy of power and domination, its insistence on being in the world in a different way (even to the extent that we would die for the right to not fight or exercise domination and control over any aspect of our lives one day of the week—Shabbat), seemed totally out of place and counter-productive to our “making it” in America. So it was not surprising that Jews, many of whom felt ambivalent about not being Christian, tried to turn this into a major holiday to provide their kids with compensation for being a religious minority by buying them lots of Chanukah gifts (“See? We have gifts for eight days, not just for one!”). Joining in the grand materialistic melee of holiday-season consumption, Jews could prove how patriotic and like-everyone-else we were by acting as consummate consumers. I don’t deny that this desire to fit in was at least partly a reflection of abiding Jewish fears of oppression—and therefore deserving not of ridicule but of compassion. Yet in the process, at least some Jews lost touch entirely with the real spiritual revolutionary message of the original Maccabean struggle.

Christianity was also born in struggle, against the Roman imperial successors to the Hellenist conquerors of Judea.

Jesus and his followers were part of the revolutionary movements of their time, challenging both Roman rule and the Jews who collaborated with them, but simultaneously challenging Judaism to take more seriously its message of love for the stranger and identification with the plight of the poor and the powerless. A Jewish prophet, Jesus reiterated the message of Jeremiah and Isaiah, of Micah and Amos, and took the biblical message one step further, insisting on nonviolence and honoring the most vilified in society.

The imagery of Christmas embodies some of the deepest hopes of the human race. A vulnerable, homeless young woman gave birth to a child in

the manger, the most humble of circumstances, yet this young child, the baby Jesus, would become the messiah destined to bring salvation to the world. All the softness and vulnerability of a powerless humanity are summed up in this picture of a loving mother and newborn babe. And all the hopes of humanity could be channeled into that one moment in which goodness is reborn on the planet.

Throughout the ages, many who lived in conditions of oppression could take hope in that vision of light in the darkness, of vulnerability and abject poverty destined to assume power, of love triumphing in a cruel world. Here too was the essence of both Jewish and Christian spirituality: the way things are is not the only way things can be, and the world need not be based on violence and oppression, but on love and generosity of spirit, and that the power of the powerful is vulnerable to the power of the spirit.

So Judaism and Christianity both have messages for this season of the year that could inspire us to challenge the ethos of selfishness and materialism that is continuously celebrated in the advertisements and storylines that dominate our contemporary media.

And yet, that message has been largely lost to mass consciousness as Christmas has taken on a largely materialistic form. The generous impulse to take care of each other, to share with each other, that could be acted upon through a Christmas or Chanukah communal meal got overshadowed in the contemporary world by the notion of gift buying as the real way to show others that you really care. As the experience of community declines, people have faced this holiday with images of happy nuclear families exchanging gifts. (In recent years there have been ads with pictures of a brand new car under the Christmas tree, setting the bar for a satisfactory gift at something like \$40,000!) But even for those whose gift buying is far less extravagant, the pressure to buy as a way to show how much you care—and about whom—becomes extremely oppressive

for those who have less disposable resources to participate in this buy-for-all. And many people have families that do not fit the traditional images (single persons who live far from their parents, single parent families, divorced people, gay couples) and who find themselves not fitting in or not being invited to whatever celebrations are available. The combination of financial and social pressures—the demands to spend and to prove that you are having a great time and are fully happy—generates society-wide depression that manifests itself in over-consumption of alcohol, suicides, and despair.

Last year, I was outraged to hear leaders of the Religious Right talk of a conspiracy against Christmas led by secularists and civil libertarians (some included Jews explicitly, others by implication by naming obvious Jewish names as leading the fight to keep Christmas carols out of the schools and manger scenes out of the public squares). When I appeared on *The O'Reilly Factor*, I pointed to the real culprit: the very capitalist marketplace that the Religious Right treats as sacrosanct, and for a moment O'Reilly was forced to acknowledge that it was the frenzy of consumption that was really at the center of undermining the spirit of these holidays.

Today, we at TIKKUN seek to reclaim the underlying hopeful spiritual message of the holidays, not only for Christians and Jews, but also as a universal message: the way things are is not the only way things could be. The overwhelming power of the ruling elites of the world (and their coterie of cheerleaders in the media) who disproportionately influence the universities and control corporations, can be overcome when the Spirit of God becomes an ingredient in the minds of the majority of people, and they realize that their desire for a world of kindness, justice, peace, ecological sanity, and loving connection to others is worth fighting for and could actually win!

Here are two concrete steps to

change the character of your holiday experience:

Give gifts of time rather than gifts of things. Give a gift card to friends or family members offering to give them time to assist them with something that they actually need: paint their house or porch, clean their garage or downstairs or attic, provide babysitting or child-care so that they can go out, teach them some skill you have that you suspect they might enjoy, mow their lawn or plant their garden or trim their trees, make a gourmet dinner for them, go grocery shopping for them, volunteer time for a charity or political cause with which they are involved. This is harder with children who are often inundated by the “things are the only way people show caring” message at a very early age. You may have to capitulate to them, but keep talking about an alternative perspective, and model this way of thinking for them by the way you give gifts.

Focus attention every holiday night on the real message. During the eight days of Chanukah or from Christmas eve through New Year's Day, pick a theme each day that allows you to imagine how things could be. Then share with family members what would have to happen in order for your vision to be made real. Try this with your family, with your church or synagogue or mosque or ashram, and with your circle of friends, or with members of the local chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) or the Tikkun Community.

For example, each day you could pick one of these themes and ask yourself and everyone in your family or network to imagine the changes you'd like to work for: the world of work, relationships with your parents, spiritual or religious community, your neighborhood and relationship with neighbors, society, American politics, social change movements, larger world.

Share your vision with others, without criticizing theirs. Then rejoice and sing songs of celebration and of struggle, drawing from the rich assortment of music and poetry that emerges from all the world's spiritual traditions and traditions of struggle. □

Christmas As Archetype

Matthew Fox

Let's not talk about Jesus at all. Let's talk about ourselves. Who are we? What do we entail? Who do we carry around inside of us? How do we connect to the Divine, to Yahweh, to the Source of all things, to the poor and neglected? Yes, let's talk about Christmas.

Christmas has become an archetype. That is its power. It means many things to many people, and some of these things are just plain offensive. Among the offensive things would be the glut of materialism and consumerism that characterizes the season in a consumer-dominated culture, or the sentimentalism that wallows in nostalgia.

But what are the deepest meanings of this archetype called Christmas?

Christmas is non-triumphal. That is to say, it is not about the victory of any empire, god, tribe, or human enterprise. It is not history written by the conquerors. Quite the opposite: It is "history," or at least a story, about the non-conquerors, the unsuccessful, the non-empire-builders. Christmas is a story about a couple, pregnant and poor with no home or hotel to take them in for their child's arrival. A story not so far fetched given today's world of poverty and exclusion, not just in the "third world," but even—as we saw in New Orleans in September—in the hidden corners and neighborhoods of our own cities.

Christmas is a story about the poor triumphing over life's tough challenges. Like bringing a child into the world. Bringing a child into a corner of the world that is not hospitable to the event, because the parents don't have the means.

Christmas is a story about bringing a child into the world in the midst of the four-legged creatures, in the hay, in the manger where animals feed. It is about laying a child in a manger, not in a pristine bassinet; in a manger, not in a sterilized hospital ward. Christmas is a story about survival.

But it is more than that. The archetype of Christmas also speaks to just what a child is. Who is a human child? Not only the son of a king, the son of a president, the daughter of a rock star—not only the identity of a well-known or well-



placed child, but the "every child," including the poorest of children born to the poorest of parents in the poorest of circumstances—in a stable, a barn, a ghetto, or a peasant village. What about that child? What is his or her worth?

That is the news that Christmas brings: That a child who comes into the world, however unconnected, however poor and insignificant, however unheralded, is a *son or daughter of God*. Is wisdom incarnate. Is Emmanuel, God-among-us. Is worth a great deal.

There lies the Good News of this archetype. It stretches the imagination to suggest it, especially in light of how many humans have been destroyed by each other over the past centuries in wars and other atrocities. But that is the lesson staring us in the face on Christmas: That every child is precious and counts, counts more than we can imagine. Every child is a unique face of God, a unique image of the Divine One who remains so often shy and hidden, but who becomes manifest in creatures—including the human creature, the helpless baby who will grow, we hope, into a compassionate adult.

Is such a story credible? Does it take more faith than we can muster in this hardened twenty-first century? What are the implications of this lesson—for education, for example? For economics? For politics? For religion? For the media? If every child is a son or daughter of God, a bearer of Divine Wisdom, what about every adult? Is this Godlike-ness, this God-among-us, lost as we grow older? If so, why? If so, can we get it back? And how do we do that?

What would a society—or better, a community—look like if we all committed to every human child and every human adult being an image of the living God? Being a "Buddha nature"? Or "another Christ"? Or the Shechinah in our midst?

These are challenging questions, which is why Christmas is not going away, no matter how woefully consumerist culture beats up on it, or how stiflingly institutional religion fails to plumb its deeper meaning. "We are all meant to be mothers of God," the great mystic Meister Eckhart preached in a Christmas sermon seven centuries ago. The news does not stop with our being divine children, but insists that we ourselves *give birth* to the divine child on a regular basis—in our children, in our creativity, in our work, in all our relationships.

A deep Christmas to us all. □

Matthew Fox is president of Wisdom University in Oakland, California. He is the author of twenty-six books.

K3
K6
K9

SCENE

www.scebee.com/lifestyle

RELIGION & ETHICS

Progressive Spirit

An interfaith group organizes in the belief
'religious' doesn't have to mean politically conservative

saifer Garza
OFF WRITER

Lerner is a man of faith,
admits that the job he
is a formidable one.
gave spiritual advice to
ton and coined the
if meaning,' has come
is sure to draw the ire
and some liberals.

er faith leaders are
group of spiritual
for the religious right.
(think) we can unify, and
tall about.



BAY AREA

Liberals gather to 'demand answers'

Venues include
parties, town hall
meeting, convention

By Kelly St. John
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The political left came out in
full force across the Bay Area on
Saturday.

In Berkeley, they explored the



Joseph
Wilson,
husband of
Valerie Plame
spoke via
conference
call with
house parti

Lee's town hall meeting was
of 320 events nationwide, plan
on the third anniversary of the



new launch

BERKELEY — They
dress alike, wearing
names as 'Got Gandi'



for the religious left in Berkeley on Thursday morning. Photo by [illegible]

SPECIAL SECTION

Conference on Spiritual Activism I

THE BERKELEY CONFERENCE

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s. Blue states. You ain't election behind them, sp fortifying their ranks. A derences last week, one were striking. But there at stake is the soul of the

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God is still
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Leftists work to 'take back God,' White Ho

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2008 presidential election may be more than three years away, but one group is already working to press the Democratic Party to include spirituality in its platform for that year.

The right is correct: there is a homecoming spiritual crisis in America. Michael Lerner, a Berkeley-based author and activist, said in a recent interview.

Republicans and their allies have "come out of the closet" in articulating that crisis. Lerner's analysis is "fundamental" because it's based on demographics: gays, liberals, African Americans, and others. Lerner made his case at the opening-night crowd of 1,200 at the four-day interfaith conference on spiritual activism.

An initiative, as several speakers urged, to "take back God" — and the White House — the religious right was the main theme of the forum, held July

"We've created this gathering for people who want to challenge the misuse of God and religion by the religious right and build a new bottom line whereby institutions will be judged rational, productive and efficient not only to their members but to the society they maximize."



A VISION FOR THE LEFT

Rabbi urges liberals to meld spiritual values with social advocacy

Creating a Network of Spiritual Progressives will take several years. We started with a Conference on Spiritual Activism in July of 2005, and will continue with a second conference on May 17–20, 2006 in Washington, DC.

In 2007, we'll proceed to a full celebratory launch of the Network, when we will also present our platform for the 2008 elections, which we hope will be introduced into the national conventions by delegates who are Spiritual Progressives.

It's hard to give a full picture of what happened and what was said at the first conference in July. With over 40 workshops, 8 work groups, and 108 speakers, not to mention a total of 1,380 attendees, it seems unlikely that we'll ever know the full range of experiences people had or the ideas that were discussed. What we can definitely say is that the response by those who attended ranged from very enthusiastic to exhilarated. Part of the reason is that there is a growing recognition of the need for a Network of Spiritual Progressives; part of the reason is that we had so many incredibly talented speakers and workshop presenters; part of the reason is that we attracted people who brought with them lots of smarts, generosity of spirit, and good will who, when they realized that they were surrounded by similarly gifted people, got very excited about being there.

An informal poll of attendees indicated the religious diversity represented: we had 600 Protestants, 200 Catholics, 150 Jews, 100 Buddhists, 100 Unitarians and Church of Religious Science and Agape people, 50 Muslims, and 180 people who were "spiritual but not religiously identified."

What we present to you here and in the next issue of *TIKKUN* is a small sampling of what was said.

We at *TIKKUN* had some guidelines for what could make a Network of Spiritual Progressives an organization that could stimulate a truly historic spiritual/political movement. It will have that significance if it can:

- Show that spiritual progressives have something to say that is distinctive and important—not just a repeat of the old liberal or progressive wisdom, repackaged with a few religious or spiritual slogans, but a new and deeper analysis that would provide

a smarter way to understand and combat both the growth of the Right and the ethos of extreme individualism, narcissism, and materialism in Western societies, which manifests itself in the globalization of selfishness. The central point is our call for a New Bottom Line, so that institutions and social practices are judged rational, efficient, and productive not only to the extent that they maximize money and power, but also to the extent that they maximize love and caring, kindness and generosity, peace and social justice, ethically and ecologically responsible behavior, and that they enhance our capacities to transcend a manipulative, technocratic, and utilitarian way of treating others, so that we can respond to other people as embodiments of the sacred and develop our capacities to respond to the grandeur of the universe with awe and wonder.

- Demonstrate that it is possible to build a movement that is interfaith—not by seeking to have a lowest common denominator spirituality, but by encouraging people to bring their own particular religions or spiritual paths, to affirm them, and to engage in serious dialogue about the differences and places of disagreement within a context of affection, mutual respect, and shared commitment to a New Bottom Line for American society.

- Show that it is possible to build a movement that unites progressive religious people with "spiritual but not religious" secular people, without requiring either to give up anything beyond their tendency to demean the integrity of the other.

- Prove to the secular Left that a Spiritual Left will be loyal to a progressive sensibility without thereby turning Spiritual Progressives into cheerleaders for the latest (and sometimes quite distorted) versions of political correctness that tend to stifle creative thinking in the secular Left.

- Explain to those in the religious world that one can be fully committed to progressive movements for peace, social justice, ecological sanity, human rights and civil liberties with-

out abandoning or significantly compromising our religious and spiritual consciousness.

- Show how it is possible to understand the psychological needs that the political Right is meeting, recognize that some of those needs are rational and legitimate (e.g., the need for a transcendent meaning to life, a purpose-driven life, a vocation that has ethical purpose, loving community, and family stability), but can best be met by a progressive spirituality that challenges the ethos of selfishness and materialism of the competitive marketplace, and by a New Bottom Line in our society. We must combat the way that the Right demeans gays and lesbians, feminists, liberals, secularists, and people of color, energetically combat right-wing political influence and programs, and yet show respect for members of the Right as human beings.

- Do all this with a spirit of generosity, compassion, humor, humility, and love.

When reading some of these talks (or listening to them on CDs, which are available at www.tikkun.org/store), you might ask yourself which of these goals the particular talk you are reading was trying to serve. Not every talk presented here assumes the same kind of political analysis or worldview. Yet, to varying degrees, what unites them is how they all foster a sense of generosity, humor, and love, coupled with a profound appreciation of the political dimension of spirituality. And at times, a number of these pieces reach out to the secular Left, extending a reassuring hand of friendship by demonstrating that spirituality and religion are not synonyms for anti-democratic politics. Quite the opposite, in fact.

We are not including the keynote speech by Rabbi Michael

Lerner, which set the framework for the conference and which provides a lot of the central politics of meaning/spiritual politics framework that pervaded the understanding of many of the participants. A much fuller statement of this position will be available in January with the publication of Lerner's book, *The Left Hand of God*, which deepens his talk and presents it in a more detailed and powerful way. If we presented the whole thing here, we wouldn't give enough attention to this conference's other wonderful speakers, who brought a great deal of crucial wisdom and insight to our proceedings. (But we do urge you to read the book—buy it in early January as soon as it comes into your bookstores, or pre-order it from Amazon.com.)

So, imagine that people listening to these other talks already knew about *Why America Needs a Spiritual Left* (a very shortened version of some of Lerner's themes that appeared in the January/February 2005 issue of *TIKKUN* (and which you can find on our website, www.tikkun.org/magazine). Then, the rest of what we are presenting makes greater sense. But please understand that we are presenting representative excerpts from many speakers whose full presentations can best be understood by listening to the CDs.

We start with a session at which the founder of the program on Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) at U.C. Berkeley, Michael Nagler, offered opening thoughts. Nagler is nationally respected as a pioneer in bringing peace studies into academia, and for his own powerful work on Gandhi and nonviolence. Nagler co-chaired the Conference on Spiritual Activism with Rabbi Lerner, and PACS, with *TIKKUN*, was one of the major co-sponsors of the conference.

Michael Nagler

We are here today because we feel that we're really onto something with this concept of "spiritual activism." Without it, we progressives are just about shut out of the mainstream political process in this country—a process that has degenerated into a fight, not a decision-making process, and a fight that doesn't even have two parties but, as Gore Vidal recently said, "one party with two right wings."

In fact, we are shut out of the mainstream discourse in which this process is embedded, because that discourse has come to be dominated by powerful media that are in turn dominated by corporate, not human, interests. The damage to democracy is much greater than the political biases that are often pointed out. Think of what it means that anyone who can afford the financial and moral cost can run a devastating attack ad based on lies that will be exposed a week later,

because by then the ad will have done its work and *no one will care* that it was false. You can tell the public that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction with the same confidence that nobody will care that they don't. And of course, should the attack ad fail, no problem: push the votes through a magic Diebold machine and have them come out the way you wanted. How has all this happened?

I don't listen to the radio or watch television, but yesterday when I was looking for a traffic report I was subjected to an ad for something called "Get Hair" (an insult to all of us in the bald community). If you don't listen to these media regularly, you appreciate how astounding the discourse has become. There was the numbing—or should I say "dumbing"—repetition; they must have repeated the 800 number eighteen times in two minutes. If they deliberately wanted us to react, not respond, to political messages, they couldn't have done a

CONFERENCE ON SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

better job. The advertisement cited "clinical studies," knowing full well that no one would believe in them and that, once again, it wouldn't matter. I often remember what Roslyn Carter said the day her husband was defeated by the former Governor of California: "The trouble with that man is he makes us feel good about our prejudices." But what made us so susceptible to that temptation? According to a recent study, Americans are exposed to 3,000 commercial messages a day—every one of which is designed to make us feel good about our prejudices, to react without thinking.

I see this as the core of the problem: *neo-conservatives have \$200 billion worth of free advertising a year. It's known as American culture.*

Science is not going to save us from this propaganda. Ironically, while we live in the very age of astounding, liberating discoveries in science, the significance of these great breakthroughs cannot be delivered to the general public, because their stories cannot make it through the official narrative of our culture: that we are all material objects doomed to compete for scarce resources.

Education is not going to save us, I'm sorry to say, because the purpose of education has been completely forgotten. According to a recent statement by our Chancellor, when he was trying to get the State to restore budget cuts, our purpose is to help students "ultimately become active contributors to our state's economy. We are telling state leaders that these programs are important investments in the economic competitiveness of California."

I hope I am making it clear in these brief words what we are up against: an entire culture, nay, a civilization based on materialism, which is a false doctrine that leads only to misery and violence.

A recent visitor to the United States said, "I have never seen a country with so much religion. And I have never seen a country with so little spirituality." Spirituality is a powerful answer to materialism, perhaps the only one. We are right to feel that spirituality can save us. Spirituality, after all, is deeper than even culturally embedded messages and political behaviors that arise from them.

What is spirituality, then? According to the Scottish Council of Churches, it is the "attempt to grow in sensitivity to self, to others, to nonhuman creations and to God who is within and beyond this totality." This same sensitivity is drowned out by 3,000 messages a day telling us to latch on to our own feelings. There is more to spirituality, of course. Let me share with you one of the most profound statements on spirit I know of, from the famous sixth book of the *Cchandogya Upanishad*: "Within the City of Brahman [i.e., ourselves] is a secret dwelling. Within that dwelling is a space; and within that space is the fulfillment of all our desires. What is within that space is to be longed for, and realized."

"No!" screams modern culture, "Everything you want is outside you—and we can sell it to you at a discount."

The Upanishad continues, "Here [on this plane of sepa-

rate existence] people do what they are told, becoming dependent on their piece of land, or their country, or the desires of another; so their own desires are not fulfilled, and their works come to nothing in this world and in the next." Startlingly contemporary. Just last week Herb Lehr, now eighty-three, who worked on the atomic bomb (the blasphemously dubbed Trinity Project), told reporters, "I am in no way ashamed of what I had done in any way, shape, matter [sic] or form. *I did what I was told to do.* I did it to the best of my ability."

My friend Michael McKinney, thirty-five, who read my book in Florida State Prison, where he has been since he was eighteen, wrote to me recently about how prison existence is torturing him. "Everybody wants to be a killer," he told me, "*nobody wants to be their self.*" Michael knows what our culture wants to forget: violence belies our deepest nature, which is our spirituality, which is our unity. It abolishes the very concept of the individual as a responsible agent with inner depth.

The last time I addressed such a big audience in this hall was during the Free Speech movement, and it gives me such a sense of history and progress to be speaking to you now. If the twelve Quakers who decided to abolish slavery in 1787 (fifty years later, slavery was over) showed the world that slavery was wrong, and if student outrage of the Sixties then showed that racism itself is wrong, what are *we* destined to show the world? I say, the time has come to show the world that *violence* is wrong. So this is my audacious proposal: *Let's abolish violence.*

How on earth can we do that? *Spiritually*, of course. And that means two things:

- We start with ourselves. Even by turning off the media, for example.
- We work mainly from the positive end, by *building the constructive alternative.*

This last point—and it's critical—will be a huge job, because to do away with violence, we're going to have to do away with its cultural and commercial infrastructure. Fortunately, millions of people around the world are already building the components of what Lester Brown calls "Plan B," the new way of living—and thinking—that supports cooperation and harmony where commercial culture and industrial civilization have produced widespread pollution, competition, war, and violence. Their project needs to be recognized and supported for what it is: a worldwide movement.

Let's look at the strategic advantages of spiritual activism. First, it can put us back on the moral high ground that has been usurped by the parties of violence and hatred. And it will put in our hands at least three other great advantages. (1) It will unlock the power of the individual. As Louis Menand points out, "we've started to understand every human encounter as a symbolic clash of group interests, and this is misleading ... Groups are essentially imaginary. Souls are real, and they can be saved, or lost, only one at a time." (2) Spirituality will unlock the biggest secret in the modern world:

Americans are exposed to 3,000 commercial messages a day—each of which is designed to make us feel good about our prejudices, to react without thinking. This is the core of the problem: neo-conservatives have \$200 billion of free advertising a year. It's known as American culture.

that sexual energy can be transformed. This is huge. Sex is, after all, the fundamental creative energy of life. When Gandhi vowed to harness it, in the summer of 1906, only two months later (on September 11, as it happens), Satyagraha was born.

Which brings us to (3) Nonviolence. Using only rudimentary forms of nonviolence, students in Serbia recently accomplished in two days what NATO bombing had failed to accomplish in eleven months: they got President Milosevic out of power. But the real potential of nonviolence becomes fully accessible only when we bring to it spiritual awareness and spiritual practice; nonviolence is, in fact, the

bridge between spiritual development and social change. Of its potential, Gandhi wrote: "My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might oversweep the world." Since Gandhi made that statement, waves of nonviolent resistance have swept over Eastern Europe; nearly a third of the world's population has now been uplifted by similar changes. Such is the power destiny has put in our hands. I propose we use it.

Peter Gabel

Peter Gabel has been Michael Lerner's main partner in the development of the ideas underlying the politics of meaning/spiritual politics that are at the core of the Tikkun Community. He is the associate editor of TIKKUN Magazine and director of San Francisco's New College of California Institute on Spirituality and Politics, where he is now developing an undergraduate major in spiritual activism. For that reason, he was the logical choice to give an opening address defining the vision underlying the conference.

Here are the central ideas of a Politics of Meaning:
The desire for mutual recognition.
The denial of the desire for mutual recognition,
and the creation of a milieu of blocked connection.

The fear of humiliation that underlies that denial.

The circle of collective denial as being the process by which society encloses spiritual longings and keeps them from being expressed.

The nature of spiritual pain and its effect on politics and culture, including how the Right has spoken to this spiritual pain.

A moral presence: building a parallel universe, and the creation of a spiritual activist platform emerging from a coherent

moral vision that links practical reality to an overall vision of a good human community, and how that speaks to the spiritual and political at the same time.

What is the greatest source of pain and suffering that we see in daily life? The fact that people experience meaninglessness and social disconnection, that their deepest needs are somehow not being spoken to and can't be expressed, that in everyday life people are floating at a distance from their own experience—from what really matters to them. Many of us are trapped by the shallowness of media culture, locked in patterns of social separation, and feeling the pain of not being able to become fully present to each other. This is the greatest source of violence and social misery.

If people long to become fully present to each other, why don't they? We are all animated by a desire for mutual recognition whereby we affirm one another's existence and become present to each other in a whole and transparent way. This is a profound need in all living beings. It is as important as the need for food and shelter.

We know that children who are not held or nurtured will fail to thrive and even die from a lack of the most basic and fundamental of intimacies: of eye contact and loving connectedness. We know it in ourselves and experience it in a way that animates us in every moment of our existence. Yet, in the

Those of you who are religious have an important role to play because you are not afraid to talk about love, connectedness, and a higher purpose, or to express your concern for the environment, not only in terms of scientific analysis, but with a sacred sense of nature.

world we are currently in, that desire for mutual recognition is denied in our everyday life.

We live in a culture in which the denial of desire for mutual recognition is continually being manifested all around us. It is a central part of our conditioning as we grow up, and we internalize that artificiality in becoming an adult.

In one sense, there are a lot of historical reasons one can give to help understand this phenomenon. However, it is simply the truth about the development of human evolution thus far. For all the developmental accomplishments of the human species, we still tend to perceive the Other as a threat, rather than as the source of our completion. In reality, we are the source of each other's salvation.

Yet, living in what I call "a circle of collective denial"—a rotating denial of desire, which we pass on to each other—creates a social field in which the aspect of our psyches that is afraid of the Other has a very powerful grip on social consciousness. This form of denial coexists with desire all the time. The longing for connection with the Other is the source of hope at the same time that the circle of fear, denial, and tentativeness is the source of withdrawal and depression.

You may remember the few weeks following September 11, 2001, after the World Trade Center collapsed. Try and recall that day—when the towers came down, when people were jumping off the buildings—and how shocking it was. Can you remember that for two weeks after that happened, there was a break in the flat surface of life, what I call "the denied surface"? Something spiritual spontaneously arose. The recognition of the heroism of the firefighters and the police, people who gave their lives for other people to be able to live, the sense of shock of "what have we wrought in this world that this could have happened?"

Some of you may remember that Kevin Spacey organized a televised concert in which he and other people sang John Lennon's "Imagine." There was such a spontaneous outpouring of awe, compassion, poignancy, and sadness. It was very beautiful, until the forces of denial re-formed around the experience and turned it into "we're gonna get them." A paranoid stance reemerged. The possibility of looking at what humanity was doing to itself that existed in those first few weeks was lost.

What I am trying to describe here is the spiritual pain of people in an environment where they cannot see each other or express their deepest needs for meaning, purpose, and con-

nectedness with others. That spiritual pain is very great and lives inside us every day. Up to this point, progressive forces have not spoken to that spiritual pain. The Democratic Party's presentation of what they are for limits itself more or less to the standard liberal worldview of helping other people with external needs. Addressing economic needs in that flat way does not reach inside to that feeling of pain and that longing for something higher and something more significant.

It's the Right that has spoken to that need for the last twenty-five years—since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. The Right has emerged to shape everything that it stands for within a moral discourse about a good community and what a good community values, thereby creating the idea of the community by defining it in moral terms.

The Right has connected its worldview with its presentations of policies. Its candidates have spoken to the spiritual suffering I am describing, mainly through images of social connectedness and images of the loving family. Some of you may remember Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" television campaign ads in 1980, in which a woman appeared holding a child, saying it was time for morning in America, time to come back to the loving family. Those ads were tremendously powerful because they spoke to the longing for vulnerable connectedness that we all feel inside ourselves.

The Right's emphasis on the family as a source of connectedness and love, on the nation and the flag bringing us together in an ideal community, on religion, and on God as being central to the nature of a moral universe where we are all bonded together with purpose—these are ways of speaking to this longing for connectedness. Such images are frequently fantasies for alienated people. Even though I emphasize the fantasy nature of this appeal, we must acknowledge that the political Right, through church groups, has also developed very real communities in which people are welcomed, blessed, and accepted simply for being who they are. They are brought into an environment of love, regardless of whether we think it's real or imperfect love.

The defining values for people in these right-wing communities are values of connectedness. Progressives have not developed a worldview that can speak to that same spiritual pain nor learned how to say, "If you join us you will become a member of a community of mutual recognition, love, acceptance, meaning, and purpose that will give moral definition to an experience of solidarity in your own life."

As progressives, what we have to do with this conference and with this movement is to build a politics of meaning or a spiritual politics that also speaks to people's spiritual longings. Those of you who are religious have an important role to play because you are not afraid to talk about love, connectedness, and a higher purpose, or to express your concern for the environment, not only in terms of scientific analysis, but with a sacred sense of nature. You have to help the Left learn to speak in that language and help us make sure we don't speak a technocratic discourse such as "we're for health care, we're for the environment," where moral resonance is lost and spiritual meaning is hidden.

Let me conclude with three key elements that challenge the circle of collective denial, so that we may build a politics that elicits hope in the progressive majority.

The first is moral presence. Here I am speaking to each of you as individuals rather than as a collective. Moral presence manifests itself in how you are, how you hold yourself, how you relate to the Other. That was missing in John Kerry's presidential campaign. I'm sure it was hard for him to retain centeredness when everyone was telling him what to do and what to say. But Kerry presented himself as the man who, as we watched him hopefully, would stand up and say [*fake monotone voice*], "From North to South, from East to West, the message is clear: the people want change." That is not manifesting moral presence. So, when we listened to him, we heard only the hollowness of the echo and not the presence of the person engaged in helping to express for all of us the direction we long to go in. The capacity for authenticity is central. We have to call on it in ourselves, in whatever fragments it exists, and try to manifest it in how we relate to each other, to the world, and certainly to those we are trying to influence.

The second element essential to creating a Politics of Meaning is "building a parallel universe." Our task is to create a culture in which we support authentic mutual recognition of each other. To sustain our own belief in the possibility of a society based on authentic mutual connection, we have to build a universe of relationships and activities within our own lives that nourish us and restore our own belief that such a thing is possible. At a conference like this we can all believe it for a few days. But when we leave this building and return to the world of social separation, it's easy to become doubtful and to lose hope.

To resist that separation requires building a parallel universe in which we see each other practicing spiritual politics, practicing the reality of mutual recognition, as opposed to the mere manipulation of objects and technical thinking and just getting things done—things that are actually distancing activities. Here are some examples:

At New College, where I have taught for thirty years, I am proposing that our evaluation of each other take Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the Jewish ten days of reflection and repentance as a model for our own communal self-explo-

ration. The idea being to think back on the previous year, on all that we had hoped for, on all the ways that we came up short or missed the mark, and we talk to each other in pairs (a practice borrowed from a Jewish tradition developed by Rabbi Lerner in his synagogue, *Beyt Tikkun*) as Teshuva buddies: people who talk to each other daily and encourage this process of self-reflection.

Supported by our co-worker, we then develop our own vision of what we hope to accomplish in the coming year. This practice is subsequently transcribed and becomes the evaluation process. That is a sacred way of looking at evaluations in an organization, and is based on strengthening each other's spiritual hopes, rather than evaluating each other in a detached way according to how well each one is functioning in the workplace. That's an example of building a parallel universe by adapting a religious practice—which has worked for 3,000 years—within a college.

The final thing that we have to do is develop a spiritual activist platform. Such a platform connects a spiritual vision of human community with practical issues. Here are some examples of how a politics of meaning approach would differ from a traditional liberal approach to activism.

Healthcare

From a Politics of Meaning perspective, healthcare is not just insurance. It is about caring about each other's health and the health of each other's families. The caring element ought to be crucial to how one speaks about healthcare. Speaking about care in that sense elevates the program or policy in a way that can inspire people to want to do that because people do actually want to take care of each other's families if given the opportunity. This discourse would make universal healthcare a moral imperative. Once the subject of healthcare is about caring for one another, it becomes impossible to disqualify anyone from receiving it due to a lack of money. That's a morally degrading healthcare platform. Thus, it becomes much more possible to argue for universal healthcare when it is presented within a moral framework as being necessary to our capacity to care for one another as human beings.

Social Security

The debate about Social Security is upsetting to me. The Democrats are simply saying, "just keep it the way it is, there is no need to change, your checks are secure." The Right seems to have the innovative proposal of private accounts. But actually, Social Security is one of the great achievements of humankind: we have developed a process by which generations take care of each other in a loving and connected way and thus have brought that element of compassion, concern, and solidarity into the whole social fabric. That's what needs to be evoked: the meaning of social security as intergenerational support, concern, and compassion, not as

just an insurance technique to allow people to die in peace as individuals with only material needs. Do you see the difference between the two?

An Education Platform

George Bush had a great idea when he came up with the slogan “No Child Left Behind” because it suggests that all children are included in a loving way in the community. It’s well put. Our perspective on education cannot just be that we want more access and we also want standardized testing. Just not as much, which is basically the Democratic Party position: somewhat fewer standardized tests. I am thinking about my ten-year-old son, Sam, and how much I want his school to attend to his moral and spiritual development, to help him to have a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of nature, to help him to connect to a deeper flow than MTV does. To keep that alive in his own joyful development so he can care about and cooperate with others.

That should be at least as important as his ability to manipulate objects and take the standardized tests. Certainly, if you have children, you are aware of the impact of standardized

testing systems on kids: the creation of insecurity and of humiliation where there was none before. The linking of what someone merits, by their capacity to manipulate math symbols and answer reading comprehension quizzes—e.g., “What’s a good topic sentence for this paragraph?”—is not healthy. It’s not a good way to guide the next generation to become more-whole human beings capable of healing the world’s injuries and suffering.

A Politics of Meaning approach to education is different. Yes, we favor access and support public education, but with a vision of what that education should be, one that aims at meeting peoples’ deepest needs and answering their profound longing in their lives. Rabbi Lerner has developed these ideas into a Spiritual Covenant with America in his forthcoming book *The Left Hand of God*. In this movement, we have to further develop this kind of meaning-oriented thinking as part of our platform and also as part of our own inner lives. And in a forthcoming issue of *TIKKUN*, I’ll tell you a bit about the undergraduate program in spiritual activism that I’m developing at the New College of California.

George Lakoff

George Lakoff is the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, and a senior fellow at the Rockridge Institute. He is the author of Don't Think of an Elephant and Moral Politics. In the aftermath of the 2004 election, Lakoff's work in reframing the language of the Democrats received national recognition, and Don't Think was a bestseller. This selection from his talk is representative of his thinking.

During the 1994 election, I asked myself why conservatives and progressives talked past each other, not to each other. And I asked myself why the same people who were against abortion were also against progressive taxation? Why were those people also for owning guns? Why were those people also against environmental regulations? What does that have to do with being for tort reform? I couldn’t understand it. I had no idea. I said, “Gee, conservatives are odd folks.” Then I said, “Well, look, I have exactly the opposite views on all of these things. How do *my* views fit together?” And I got embarrassed, because I couldn’t answer the question. The answer came in an unusual place. When I started looking at what conservatives meant by family values, I discovered that there were two basic models of the family, what I’ll call “strict father” and “nurturing parent” models.

To speak briefly—if you want the 500-page version, there’s my book, *Moral Politics*—in the strict father version, you need a strict father because there’s evil in the world, and you’ve got to stand up to it and defeat it. Because there is competition in the world, there will always be winners and losers, and you’ve got to be a winner. In this view, children are assumed to be born bad, in the sense that they just do what they want to do, not what’s right. There’s an absolute right and an absolute wrong, and the only way that children can be made moral, in the strict father tradition, is through punishment—punishment painful enough to give them an incentive to do right, not wrong. And if they are punished sufficiently, they will get that incentive and discipline themselves. They will get internal discipline to do what’s right, to do what the strict father says, because he’ll be teaching them right from wrong. And if they do that, there will be a secondary effect: they will be able to pursue their self-interest to become prosperous. Prosperity and morality are linked from that point of view. And why is it good to pursue your self-interest? It’s a version of Adam Smith’s view of capitalism: If everybody pursues their own profit, the profit of all will be maximized as a law of nature, by the invisible hand. What does that say? It says the only common good is the sum of individual goods.

What does the strict father model say about politics? In

When you start looking at it, it turns out that there are lots of people who are partial progressives, and those are people that we can talk to. The way to talk to them is to find out what they share with you, that is, what parts of their lives involve nurturing.

the case of social programs, it says they're all immoral. Why? Because they give people things they haven't earned, thereby taking away their incentive to be disciplined and to earn their own living, and their incentive to be moral, their capacity for morality. Therefore, social programs should all be gotten rid of. Deficits are a way of eliminating all social programs because we don't have enough money for social programs (though we have plenty of money for the war).

The strict father is the moral authority in this family. What does that mean when applied to politics? Think of it applied to international politics. Would a strict father ask his kids what to do? No, he tells them what to do. Would a strict father President go to the UN and ask for advice from our allies and other nations? No, that would be abrogating his duty. His job is to tell them what to do, because he knows right from wrong, and their job is to listen to him and follow. And what he knows is that the world is scary and based on competition.

The nurturing parent model, on the other hand, urges parents to empathize with their children, to know what their needs are, to be responsible first for themselves (you can't take care of somebody else if you're not taking care of yourself) and also to others, and to raise children to be responsible for others and to empathize with them. From that very simple model, all progressive values follow. If you're raising your child to be empathetic—and by the way, notice that this is the opposite of indulgence; it's the opposite of permissiveness—you're raising a child to care about others, to be responsible for themselves and others. That is as far from permissiveness as you get. What is important about this model is its consequent values: protection (you want to protect your child if you empathize with them); fairness (you want them to be treated fairly); freedom and fulfillment in life (you want your child to be fulfilled, and to be fulfilled they must be free). In order to be free there must be opportunity; to create opportunity, there must be general prosperity, and so on. That's crucial.

What kind of community would you want to live in? A strict father community is one where community leaders tell you what to do and if you don't do it you get punished. A nurturing community is where your leaders *care* about the people in the community, are responsible to them and for them, and where people care about each other, do community service, and are responsible for themselves and others.

This requires cooperation, trust, honesty, and openness. These are progressive values.

We all have both strict father and nurturing parent capacities, whether we act on them or not. There are partial conservatives and partial progressives. Sometimes these are called "swing voters." They live by both models in many different ways. For example, the Reagan Democrats were strict fathers at home but nurturing in their union politics. They were blue-collar workers.

We recently did a study of members of environmental organizations. If you look at the range of different environmental organizations, it turns out that there are lots of Republicans in environmental organizations. Well, who are they? They're different, depending on the organization. That is, people who love the land will join land trust organizations; people who are conservative Christians but want to save God's creation will join organizations dedicated to that; people who are hunters and fisherman, who care about their hunting and fishing, and want to be able to eat their fish, will join Trout Unlimited; people who care about their families, who want to hike in the national parks, will join park organizations. When you start looking at it, it turns out that there are lots of people who are partial progressives, and those are people that we can talk to. The way to talk to them is to find out what they share with you, that is, what parts of their lives involve nurturing.

Communities are particularly interesting. In the red states—I lived in the Midwest for four and a half years—one of the most striking things for me were Midwestern communities. There were nurturing communities where people had leaders who cared about the members of the community, where people cared about each other. These were projections of the nurturing family onto those communities. And that's always a place to start conversations, if you want to talk about values.

Now, one of the things that came up in the *Moral Politics* book was this: if you take a look at these two moral frameworks in which the nation is understood metaphorically as a family in two different ways, the question then arises: What is conservative Christianity as opposed to progressive Christianity? What is the difference? I did a little research on this and in interviewing people discovered something pretty straightforward: it had to do with views of God. Is God a strict or a nurturing parent? If God's a strict parent,



what does he say? He says, "I've given you these commandments. If you follow them, you go to heaven; if you don't, you go to hell. But I'm a good guy. I'll send my son down there, he'll suffer for you, he'll redeem you, and if you believe in him you can be born again and we'll wipe the slate clean. Now, if you follow my commandments you go to heaven, if not you go to hell." That's a strict father religion.

There's another form of Christianity that has a central notion of what I'll call "metaphorical nurturance," which is also called "grace." It has to do with unconditional love. And you can't earn grace. You can't earn God's nurturance, but it's given unconditionally; you have to be close to God to get it; you have to accept it, when given. It fills you and makes you feel whole. It heals you. It makes you a moral being. That's what grace is in that tradition, and grace comes from a nurturing God. This is not news.

Between 1850 and 1920, this discussion about the different views of God was everywhere in America. In the abolitionist tradition, the abolitionists argued for a nurturing God. Bushnell's most famous essay is called "Christian Nurture." And all over America, there was an argument about this. The punitive God said, "Some people are better than others, and that's why some have to be slaves." And those who argued for a nurturing God said, "We are all God's children; we are all equal. That's why there can be no slaves." And the same argument came about with women's suffrage. This difference still exists in America. The sociologists tell us there are more—many more—progressive Christians than there are conserva-

tive Christians. But the conservatives are better organized. And the progressive Christians no longer see the connection between their view of God, spirituality, morality, and their activity in politics. But there is a connection. Morality is shown in action. And conservatives understand political action. Progressives need to understand the same thing.

One of the things that always interests me when I teach a course on metaphor is that I get students from the Graduate Theological Union. When the first one came, I asked him, "Why have you come to take a course on metaphor?" And he answered, very clearly, "Look, God is ineffable. The only way we can understand God is through metaphor. I want to find out how we understand God, and how different people understand God."

One of the things we've been doing is looking at the metaphors for God. My colleague [Eve Sweetser] started looking at the metaphors in the Yom Kippur rituals, and there you have a song containing the metaphors for God. God is a father; God is a shepherd; God is a jeweler; God is lord. What she observed was this: If you start with God as a father, and you look at the properties of a father—sometimes strict, sometimes nurturing—what you get are all the metaphors: God as lord who is in charge; God as law-giver who tells you the right things to do; God as shepherd who takes care of you; God as creator who made you; God as lover who loves you. All of these are metaphors for God as a parent.

But there are several other classes that we've discovered. There are four major ones that we've found so far and there

are probably others that we haven't found yet. There are the personifications (God as father or parent, God as a person). Then there's God as the infinite, the all-knowing, the all-good, the first cause, the all-powerful. Third is God as the source of all good things, as in grace. Fourth comes God as the physical world, or God as your connection to other people, to other things in the world. This last is, for example, part of the mystical tradition in Judaism: "Do not say God is not in the stone, God is in the stone. Do not say God is not in the tree; God is in the tree."

Jim Wallis

*Jim Wallis has become almost a household name in many parts of America after his book *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* reached and stayed on the New York Times Best Seller list in the Spring of 2005. He is the author of a number of other books: *Faith Works*, *The Soul of Politics*, *Who Speaks for God?* and *Call to Conversion*.*

Wallis is the founder and editor of Sojourner's Magazine, and his work as America's foremost progressive evangelical preacher is widely respected outside the evangelical world. Wallis has been a friend of TIKKUN for many years, and we have always honored his courage and wisdom, and rejoiced that there was such a powerful evangelical Christian leading the struggle for social justice in the U.S. Jim Wallis was instrumental in forming Call to Renewal, a Christian faith-based organization focused on overcoming poverty.

When I was coming here, I was thinking about Michael Lerner, and a time we spent together once in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in D.C., protesting cuts in programs for the poor. We gathered in our clergy costumes, looking very official, and Michael read from Isaiah: "Woe to you, legislators who pass infamous laws and deny my people of their rights."

When you sing and pray and read Isaiah in the Rotunda of the Capitol, you get arrested. So, we all got handcuffed and taken to jail. There was an eighth-grade Catholic civics class in the Rotunda that day learning how the government works. Now it's tough to get eighth-grade kids to be quiet, but they were totally silent, eyes bulging as they saw all these religious types getting arrested and being led away. When we finally left, they all applauded. A *New York Times* reporter said to a young kid, "What did you learn today about citizenship?"

"Well, I learned that sometimes you got to stand up for what you believe, but when you do, it's good to have some people with you." So, that's why it's good to be here tonight.

Now these are four different metaphors for God. And there are many folks who say, "I reject the first two. I don't think of God as a person, a guy with a beard. I don't think of God as the infinite beyond all of us." But there are many folks who are spiritual, who respect the fact that they are given good things in life, and who see their spirituality in their connections to other people in the world. Those views reflect the last two metaphors. They wouldn't call their sense of connection and their appreciation "God," necessarily, but what they feel is part of spirituality.

In jail, Tony Campolo—a highly respected Christian theologian and evangelist—and Rabbi Lerner were having a theological conversation. They had an intense disagreement about whether Jesus Christ was the Son of God or a prophet or what. They were really going at it. They're friends, but it was a serious conversation. And, watching them, I got it: this is how you do interfaith work. You all get arrested for your faith and you talk theology in jail.

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I want to tell a story of something that happened to me just last month—that's where I would like to begin tonight. On the book tour for *God's Politics*, the last event was in Atlanta at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Martin Luther King Jr.'s old church. Now, I had preached at the old Ebenezer. I remembered the first time I preached there. It was the first legal holiday of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ebenezer kindly invited me. It was a "Peace and Justice Sunday." I was this young white kid, and I was totally intimidated. How to preach out of that pulpit! I was so in awe I could hardly speak. I was a little timid. I said something like, "Oh Martin Luther King, Jr. ... he was for peace and justice, and we should be, too."

And this booming voice came out of the first row: "O help him, Lord, help him. Help him, Lord. Come on, young man, say it, say it. Tell us what you mean. Tell us what you want to say." So I said a bit and, "Well? Well?" And I got going, and, "Come on! You are halfway there."

He got me going and preaching and sweating, and I preached my heart out. When I was done, I was exhausted. I ran down and I said, "Oh brother, you just pulled that sermon out of me." And Deacon Johnson put his hands on my shoulders and said, "That's okay, young man. I've raised up many a preacher in my day."

Ebenezer Baptist Church pulled out some of the best sermons, pulled out some of the best stuff from Americans.

CONFERENCE ON SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

Religion's job is to pull out some of our best stuff. But religion now is pulling out some of our worst stuff. How can religion start pulling out our best stuff and stop pulling out the worst?

My son Luke is six years old. Just before the election, we were out trick-or-treating, working the streets of our Columbia Heights neighborhood. Sensing the national mood, Luke looked up at me and said, "Daddy, this election is more important than Halloween, isn't it?" Indeed it was. This was an election that, no matter what the outcome, half of the population would have felt crushed—at the level of their values, even their faith. It was that kind of an election. It's that kind of polarization in the nation.

The role of religion, in particular, played a huge part. Now, here's what happened, I think. A lot of people looked at the way religion was used—and some would say abused—in this election. They looked at how faith has been portrayed in the media for a long time; looked at how religion is invoked in the White House and Congress, and here's what they said: "Wait a minute, I'm a person of faith, too, and that is not my faith." Or, "I may not be religious, but I have moral values, and those are not my moral values." Those are the people I'm meeting all across the country. Many of them are Evangelical Christians who don't feel represented by [leaders of the Religious Right like] Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson.

When George W. Bush went to a commencement address at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, an ad appeared in the Grand Rapids newspaper signed by one-third of the Calvin student body and faculty saying, "Mr. President, because of our shared Christian faith, we implore you to reconsider your priorities and your policies which favor the rich over the poor, despoil God's creation, and prosecute an immoral, unjust, and illegal war."

That was in the red part of the blue state of Michigan. One-third to half of the press coverage of the President's speech was about the protest. The media doesn't understand what's happening yet among evangelicals. And many Catholics don't feel spoken for by a handful of right-wing bishops who tell them there is only one issue by which Catholics can vote. They're saying so all over the country. And mainline Protestants are coming, from all the mainline denominations. They have felt what we might call being "disrespected"—disrespected by the fundamentalists who say they are not people of faith at all. They're coming. A lot of black church people are coming out too, because, to be honest, this conversation about faith and politics has been a very white conversation.

When the media says evangelicals, they mean white evangelicals. They don't mean the historic black churches. They're all coming out. A lot of Latino and Asian Christians, they're coming out. A whole lot of rabbis are coming out. A lot of young Muslims are coming out, who want a more open, tolerant, peaceful and, yes, democratic Islam. They are fight-

ing for the heart of their faith. All of our great traditions have a battle going on between fundamentalism and prophetic faith—in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. And there are a whole lot of young people who say, "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual, and I want to be in this conversation, too." Every time, people say, "I'm agnostic. I'm secular. I'm even an atheist and I want to be a part of a moral discourse on politics."

In Boston, a young man came up and said, "I'm gay. Thank you for making me feel so welcome tonight. But you know what? It's easier to come out as gay in Boston than as religious in the Democratic Party." He made a point.

What I want to say—and I'll be a little provocative tonight—is that what we're seeing is much more than the rise of a religious Left. Let me say why: I think the Religious Right is the political seduction of religion. There were political operatives on the far Right who had meetings with a handful of TV preachers. We could name names. And they made a deal: you give us your membership lists, your database, and we'll turn our computers on your list. We'll make you famous, and we'll gain political power. They created a constituency to make religion a partisan wedge, to divide us and destroy us. Religion is not meant to be a wedge to divide. Religion is meant to be a bridge to bring us back together again.

If the Religious Right is that kind of political seduction, why would we want to create its exact counterpart on the other side? Religion at its best is not ideologically predictable or loyally partisan, but critiques Left and Right from a consistent moral ground. Now, I want to make clear that what I'm talking about here is what I like to think about as the moral center of our public life, not our political middle, which is often a mushy place of compromise. We don't need such a place. We have to go deeper to the moral center of our public life. There are a lot of people in this nation who we can reach—who we have to reach—and who do not consider themselves Left and probably never will. But they will respond to an appeal to find the moral center of politics. I feel a hunger out there for that kind of faith, for that kind of bridge to bring us together.

Lincoln had it right. You don't claim that God is on your side. Rather, you pray earnestly that we will be on God's side. The "God on our side" way leads to bad things in politics: overconfidence, triumphalism, and bad foreign policy. On the other hand, worrying if we're on God's side leads to things we need in politics, like penitence, humility, reflection, and even accountability. If Lincoln got it right, Martin Luther King, Jr. did it best. Bible in one hand, Constitution in the other. That's what we have to do. He convened a moral discourse on politics that everyone was welcome to. Baptists like him, as well as Catholics, Rabbis, and agnostics. This is a conversation that we all need and that we are all needed for.

The Right is very comfortable with the language of reli-

I believe in the separation of church and state. But that does not mean the segregation of moral values from public life, or the banishing of all religious language from the public square. We can include these things and still be open, democratic, tolerant, and welcoming.

gion, values, faith, and God—so much so that they act like they own the territory, maybe even own God. But they narrow everything to just two issues: abortion and gay marriage. Now, I've been finding on the road some common ground, even on those contentious, controversial issues. We can find common ground despite what they say.

There are a lot of people out there who are hungry to hear what we have to say. The biggest mistake progressives have made in decades was conceding the entire territory of religion and values to a religious and political Right. We must never make that mistake again.

So the Left doesn't get it because they forget that the Democratic party was tied vitally to a Civil Rights movement led by black churches just decades ago. Where would we be if the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. kept his faith to himself? I believe in the separation of church and state. But that does not mean the segregation of moral values from public life, or the banishing of all religious language from the public square. We can include these things and still be open, democratic, tolerant, and welcoming. We don't have to let the Right control the territory or give it up the way we've done. We can and must take this back. The reason I want to take it back is because faith is not being used for the right thing.

Let me tell you a quick story. I was invited to speak in a different place than a great university like this one, or a town meeting, or a big church. I was invited to speak by the inmates of Sing Sing prison in upstate New York. "Come speak to us," they said. Sounded interesting. I wrote back and asked, "When do you want me to come?" A young brother wrote back and said, "Well, we're free most nights. We're kind of a captive audience here." So the authorities gave us a room in the bowels of the prison. They left us alone—me and eighty guys—for five hours. I won't ever forget that night. A young brother said, "Jim, just about all of us are from four or five neighborhoods in New York City. It's like a train begins in my neighborhood. You get on that train when you're nine or ten years old and that train ends up here at Sing Sing."

What an image: fast moving urban trains starting in only certain zip codes, traveling to inevitable destinations. The point I want to make is this: Faith is about changing the big things. This young kid I met that night looked at me and said he'd had a spiritual conversion inside the walls. He's part of a

program by the New York Theological Seminary offering a Certificate of Ministry inside the prison. You can become a preacher inside the joint. You graduate when your sentence is up. He said, "When I get out, I want to go back and stop that train." Two years later, I'm back in NYC leading a town meeting and guess who's up front, back home, stopping that train. Friends, that's what we should mean by a faith-based initiative.

Faith is for the big things. Faith is for changing the stuff that we don't think can be changed. That's why they call it faith. Here's a big thing: A billion people living on less than a dollar a day. Thirty thousand children will die today and tomorrow in a silent tsunami of hunger, curable diseases, and the lack of clean drinking water—things we could change if we ever decided to. These are the big things that faith is supposed to change. Gordon Brown, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer and likely to be the next prime minister after Tony Blair, says, "We can end extreme poverty around the world for only fifty billion dollars." We spend five billion dollars every month in Iraq. The tax cuts for the wealthy—that's giving millionaires a tax break—cost fifty billion dollars. Which would make us more secure—ending extreme poverty or more tax breaks for millionaires?

In America we like to discuss faith. We discuss religion more than any other nation on the earth. Discussing religion does not change things. Betting your life on faith sometimes has. Those who believe that change is possible and bet their lives on it, that's how that change starts, every time. History is changed by social movements. And the best ones have a spiritual foundation. Every single major progressive social movement in our history—women's suffrage, the abolition of slavery, child-labor law reform, Civil Rights—were all driven and fueled, in large part, by religion, faith, spirituality, and values. We have a proud progressive spiritual history. We've done it before. We can do it again.

I want to give you a commission, as I finish tonight, that has won my heart and might speak to yours. It comes from a young woman from my city, my town, my streets—Washington, D.C. She was a young African American kid who was so smart, she went to Yale and got a Ph.D. When you're young, black, female and you went to Yale, you can write your ticket to wherever you want to go. And she wrote her ticket back to her streets and her city and to the children on those streets who'd won her heart. Lisa Sullivan

became the best street organizer I'd ever known. She used rap, hip-hop. She loved. She scolded. She hugged. She confronted. She fundraised. She organized. As they like to say in the non-profit industry, she built capacity. She was a rising star. And she was the future. She was my friend. She was on our board. And one day I got a call. Lisa's big heart had a heart ailment. Nobody had known, least of all Lisa. And not two weeks before she was forty years old, Lisa Sullivan was gone.

When people would say, "Lisa, the problem is too big—the drugs, the violence, the corruption, the streets, the apathy—it's too big and we're too small. Our budget, our resources, our staff, our faith, it's too big and we're too small. And Lisa, we don't have any leaders any more. We don't have any Martin Luther King, Jr.'s anymore," she'd get mad. Really mad. "Don't say that. Don't say it's too big and we're too small and don't say we don't have any leaders anymore. Don't you understand? We are the ones we've been waiting for."

We are the ones that we have been waiting for. I think Lisa's right. Politicians walk around Capitol Hill with their

fingers in the air, wet fingers, to see which way the wind is blowing, and we think that by replacing one wet-fingered politician, we can change the nation. King knew that was wrong. He knew that to change the nation, you had to change the wind. Change the wind! We don't need advocates and lobbyists, we need wind-changers. People of faith are called to be those who change the wind, change how a nation thinks and feels and perceives the most important things. Change the context and you change the wind, and the politicians follow very quickly. But we have to change the wind.

Lisa knew that it only took a handful of people who realize that they are the ones, that they are the leaders we have been waiting for. This is an amazing group of people. It wouldn't take many more than this to take Lisa's commission to heart and make it their own. We have done it before as people of faith and spiritual values, and we can do it again. The time of the Religious Right is now passing. Our time has finally come. We are the ones we have been waiting for. And hope means believing in spite of the evidence, and watching the evidence change.

Michael Lerner and Jim Wallis in Discussion

After Jim Wallis spoke, Michael Lerner made his keynote address about the theoretical foundations for a spiritual politics and what a Network of Spiritual Progressives should do. The following morning, Wallis and Lerner took questions and responded. Here are a few of those questions and answers.

Q: Reverend Jim Wallis, what does being an evangelical mean to you? Do you take the Bible literally?

JW: I'm a nineteenth-century evangelical born in the wrong century. Evangelicals led the battle against slavery; they fought for women's suffrage; they fought for child labor reform; they were revivalists and reformers, evangelists and abolitionists, and people like Charles Finney (the Billy Graham of his day, the nineteenth-century evangelist who invented the "altar call" to get the names of his converts to sign them up for the anti-slavery campaign). I like the idea of altar calls. I mean, don't just listen to a talk and clap your hands and go home. Respond. Commit. Make a decision. Join something. That's what it means to me to be an evangelical.

The word "evangel" means "good news." Jesus used that particular word in his first sermon at Nazareth, what I call his "Nazareth Manifesto," his mission statement. He quoted Isaiah and said, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because

He has anointed me to preach good news"—the evangel—to the poor. Good news to the poor was at the heart of what it meant to be evangelical. The Religious Right doesn't take the Bible seriously—or literally. I want the Right to take the Bible more seriously, what it says about the poor, about war and peace, about the environment, and all the rest. So, I'm happy to be an evangelical.

ML: I want to comment also on the Bible issue. One of the things that we are trying to do in this Network of Spiritual Progressives is provide a place for people from many different religious backgrounds. There isn't one orthodoxy that unites us theologically. There are people in this alliance who are practicing Buddhists, practicing Hindus, practicing Jews, practicing Catholics, practicing Protestants, and people who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious." All are part of this, including those who reject the Bible or the Koran or any other religious text. Our minimum position is that we respect each other's spiritual lives and encourage our members to develop an inner life and a spiritual practice, but we do not push any particular theological commitment.

As Jim mentioned last night, I was in jail with Tony Campolo, one of the country's most significant evangelical progressives. We were arguing about religion. We weren't just

The prophetic biblical tradition is such a powerful thing: the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. You know, that's the most radical stuff. I got converted from the radical student movement by reading the gospels. I found the Gospels more radical than Karl Marx, Ché Guevera, and Ho Chi Minh.

discussing it. We had a different understanding of the text. We didn't think that the right way to do "interfaith" was to find a lowest common denominator. And that's also our approach here—the Network of Spiritual Progressives must encourage people to come into our arena with the fullness of their religious or spiritual particularity, and to present it, argue it, even debate perspectives with which they disagree, and to do so respectfully and without undermining what we have in common: our commitment to peace, social justice, ecological sanity, and a New Bottom Line for American society.

Now, having said that, I'm going to come in with my own theology, which is different from Jim's. When Jewish tradition says, "This is the Torah that Moses put before the children of Israel: By the Word of God, by the hand of Moses," it tells us that there's a transaction going on. The source is God, but the receiver is a human being. Moses was a very screwed up human being. We know that. According to the story, God decided not to let him go into the Promised Land because he couldn't totally control his anger, and he hit the rock instead of speaking to the rock, as God had told him to do. He used violence when violence wasn't appropriate.

I want to submit to you that this Torah story is meant to teach that every human being is limited, and that the way that anybody ever received God's message was through their particular psychological, spiritual, intellectual framework—that there was no other way that human beings could get it. When they heard God's voice, they always heard it through the framework of who they were and what they were capable of at any given moment.

So when the authors of the Gospels (none of whom knew Jesus) wrote them, if one were to assume that they were divinely inspired, then they received that part of God's message that they could receive, given their particular limitations as humans. Of course, that's a particular understanding of theology, because there are some people who believe that humans received God's message exactly as God intended, though I don't know how they would know that.

In the Jewish tradition, we have a corrective process. On the one hand we have our own study of the text relying on our own intellectual capacities, and on the other hand there's a community of study and struggle with the text. Finally, if there were a third hand, there's prayer, in which each individual tries to access the God-energy of the universe as best they

can. Through the interaction between these three, we seek an outcome of how we should understand the text. Just as our generation is waking up to the fact that the way the texts were heard before had a certain sexist quality to it because a great deal of that interpretive process was performed by men, there's a huge amount now to learn from all the women who are opening and rereading those texts.

Thus, future generations will look back at us and say, "Oh, they were limited in their understanding of God's word by the assumptions that they had in their historical period, living in the United States of America or living in the Western world, in an extremely individualistic, materialistic society of that period." People will look back five hundred years from now and say, "Okay, that was a good attempt for what they could do at that moment, though luckily now our understanding has evolved."

JW: I think a similar thing happens on the Christian side, even among the most conservative evangelicals. Very few hold to what to what you might call the dictation theory—that the author of the scripture was just sort of a stenographer, God was dictating scripture and they just wrote it down. Almost no one takes that point of view. But my point is to not fall into the trap of letting the Right have the Bible. The prophetic Biblical tradition is such a powerful thing: the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. You know, that's the most radical stuff. I got converted from the radical student movement by reading the gospels. I found the Gospels more radical than Karl Marx, Ché Guevera, and Ho Chi Minh.

Q: How do we stop our world from being destroyed by nuclear weapons?

JW: Father Louis Vitale and I went to jail many times over nuclear weapons at the Nevada test site. The arms race between two superpowers put the world in grave danger. Today, nuclear proliferation remains a profound danger. The world's nuclear materials and warheads are not secure. The real security threat of this coming period would be the coming together of a terrorist organization and an accessible nuclear weapon. That's not just made up by the Right wing. That's a real threat. Nuclear proliferation is a huge danger that almost no one is talking about. And this administration has totally bungled our policy relationship with North Korea.

CONFERENCE ON SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

There is a serious nuclear danger right now from North Korea. Another one's coming from Iran. And of course, the United States makes the same mistake every time, by saying it makes sense to them that other people should disarm their weapons of mass destruction when we don't believe in leadership by example.

Q: What do you do for renewal as individuals and within your organizations?

JW: I'm a t-ball coach on Friday nights. I've got fifteen first graders including my son, Luke. Which is to say my kids, six years old and two years old, are my principal source of anchoring in my life and the renewal that I need, day-to-day and week-to-week. At *Sojourners*, we have a daily liturgy and monthly chapel services. For us, it's important to somehow be what we say we believe. We try to be a prayerful community day-by-day, week-by-week and try to support each other as a community.

Gandhi said, "Be the change you propose for the world." That's easy to say, it's very hard to do.

So that means taking time for recreation. And this is where I have to really admire my Jewish friends. Christians don't do nearly as well with the Sabbath as our Jewish friends do. Just to stop. Stop, stop, stop. And that's why I sometimes like going to jail: there are no cell phones, no meetings, no phone calls, no schedule. And to admit it, sadly I'm sometimes in better shape when I come out of jail. That says something about how we live the rest of our lives, outside of jail. We've got to build in discipline: prayer, reflection, family, and kids. We have to take care of ourselves and each other. You can't change the world just by protesting the bad stuff, and think you've really solved things. People who want to be activists for the long term had better become contemplatives at the same time.

ML: If you go home and create a local chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives it's really important to have a spiritual practice, or to encourage members to develop an inner-life. It's so critical.

My path is Shabbat, the Sabbath. From about forty minutes before dark on Friday night until three stars appear on Saturday night, I stop doing whatever else I'm doing in the world of work. I literally do not touch money, do not shop, do not watch television, do not answer emails, do not go near a computer. And for that roughly twenty-five-hour period, at my synagogue, Beyt Tikkun, we observe this incredible spiritual celebration.

The central practice is: do not try to control the world. All the rest of the week we're trying to get things together, to make things happen; Shabbat is twenty-five hours in which you're dedicated to just celebrating the world. So we celebrate the miracle of creation. In the Jewish tradition it's a commandment to have sex if you're married, to have good food, to take

time for study, for inner-work, for joy. Growing up as a Jew, I never knew a bit about this because nothing that I ever encountered in the synagogue of my youth was actually joyous. So I thought Sabbath was like this: you go to synagogue on Friday night or Saturday morning, you sit through two hours of boring Hebrew and another half hour of boring sermon.

It was only when I entered the Orthodox world that I began to encounter the Sabbath as an actual celebration of the universe. It was only when I followed the strict rules of Sabbath observance that I discovered that it is incredibly renewing to be able to take the time away from the tasks of making things happen, to say, "No, I'm not fixing things, I'm not doing my laundry, I'm not catching up on my housework, I'm not doing all the things I didn't get done in the rest of week. I have twenty-five hours just to celebrate the grandeur of the universe." That's what I do for renewal, and I invite anybody who happens to be in the Bay Area to join us at Beyt Tikkun.

JW: What tough spiritual discipline: sex, food, and rest. You know, I think we could build a movement around this one. *[laughter, cheers]*

ML: We did. *[laughter, cheers]*

Q: Are we at risk of having the word "spiritual" be overused and emptied of meaning?

ML: Absolutely, the culture is at risk of emptying the word of meaning. Yet I don't want to give up that word. People have taken almost every word and transformed it into its opposites. Any ideal that people have can be used and misused. Socialism and communism were taken by East European and Chinese totalitarians and transformed into the exact opposites of what those terms were supposed to mean, and that was to the detriment of many peoples of the world. The word "love," precisely because it speaks to something that is so deep in people, has been commercialized and so often emptied of its meaning, and yet I don't want to give it up. There are some words that have a historically important resonance that should not be given up to the commercializers or those who try to empty them. I believe that *God* and *spirit* are two of those words. We need to reconnect to the deepest meanings of those words and not let them be manipulated.

Q: Shouldn't we in the Network of Spiritual Progressives also be talking about "responsibility"—defined as a combination of social responsibility, righteous action, and the Jewish idea of being a *mensch*?

JW: I actually think that's a good idea. Responsibility is a word that transcends the categories of Left and Right. And personal and social responsibility together make up the Catholic notion of the common good. On the poverty question for



example, there are too many people on the Left who just talk about social responsibility. Then the Right says, "Well, there are also issues here of personal responsibility." And anybody who's ever lived and worked in a poor neighborhood knows that, yes, there are issues of personal *and* social responsibility. You don't tell kids at our neighborhood center, "The world's stacked against you, there's nothing you can do." You say, "There are choices you have to make about drugs, about your schoolwork, about your sexual activity, about conflict over a jacket or running shoes, that could be lethal. There are choices you've gotta make." I think personal and social responsibility are deeply embedded in most of our religious traditions and these really transcend the categories of Left and Right. It makes for a very balanced and good theology.

Q: So much of Western culture is formed and shaped by the Christian concept of original sin—human beings born broken and incomplete. This has colored so much of how people feel about themselves and others and has been the basis of so much that might be wrong in our society. How do we reframe the Christian message without damaging the power of Jesus' message: that people are relieved of the terrible burden of being born in sin?

JW: We at *Sojourners* once published a resource called, "America's Original Sin: A Study Guide on White Racism." And it really went much deeper than the usual political diatribes against racism. That's how this nation was really conceived—first against native peoples and then by kidnapping much of Africa. I think there's something really deep in those Christian notions of sin and the fall and all the rest. But what they say is that good and evil are running simultaneously.

To not see the face of evil on September 11 is to suffer from some kind of postmodern relativism. But to say "they are evil and we are good" is bad theology. That's what Bush has done.

A movement like this has to be careful not to gloss over the reality of evil in the world, in the nation, in our own lives. The best theology knows there's a choice that is always being made between good and evil. So we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that evil is just some sociological category, and that if we're just loving, caring, generous, and responsible, that evil goes away.

Evil is very real. So how do we not fall into the right-wing notion that evil is always with the Other, the enemy, the adversary?

Jesus says, why do you see the splinter in your adversary's eye but not the one in your own eye? I think the notion that there is real evil in the world that we need to confront realistically should be part of any serious social movement, including in our own hearts and in our own lives.

ML: Well, Jews also believe in "original blessing," and I thank Matthew Fox for his wonderful book by that title. Our creation story in Torah says about God that "He saw the world and behold it was very good." So we start with initial blessing, that God's take on this world was its fundamental goodness—and that included human beings. And so even though in the historical world in which we live we have to take evil very seriously, I don't want to ontologize that evil; I don't want us to act as though there's a dualistic universe in which there is an equal amount of power to the evil as to the good. In my theology, the universe as a whole recognizes evil but tilts towards the good. Because the God of this universe is a good God who saw this universe and affirmed it as good. That vision makes me want to say to people that "Yes, there's real evil here, but, yes, it can ultimately be overcome and transformed."

JW: Transformed, sure. Exactly that is true of both our traditions.

Progressive Spirituality and Gender

As Jim Wallis and others pointed out, the issue of values in politics has been redefined by the Right to refer to only two issues: abortion and gay rights. In attempting to build a spiritual politics, we've done all we can to broaden that discussion and to address the values issues inherent in a society whose "bottom line" is money and power, and whose ethos of selfishness and materialism plays a central role in destroying families and undermining loving relationships.

So, when we turn to address values in personal life and family, we have to address all of these issues.

The least complicated for us is homosexuality. We reject the notion that the rights of gays and lesbians should be different from those of anyone else. We believe that the assault on them by the Right is morally untenable and spiritually destructive, a clear and present danger to the wellbeing of American society and needs to be challenged and resisted.

We are unequivocally opposed to criminalizing abortion or

using the state and its legal coercive powers to impact on women's reproductive choices. To symbolize that commitment, we presented a talk by the Reverend Debra Haffner, a feminist who has done important work in organizing clergy to publicly state our religious commitment to reproductive rights for women. Yet at the same time, we want to make clear that the discourse of "rights" does not adequately address the issues raised by abortion. So we invited the United Church of Christ Reverend Ama Zenya—a feminist who supports choice but whose experience with an abortion led her to realize that the discourse of rights is inadequate—to share her experience with us. Two other talks round out this discourse: Rabbi Debora Kohn discusses the distortions in our society that contribute to undermining loving relationships and families, while Harvard University's Susan Linn argues that the dynamics of the capitalist marketplace are undermining childhood.

Debra W. Haffner

Reverend Debra W. Haffner is the Director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. A sexuality educator for more than thirty years, she is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister.

Our sexuality and our spirituality are inextricably related. It is in our relationships with each other that we come closest to knowing the divine on earth. In other words, there is nothing more important than how we treat each other. Sexuality is one of our most life-affirming and life-fulfilling gifts, central to our humanity and integral to our spirituality. Faith communities and society at large must support sexual and relational justice for all.

Many of us received conflicting messages about sexuality from our cradle religion—the religion that we grew up in before the age of twelve. Too many of us were raised to believe that religion isolates certain sexual acts or relationships as sinful. Some of us learned that abortion is wrong, that homosexuality is wrong, that masturbation is wrong, that sex

outside of marriage or sex for pleasure is wrong. Some of us grew up in a religion that taught sexual thoughts were immoral and needed to be confessed.

When I was the President of the Sexuality Information Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), I wrote that America is moderately erotophobic. If we were completely erotophobic, we wouldn't have sex. Since we are moderately erotophobic, we're relaxed enough to do it, but not without a dark box inside ourselves about our sexuality: a dark box of fear and shame, guilt and misinformation and—for too many of us—a history of negative sexual experiences. Our culture inundates us with sexually exploitive messages while denying us comprehensive sexuality education, and sexual health services. And this erotophobia extends to too many of my progressive religious colleagues, who choose not to engage the pressing sexual issues of our times, seeing them as too potentially divisive for prophetic leadership.

Many people have been alienated from faith communities because they view them as sex-negative. It is true that the far Religious Right that is trying to deny our sexual rights. I

totally understand how challenging it is to “love thine enemy.” Every week I receive at least one piece of Christian hate mail—truly an oxymoron. However, this audience needs to know that there are tens of thousands of religious leaders in this country, and indeed around the world, who are challenging sexual oppression and working for sexual justice within their denominations, within their congregations, and within society. And as a Unitarian Universalist evangelical, I encourage those of you who miss being part of a spiritual community to visit the thousands of spiritual and religious communities that would welcome and embrace every one of you.

I lead a network of more than 2,400 religious leaders from more than forty denominations who have endorsed the *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*. The *Religious Declaration* calls for sexual healing. It recognizes and hears the brokenness that so many of us experience about our sexuality, a brokenness that is too often suffered in silence in our faith communities.

There is a dark side of sexuality—abuse, violence, morbidity, loneliness, and exploitation—that is rarely if ever given voice in our faith communities. Faith communities and spiritual progressives must recognize them, talk about them, and provide support, so that all of us can live with sexual health and wholeness.

Faith communities must work for sexual justice. We call for full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in the life of the faith community including ordination, marriage equality, and welcome for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersexual persons.

As people of faith we must reclaim the Bible, the family, the church, the synagogue, the mosque, the ashram. We need to challenge the moral vision of the right.

The vast majority of Americans support what we support.

Ama Zenya

Reverend Ama Zenya is Senior Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oakland, UCC. Under her leadership the formerly dwindling congregation has more than doubled, and the church campus is an active community center.

It is a joy to be gathered together to build a society that promotes rather than undermines love, caring, peace, nonviolence, generosity, joy, and pleasure in life, not to mention social responsibility, interdependence, and awe and wonder at creation.

This is the politics of love. Love is a moral value. Love is not just sentimental. Love is something that can shape and infuse all of our life, all of our decisions.

They support AIDS education, family planning, sexuality education, and the end of discrimination and violence because of sexual orientation and gender identity. Sixty-two percent of Americans support marriage or civil unions for same sex couples. Canada recently became the fourth country in the world to legislate marriage equality for all.

We need to understand that America supports the right to privacy. In the third presidential debate, George Bush said, “Consenting adults can live the way they want to live.” We need to marshal that public support. And we need to articulate our spiritual values in a common sense, common wisdom manner. We need to say that education that respects and empowers young people has more integrity than abstinence-only education based on fear and shame.

We need to say that it is not a wedding band that makes sex moral—or whether partners are gay or straight or eighteen or eighty—but whether that relationship is consensual, non-exploitive, honest, mutually pleasurable, and protected. We need to say that abortion should be safe, legal, and rare. But there is also a moral imperative for access to high-quality abortion services. We need to shift the dialogue from reducing the number of abortions to reducing the number of unintended pregnancies. It is precisely because life is sacred that it should never be created carelessly. And it is precisely because life and parenthood are precious that no woman should be coerced into carrying a pregnancy to term.

A moral voice that says “love your neighbor as yourself” means all of your neighbors. Our work is about love. The *Religious Declaration* ends, “God rejoices when we celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity. May we together create a world for ourselves, for our children, and for our grandchildren, where our sexuality can be lived and celebrated. And so may it be.”

Now earlier, we heard from Jim Wallis, whom I deeply respect. I definitely understand why he would say the Left doesn’t get it. But sometimes the Left actually gets some things. And sometimes the Left hits it just right. I think we did it with the clear, profound, concise slogan, “Love makes a family.” We hit it right on. “Love makes a family” can be taken as a principle to live by. It’s a reflection of the divine call in our most intimate relationships as well as in the “familyhood” of humanity, or as Tikkun puts it, “the sisterhood of man.”

“Love makes a family” supports the family values of mutuality, nurturing, vulnerability, authenticity, kindness, and solidarity. It integrates awareness of physical, emotional, and

A sacred, moral politics may affirm abortion at times. Sometimes one life must be lost to save another. And just as spiritual politics can affirm self-defense or even just wars, any healthy spirituality does not take the termination of another life lightly.

spiritual needs. Like the "Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing" says, it accepts no double standards and applies to all—regardless of sex, gender, color, age, bodily condition, marital status, or sexual orientation. "Love makes a family" also serves as a critique of domestic violence and even of relationships of loveless endurance that our own fear and apathy may tempt us to settle for.

I want to bring this politics of love to bear on one of our most challenging issues: abortion. We are all too familiar with the standard dichotomy between pro-choice and pro-life, and how the Left critiques the Right for making this a one-issue moral litmus test. I deeply love and respect many Catholics for their incredible solidarity with the poor. Pope John Paul II advocated for working people. Even the current pope stood up during the protest at the G8 Summit and said that the G8 should listen to those demonstrators who were protesting policies that create global poverty. Yet, during the 2004 elections, I went to a Catholic church with a friend of mine. On the voter registration cards in the church, the top issue was abortion: no faithful person could vote for any pro-choice candidate. I was appalled.

The Left also rightly critiques anti-abortionists as advocating for male—or governmental—control of women's bodies. If the Right really wanted to stop abortion, they would do what works. What works is providing pre-natal care, healthcare, post-natal care, childcare, and support for mothers and pregnant women in need. That cuts down abortion dramatically. In fact, under Bush's tenure, abortions have increased because of the terrible economic situation that he has put us in.

And yet, the Left also makes abortion a litmus test. I don't know how many of you are familiar with the presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich. His life practices and stance deeply honor the sacredness of life, from his personal commitment to being a vegetarian to his stance for free college tuition for every person in the United States. And yet, many liberals didn't trust him because he had been pro-life in the past. Even though he later became pro-choice, Kucinich faced a deep ambivalence from the Left because of this.

To the Left, anyone who opposes abortion rights has clearly been brainwashed by the Religious Right.

What would a Spiritual Progressive perspective on abortion look like? I invite you to consider first that it will be pro-choice, not as a knee-jerk liberal stance, but because choice is a divinely given power. It's one of the sacred responsibilities

for each of us spiritual beings having this human experience. To deny women the power to choose what impacts our bodies is to deny our humanness, just as slavery or forced labor denies humanness by denying personal sovereignty.

Women, I invite you to enter a place of being deeply and spiritually pro-choice, fully affirming our divinely given power to respond to what by grace, nature, or circumstance happens in our bodies. And, men, in revolutionary, spiritual commitment against sexism—against the teaching that others should determine what happens in women's bodies—I encourage you to support women's choice. Transgender folks, do both.

And yet I invite you also to consider that a Spiritual Progressive perspective on abortion will be pro-life. And when I say pro-life, I'm not talking about the anti-abortion movement. I'm talking about appreciation for life, gratitude for life, care for and stewardship of life. Rabbi Lerner called it a "wow" for the miraculous in life that surrounds us—and so I add that we should be acting on that "wow," letting that "wow for life" shape our values and our actions.

And to that question, "Is all life sacred?" I think all of us in this room would have a resounding "yes."

So, is life sacred? Yes! Is human life with all of its challenges sacred? Yes! Is human life sacred only after birth?

Women, I want to invite you to consider expanding that circle of loving solidarity beyond our own bodies. What would happen if we expanded that to include the new life forming within those of us who are pregnant? Pregnant women have spoken to me about the deep mystery of new life conceived and growing within them.

I believe that a spiritual politics calls me to move beyond the language of my rights and into the language of the sacred, the language of love—both for myself and for the new and sacred life within me. At the center of many faith traditions is the practice of surrender, of *giving up* our rights for love. Islam is all about surrender, affirming that one's life belongs to God. I think of the Jewish prophetic tradition and those like Esther, who left her right to be safe and secure in the palace and put her life at risk for the love for her people. I think of the Christian scriptures: Jesus could have just kept sitting at the right hand of God, but instead he emptied himself and became the left hand of God, the presence, as Rabbi Lerner says, of compassion and love. In Buddhism, bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have the right to move on beyond the

cycles of rebirth and pain because they have already woken up and become enlightened. They could just take off, but they make a commitment for love to keep being reborn into the world of suffering until all beings achieve liberation.

These spiritual traditions move us beyond the language of rights to the language of love. And what I see in current liberal politics is that there is no support for the woman that also honors the life within her and loves it. So abortion is talked about as though it is a purely practical, material decision. I've got to get my tooth pulled, use the john, and get an abortion. It's just a matter of getting something out of me.

On this issue, the Left has just completely bought the capitalist paradigm: What's good is whatever feels good to me. For most of us, our reasons for getting an abortion are self-centered.

I speak as someone who has had an abortion.

At that time I was spiritual but not religious. I didn't want to stay with the man I was engaged to, and I didn't want to take care of a baby, so I terminated the new life within me; and in a materialist, rational universe that made good sense. And, as I said, I considered myself spiritual.

Much of the spiritual Left has simply added the prelude, "My life is sacred. Therefore, what's good is what's good for me." Yet the language of spirituality when applied only to the self and not to the other simply becomes an extension of individualistic materialism.

A sacred, moral politics may affirm abortion at times. Sometimes one life must be lost to save another. And just as spiritual politics can affirm self-defense or even just wars, any healthy spirituality does not take the termination of another life lightly.

One of the things that I didn't know while I was terminat-

ing my pregnancy was that my mother was trying to get pregnant and would have loved to raise the child, but in my own isolation and materialist pragmatism, I never even told her about the pregnancy until years later. A spiritual community could encourage much more strongly the importance of reaching out to discuss an abortion with family members, even if doing so made one uncomfortable.

What could a moral politics of love regarding abortion look like? The word that has come to me about this breaks through the right-left barrier. It affirms a deeply spiritual principle, and it could be written on a bumper sticker. So here it is: Choose life!

What if we had Choose Life Clinics that would talk lovingly and thoughtfully with pregnant women about their options in a way that affirmed the sacredness of both the mother and the unborn child? What if these clinics were centers of activism for the policies that affirm life, for free pre- and post-natal healthcare and childcare, for living wage, and affordable housing. What if we had Choose Life Retreats for young, pregnant women who wanted to go somewhere to be nurtured, blessed, and affirmed as they were pregnant and as they gave birth? What if Choose Life Chaplains were available to help women who chose abortion create time and ritual for mourning and grieving?

The Divine has given us the power to choose, and our living spirituality comes in choosing to accept the constraints of love, constraints on our rights. As the scriptures of the Jewish and Christian traditions say, "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses" (this is the voice of God speaking in this tradition), "that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses, therefore: Choose life that you and your children may live." Amen.

Debora Kohn

Rabbi Debora Kohn is the rabbi of Reutlinger Community for Jewish Living in Danville, California. A member of Ohalah, the organization of Jewish Renewal Rabbis, and of the Northern California Board of Rabbis, she received a master's degree in Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

People love to talk about love. It is probably one of our favorite topics, but what do we really mean by "love"?

Mostly, we have what I call the "Hollywood" version of love: you suddenly meet this person, you get hit by love, and then you live happily ever after. Actually, few people can describe their married lives as living happily

ever after. There is always a lot of daily work that has to be done in order to make a relationship work. Unfortunately, the market-centered culture we live in stresses instant gratification.

Too often love is built on the need to maximize our satisfaction. This consciousness translates into a formula: "I am with you as long as you fulfill my needs." But this can be problematic. If we base our relationship on how well you fulfill my needs, we are going to be in trouble. How many relationships, how many marriages, break up when one of the partners gets sick, loses their job, becomes too needy, or no longer fulfills the other's needs? I work in a retirement home, and I'm constantly confronted with the sad reality of how many elderly parents are isolated and abandoned when

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they stop being productive. When they become frail or infirm, we want them out of our lives and out of the picture.

Similarly in love relationships, when needs are not met, we just break up. Sometimes breaking up or getting divorced is the only way to be true to yourself, to be true to your spirit and your partner's spirit. Sometimes divorce is the only way to respect and honor our being created in the image of God.

Yet we in the spiritual world must also insist that honoring and respecting ourselves and our partners means having a relationship that is not only based on the fulfillment of our needs, but on dialogue. We envision relationships based on the recognition of our partner as a human being who has been created in the image of God, and on the awareness that no other human being was created and brought to this world solely to fulfill our needs. There is no way that any one person will be able to fulfill all my needs, ever. And if my image of love and relationships leads me to look for a person whose only goal in life is to fulfill my needs, I'm in trouble.

Too often we demand that our partner intuitively know what we need. Consider the request we often make of each other: How come you don't understand what I need? And you have to guess, because I'm not going to tell you. And if you don't guess, obviously you don't love me. We do this in many of our relationships—with our partners, with our parents, with our children, with all the people around us. "How come you are not here for me?" we ask, when we should be asking "How come I'm not here for you?"

Susan Linn

Susan Linn is a practicing psychologist at the Judge Baker Children's Center and Harvard Medical School, the author of Consuming Kids, and the co-founder of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

Spiritual progressives need to make clear that although we can support sex education in the schools, that has nothing to do with the sexuality sold to our kids on television and in their corporate-sponsored music, movies, and video games. What they are learning from these media is not about real sex, but rather about a commodity we can call sex/violence and sex/power.

And yet, it is only the Religious Right that consistently speaks out against the way that corporations are using sex to reach kids through the media.

As far as I'm concerned, artists can create anything they want. I support the First Amendment. I fervently believe in it;

The Right today talks a lot about progressives and liberals undermining families because they support same-sex marriage. What actually undermines our marriages and our family life is the fact that marriage is understood in our society as an exchange agreement. It is all about what I give to you and what you give to me. It says I will be your lawfully wedded wife or husband—as long as you provide for my needs, and when you stop doing so, I am free to go on with my life and look for a better deal.

I oppose the state regulating our spiritual life because marriage is both a legal *and* a spiritual institution. The state should regulate the legal and financial aspects of marriage, but should not have a voice in defining the spirituality of marriage. What the state can do is provide a license that certifies the status of the two people that have decided to enter into a financial and legal contract. This contract allows my husband and me to file taxes together (which might be a wonderful experience for my accountant, but is definitely not a spiritual experience for my husband or myself), and to make end-of-life medical decisions for each other. It is appropriate for these aspects of marriage to be regulated by a legal and financial contract.

But marriage is also a sacred and a spiritual covenant. It has always been the domain of the spirit and of religion, and should remain that way. We should separate the legal contract from the religious ceremony, so that any two adults who wish to can enter into a legal contract, but we also need a range of spiritual communities that perform marriages independent of the state.

I just don't think they should market it to children. And I think we need to make that distinction. Around 6.6 million two-to-eleven year-olds and 7.3 million twelve-to-seventeen year-olds watched Justin Timberlake rip open Janet Jackson's blouse. A white man ripping off the blouse of a black woman—that was obscene for both its racist and its sexist connotations. And who responded? The Right Wing. Focus on the Family got 60,000 people to call the FCC. But where were we and other progressives? We should have been calling and complaining about that and the fact that the commercials run during the Super Bowl were obscene as well. That should have been *our* voice.

A Spiritual-Progressive vision of childhood should call for a commercial-free childhood. When the Religious Right was up in arms accusing Sponge Bob Square Pants of being gay, progressives all over the country leaped to the little yellow sponge's side. Sponge Bob Square Pants is innocent;

Sponge Bob Square Pants is wonderful; there is nothing wrong with Sponge Bob. So, as this argument was going on, there was the Right, and there was the Left. I was in my office with my head in my hands saying this is the wrong argument. There *is* something wrong with Sponge Bob Square Pants. Just as there was something wrong with Tinky Winky. But it's not their sexual orientation, or lack of it. It's the fact that they are corporate tools to sell junk to children. When childhood obesity is a major national problem, isn't it obscene to use Sponge Bob Square Pants to sell Kraft Macaroni & Cheese? We need to take back childhood from corporate America.

In 1998 a company called Western Media International did a study on children's nagging. This was not a study to help parents cope with nagging; it was a study to help children nag more effectively. They call it the "nag factor." Why are we giving a free pass to corporate America to undermine parental authority so that it can get children to push parents into buying stuff that parents don't want to buy? The study found that the parents who were more susceptible to nagging were the parents who were the most stressed: single parents, parents of young children.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, not a right-wing organization, commissioned a study which found that 60 percent of parents say they're concerned about sex on television. According to the same study, slightly fewer than that said

that they were concerned about violence. And it's not just television. It's also movies and video games. "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" was the top selling video game for preteens last year. And that's the one where you can have sex with a prostitute and then kill her. Where is our voice about the sex and violence, to say nothing of the racism, in video games? Seventeen communities around the country, including the entire state of Illinois, are passing or have passed laws making it illegal to sell mature-rated video games like "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" to minors. We should be supporting those laws. The video game industry is fighting them, and they've won in the courts. The video game industry says they are exercising First Amendment rights. But we're talking about corporations and corporate speech, not individual speech.

In 2003, 83 percent of the episodes in the top twenty shows among teens contain some sexual content. And 20 percent depicted intercourse. We have a country that is fighting honest sex education in the schools while supporting kids learning about some corporate version of sex from television and other media. The organization I work for, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, works for the rights of children to grow up and the freedom for parents to raise them and to transmit their values without being undermined by corporate interests or greed. We are Spiritual Progressives, and we want you to work with us.

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Mary Elizabeth Moore is Professor of Religion and Education, and Director of Women in Theology and Ministry at the Candler School of Theology of Emory University. She is the author of Teaching as a Sacramental Act.

Let's talk straight about power and spirituality in the public sphere. In what ways do we exercise power—knowingly or unknowingly—in the public sphere, and how is that power shaped by our own spiritual traditions and practices? What are the values and dysfunctions of our power, both within our communities and in the larger social arena?

I would like to address three issues: how we engage with power, how Spiritual Progressives might increase our contribution, and how we might practice transformative politics. As a prelude, let me say what I mean by power, namely, *the ability to influence persons or situations, whether by persuasion, coercion, collaboration, or other means*. This is a subject about which we are often naïve, conflicted, or idealistic, and I do not pretend to be exempt from these problems. On the other

hand, I am convinced that avoiding power and hiding our power behind pessimism are *not* real options. Our public world is in confusing disarray and in the frightening grip of religious and spiritual distortions that seem to some well-intentioned people to be the only options. Let's begin then with how people engage with power.

Engaging with Power: Problems and Possibilities

At the outset, we need to acknowledge that power is already present in our world, and *we* exercise power, whether or not we are aware of it. U.S. consumption of cars, clothes, and other goods creates a U.S.-dominated nexus of power across the world, affecting the ways in which people live their daily lives—the extent of their food, shelter, and access to self-determination. Further, most of us engage with power in different ways in different situations, sometimes violating our own deepest spiritual values, whether in business dealings or in closing our ears and mouths when someone close to us misuses power. In order to be more self-conscious

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about power, I invite you now to explore four ways in which people “do power.”

AVOIDANCE OF POWER. Religious and spiritual communities that reject strict orthodoxy often *avoid issues of power*, in part because: we are not all alike; we do not see strict boundaries between true and untrue; and we stand against dominating powers. We often have an aversion to consolidated power; thus, we leave space for others to usurp our voices.

COMPETITION FOR POWER. We also undercut ourselves by *competing for power*—competing for control within and between our organizations, even pitting one progressive issue against another. Further, consider how we compete for power in more subtle and damaging ways. How often do we argue our case by contrasting ourselves with another group—them and us? Indeed, much of the progressive movement has been trying to articulate its place in the world in opposition to the “rightist” movement, whether in religion or politics. Even the framing of this conference and many of the best books on our present situation divide the world into two camps and claim to choose the better of the two, or at least to reject the worst. Such arguments reveal competition for power. In honesty, these dualistic arguments can be as motivating in politics as they are on the sports field, but they are self-defeating in the long run.

ABUSE OF POWER. This leads to reflection on a third way of engaging with power, namely the *abuse of power*. Critiquing the abuse of power is something that many progressives do well. We, and an increasing number of other people in this country, recognize the abuse of religious values to justify violence and to squeeze values discussions into a limited range of sexual mores, pitting homosexuality against heterosexuality and abortion against the protection of life. We too often fail to name the most pressing ethical issues in public life: the morality of war, increased poverty, increased numbers of children in poverty, and limited healthcare accessibility, to name a few. To define ethics around selective agendas, to favor the rich, to use war and threats of war to address violence, and to target certain groups as symbols of immorality, are decisions to engage with power abusively.

HEALING, TRANSFORMATIVE POWER. While we inevitably participate in the three kinds of power I have named, they are not the only options. I invite you to consider the possibility of healing and transformative power, or *the ability to influence persons and situations toward serving the good of the whole of humanity and creation in the most life-giving and life-repairing ways with the least amount of harm, and to do so by persuasion, collaboration, and other means that are compatible with those goals*. If the progressive movement were to practice such transformative power, how would that look, and what would the results be? I would like to offer some sketches of what this might mean, first in relation to the goals of this progressive spirituality movement, and then in relation to politics on the ground.

Framing Spiritual Progressive Goals

The first challenge is to frame our goals in terms of healing and transformative power. I suggest that we shift away from challenging negatives and instead offer positives, such as the following:

- Champion a progressive spiritual politics that draws deeply from religious practices and traditions, boldly critiquing its own formulations as well as others’ misuses and distortions of religion.

- Respect the religious/spiritual impulses of U.S. peoples, and encourage liberal, progressive cultures to look to these traditions, communities, and experiences for potential contribution to future vision and action.

- Articulate and construct a U.S. ethos that maximizes love, caring, kindness, generosity, ethical/ecological sensitivity, and awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe.

These proposals are neither a beginning nor an end, but they challenge us to claim the power of this moment—to construct and commit to positive visions. They challenge us to move beyond dividing the world into two camps and defining ourselves against the Other. They also encourage us to resist abusive power by reflecting on *all* uses and abuses of power, including our own. To name goals in such a way is to choose hope!

Engaging in Healing and Transformative Politics

I discussed engaging in healing and transformative politics briefly in my book *Ministering with the Earth*, but here I want to elaborate on these ideas in relation to a Spiritual Progressive movement. In the book, I described a politics of partnership, which would be purposive, communal, conversational, passionate, and prophetic. I want now to encourage us to embody these qualities in our public witness. I encourage us to collaborate in developing radical visions, and also to embody radical ways of being in community with one another. This means reshaping our social organizations and life patterns.

The starting point for transformative politics is compassion—feeling with the world and all creatures within it. This includes compassion for our immediate communities and those far away; it includes compassion for the whole and for the details. Compassion is a deeply religious value, and is well informed by religious-spiritual traditions. Transformative politics also need reflection, through which people discover what is happening in the world and then critique it and construct new possibilities. Compassion and reflection are vital, but they are not sufficient for transformative politics. We need also to identify and practice new forms of politics:

POLITICS OF SUSPICION. We need, first, a politics that is suspicious of those powers that reinforce domination, oppression, and destruction. When we exercise suspicion, we examine everything from ourselves to our economic structures to the cultural seas in which we swim. A politics of suspicion is not negative, however; it is simply wary. Indeed, suspicion is

strongest when vision is strong, for the very practice of suspicion is intended to detect those powers that threaten vision and the movements toward it.

POLITICS OF TRANSCENDENT POSSIBILITIES. In addition to suspicion, we need a politics that recognizes the “beyond” or “larger than” realities of the cosmos. Such a politics invites people to reach toward mystery—to reach beyond our favorite beliefs and values, to open ourselves to genuinely new visions for public life. Mystery is named diversely in various traditions, but it always carries healing power, whether focused on Divine mystery, the mysteries that dwell within human relationships, or awe of the universe.

POLITICS OF FUTURE. A politics of grace already points to a politics of future. Most religious traditions have a view of the future, and many (such as Judaism and Christianity) project a future of God’s reign, or God’s new creation. In a politics of future, present reality is always measured by hope for a just and sustainable world to come. African American spirituals represent such moments of hope in the midst of tormented human existence; spirituals in the antebellum United States embodied protest against slavery, as well as hope and movement toward an undefined, but better, future.

POLITICS OF CYCLES. We cannot be serious about the future if we are not also serious about the cycles of life (an accent that is often more clear in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Native American traditions than in many others). A politics of

cycles means that we raise quality-of-life issues from beginning to end, addressing issues and forming communities that nourish all of the interdependent cycles of life—cycles of land and air and sea, cycles of human life, and cycles of international relations. We cannot afford to make political decisions based only on so-called “end goals.” We need also to make decisions that foster life on the way to such goals, and remain open to changing goals along the way.

POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP, ADVOCACY, AND SOLIDARITY. Finally, we are called to a politics of friendship, advocacy, and solidarity. This involves befriending the stranger; offering hospitality to the outsider; working with and for the marginalized; advocating for those who are oppressed, rejected, or silenced; and building communication with all peoples and creatures. The emphasis here is not on caring *for* others, but on being *with* others in their struggles for physical necessities, social justice, and the dignity befitting sacred beings. I also emphasize advocacy because this kind of politics is not simply relevant to personal relationships. It has to do with taking a stand for the sake of a life-loving, justice-building, and peace-filled world. It has to do with solidarity over time—a long, long time.

For all of these visions, although the road is long, it is one on which we will be transformed by mysteries too great for words. It is a road where we will be called to take up our power and walk. Dare we to be that powerful?

Richard Ufford-Chase

Richard Ufford-Chase is Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

I spent eighteen years working on the United States/Mexico border with refugees from Central America and people of faith from the United States who came to the border to learn about U.S./Mexico border policy. No one was more surprised than I was when God moved in some fairly mysterious ways a year ago to cause my election as Moderator of the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. I would describe that job as a cross between being a short-term pope and Speaker of the House. It’s our highest elected office, and it has been a great joy and privilege for me to travel across the country over the past year and to be with Presbyterians and other people all over the world describing what the work of becoming a new kind of church is going to be all about. I need to let you know that I came to this gathering primarily for very personal reasons. And those reasons are that I felt my own need to be lifted up and rejuvenated and reminded once more about what gives us spirit and life.

We come together to share the best of our religious traditions, not to water down our religious traditions until there’s nothing left (which tends to happen too often, I think, when we get together for interfaith gatherings). So I want to share a passage from the book of Isaiah—the fifty-eighth chapter, which will be familiar to most of you: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor in to your midst, and when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up quickly, your vindicators shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard, then you shall call and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help and God will say, here I am.”

Three summers ago, I was in my apartment in Tucson, Arizona. It was the hottest part of the year, and I received a phone call from a friend of mine who was a nurse at St. Mary Hospital on the west side of town. She invited me to come

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meet a patient who was in need of some pastoral care, and especially of someone who could speak Spanish with her. So I went to the hospital and met a woman about a year older than myself, named Veronica.

Her story went something like this: Veronica is from Mexico City. A single mother living with her parents and, at the time, with a thirteen-year-old son. When her son got to be of high school age, the expenses to keep him in school jumped dramatically. On her salary, she could no longer afford to pay the bills for him to stay in school. So she made the difficult decision to leave her son with her parents and to travel north by bus with her twenty-one-year-old nephew to the little town of Altar, Sonora—about 150 miles southwest of Tucson—sixty miles south of the border, where hundreds, and some days thousands, of migrants arrive by bus, day after day. They get off the bus in the little plaza in Altar and look for a *coyote* (a paid smuggler) to get them through the desert and across the border where they hope to find work. Veronica and her nephew found a coyote and joined a group of nine other people. Having paid significant amounts of money, they began their journey, hiking across the Sonora desert at the most brutally hot time of the year. It must have been 118 to 120 degrees in the part of the desert where Veronica crossed that July, three summers ago. They hiked all night long and into the next day. At the end of the day, Veronica got dizzy and began vomiting. She had horrible headaches. She couldn't keep anything down. They were out of water. And she was in big trouble, as are hundreds of migrants who try to make that journey every day. Eventually, she could no longer keep up. And the economics of *coyotismo* are that you take the people who can make it because they're where the money is. So Veronica and her nephew were left behind. He eventually picked her up and managed to carry her to a road where someone picked them up and took them to Saint Mary's hospital, where Veronica's heart stopped beating twice in the emergency room. She was brought back to life both times and placed in intensive care. I was invited to come and visit with her about a week into her stay at the hospital.

When I met Veronica, her lips and tongue were black. She was being fed intravenously, because her cerebral cortex had been so badly damaged by the heat stroke that she couldn't swallow. And I watched what could only be described as a miracle take place, as the pink skin began to appear underneath the black scabs on her lips and tongue. Toward the end of the first week that I knew her, as I began to learn her story, I discovered that her son was to turn fourteen the next day, so the following day I took a phone credit card to the hospital, dialed her son's phone number in Mexico City and then held Veronica's hand as she wept through a conversation with him on his fourteenth birthday. Eventually, she was well enough to be returned to Mexico City. The Mexican Consul agreed to buy her a plane ticket, and I took her to the airport. As I pushed her wheelchair down the concourse to put her on a plane, I tried to express my gratitude to God for the condition

she was in and her ability to go home to be with her family. Do you know what she said to me? "I'll have to try again."

My friends, few of us in this room can imagine the kind of economic pressures that exist in the lives of people like Veronica. But we have a problem, which is that 20 percent of the world's population will receive all of the benefits of the global economy. And 80 percent of the world's population will be in Veronica's situation, where they know that if they don't risk everything to try and get across a border like the one between Mexico and the United States, they have little hope of ever having any kind of future for their children. And we have been encouraged to believe a lie. The lie is this: that it is somehow reasonable and responsible for us to take all the benefits of globalization while accepting no responsibility for the global economy. That lie does not find any kind of support system in any one of the religious traditions represented here this afternoon, not one.

The question before us is, "How will the church be church?" How will we stand against the lie and help to create a new, and I would suggest to you, Biblically- founded society? And how will we live out that foundation in our faith communities?

For answers to that question, I turn to my most important mentor, a man named Jim Corbett, a self-described Quaker rancher, who was one of the founders of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. In a new book called *Sanctuary For All Life—the Cowbala of Jim Corbett*, here's what Jim has to say about the task facing our churches: "For the prophetic faith, revelation unfolds in history guided by the question, 'How are we to fulfill our covenant to be a holy people?'" Down through the generations, the biblical voice urges us in community to seek, do, and study Torah. Torah can be characterized as law, guidance, instruction, a way of life, wisdom. It is studied in the story of the covenant people and the peoples grafted onto the covenant people—an inheritance bequeathed by the Bible. All insight into the hallowing way is Torah, but it can't be abstracted out of history into timeless creeds, personal pieties, or politically correct theologies that exist apart from the life of a people.

Our task, my friends, is to build church, a faith community that seeks always to follow Torah. Jim would have suggested that what we need to do is practice what he called "Civil Initiative." Here's how he described it: "Civil Initiative maintains and extends the rule of law, unlike Civil Disobedience which breaks it and Civil Obedience which lets the government break it. The heart of a societal order guided by the rule of law is the principle that the nonviolent protection of basic rights is never illegal."

So, how do we be church? My friends, we be church not by simply protesting or trying to create more policies that are life-affirming in Washington, though that is important work to do. We don't be church by chaining ourselves to the front door of the federal building to try and demand something different, though that is occasionally necessary in our lives. We

be church by simply functioning like church. What do I mean? Well, five years ago we were facing a situation where border policies promoted by the United States government were increasingly moving us in the direction of death on the border. Make no mistake, hundreds of people have been dying in our desert this year and every year for the last ten years, not because of some fluke of nature, but because we have closed down all of the traditional routes of migration and forced people into the desert.

Our question was, "Well, what do we do about that reality?" A group of us got together one Saturday morning at the local Quaker meeting house in Tucson, some 90 or 100 people, and discussed what could be done. Our first step was to create an organization called Humane Borders. We went to the local County Coroner's; we asked where people had died in the previous year, and using GPS coordinates we began plotting on a map every body that was found that year on the border. Eventually, we could see the corridors and the clusters of death that began to appear on the map. And then we went to the land managers, because much of our land is owned by the state or the federal government. We asked them for permission to put water stations in those areas where there were clusters of death. Last year there were fifty water stations. Folk from all over the community went out to the desert and put out close to 30,000 gallons of water. This year there will be seventy water stations out in the desert attended by those volunteers.

Now we have gotten all kinds of press and attention for our actions. It's not that we have no intention of creating public policy, because we do. But the trick is to act like church and choose actions that are both responding to the immediate need and creating a symbol around which we can organize as a people.

So let me share just a few quick comments now, based on

Jim Winkler

Jim Winkler is the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, which is the public policy and social justice agency of the United Methodist Church.

Spiritual and religious values pervade the public sphere. The question is which values are and will be dominant. We are in the midst of a struggle. Spiritual wickedness does exist in high places. We here, for the most part, believe with all our hearts that we represent the values of love, justice, peace, and forgiveness, and that we do battle with the forces of hate, oppression, war, and revenge.

William Sloane Coffin helped frame this discussion when

the transition that I've made from being a faith-based activist on the border to Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). I titled my talk, when I was jotting my notes down earlier today, "Confessions of an Elected Activist."

We have a huge struggle before us, and it is not easy to think about how we're going to move an entire denomination of people. How do we move and create new kinds of movements? First, we go to Scripture, or we go to whatever the foundational documents are that hold our faith tradition together—we go to Torah. Second, we recognize that it is God's desire that we be renewed. We need to get ourselves out of classrooms, pews, and places of meeting and into the world to go to work. No one I know has ever been argued into a different position about something. People change their minds about important things when they have direct experience. So if we expect to change our neighbors, our friends, and our families, we have to go into the world, go to work, and invite them to come with us. And this doesn't mean beating them over the head until they come. It means we extend a hand in friendship and invite them to become part of this wonderful new thing God is working in all our lives. That's the work.

I would ask that we keep in mind the wisdom of the Quakers. I'm married to one, so I'm allowed to talk about it. We don't demonize others. Quakers believe that there is something of God in everyone, even George Bush and Karl Rove. So I would ask all of us to think carefully about how we do the work that we do. Are we willing to embody the best of who God calls each of us to be and to draw that out of one another? There is so much positive work to be done in the world. Let's not spin our wheels standing against the negative energy around us.

he pointed out that the real axis of evil is not Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—rather, it is environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash in weapons.

It seems rather obvious, doesn't it? Well, not to everyone. Which, as Rabbi Lerner reminded us last night, does not mean that some of us are stupid. I do believe people want to live holy, just, authentic, spiritual lives. People don't want to wear tennis shoes made in sweatshops in Southeast Asia; they don't want to drink coffee grown on land in Central America that should be feeding its hungry people; they don't want to be pumping pollution into their own bodies and those of their children (or into the atmosphere), but many, if not most, of us engage in these actions every single day.

Spiritual progressives never left the field or the public sphere. We never ceded any ground to the Religious Right. But we failed to organize effectively within our churches and our synagogues and to identify ourselves to our elected officials as spiritual people. This must change.

How do we get out of this crisis? Our solutions must be as practical as possible for ordinary people. Everyone, it's said, wants to hear three things: supper's ready, you're forgiven, and I love you.

People will drink fair trade coffee; people will recycle. We have to give them the practical tools to engage in justice and integrate this into their daily lives. I believe people are willing to change, and I believe people are willing to sacrifice, if there is a vision of hope offered to them based on a realistic program set forth for a better world.

People want healthcare for all. They believe if you work forty hours a week you ought to have enough money to feed your family, and put clothes on your body and a roof over your head. People want social justice; they just don't know how to get it. But we also have to remember what has happened in these last fifty years. The movements that we have been part of over this past half century have changed this nation and, indeed, the world—the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movement, the anti-nuclear weapons movement, the environmental justice movement, the movement for the rights of gay and lesbian people. All of these movements are moral and spiritual movements. We have been at the forefront of those movements, and we've changed the institutions of this country. But we still have a long way to go.

So, why this effort now to roll back the gains that we've made? Fear, obviously. The Religious Right has perfected the language of persecution. Yet the Religious Right is made up mostly of white Americans, the most powerful group of people ever to stride the face of the earth. I know; I'm a WASP. Although I grew up in an anti-war, pro-Civil Rights family, the message the culture sends to me as a white, American male is that I rightfully own and control the planet militarily, socially, culturally, and economically.

The Religious Right's sense of persecution is palpable. Objectively, it's preposterous. Their sense of loss of control, though subjective, is for them a reality. The angry white male has not disappeared. He's like a wounded bear, striking out in desperation. We're experiencing the birth pangs of a new world, and the labor is hard.

Gore Vidal was asked a few years ago after he completed a speech at the National Press Club, "Why do you think this country has moved to the right?" He answered, "Moved to the right? Any country built on the backs of slaves on land stolen

from its native peoples is by definition a right-wing country."

So how do we move forward? When we fail in the public sphere, it is not by failing to quote the Bible as much as the Religious Right does, or by not wearing American flag lapel pins prominently enough; rather, it is when we do not advocate sufficiently for public policy in terms of love and compassion.

I work on Capitol Hill right across the street from the Supreme Court and the Capitol. When we meet with Members of Congress, we offer no campaign contributions. We don't threaten to turn them from office if they don't vote the United Methodist way. We don't pray for the death or illness of any Supreme Court justices. We seek no special favor or legislation. Rather, we try to speak as best we can on behalf of the last and the least and the lost. Meanwhile, the Christian Coalition scores how Members of Congress vote on Supreme Court nominees, abortion, gay marriage, and constitutional amendments to ban flag burning.

Spiritual progressives never left the field or the public sphere. We never ceded any ground to the Religious Right. But we failed to organize effectively within our churches and our synagogues and to identify ourselves to our elected officials as spiritual people. This must change. We are spiritual and religious people concerned about politics. The Christian Coalition is a political group concerned about religion. Let us not think of ourselves as the Religious Left here now to counter the Religious Right. That gets us nowhere except to feed the media's frenzy for adversarial politics. And let's not put our faith in, nor attempt to control, the Democratic Party as the Religious Right has the Republican Party. We face nothing but heartache and disappointment if we try to do so.

Now, I'm pleased that Democrats seem to have awakened to the need to see public policy in terms of right and wrong and moral values, rather than as the work of policy wonks trying to tweak their various programs. But I am reminded always that in American politics today, it's the power of money that dominates. Congressman Jamie Whitten of Mississippi said it well years ago when he explained, "All anyone wants is a special advantage over the next fella. Understand that, and you understand the intent of every piece of legislation ever passed."

I don't mean that we should become too cynical. Can we imagine a better future? E.J. Dionne wrote recently in the *Washington Post* about a new report from the Center for

Budget and Policy Priorities showing that every year 27 million Americans are lifted from poverty by our system of public benefits. More than 80 million Americans receive health insurance through a government program such as Medicaid, Medicare, or the state Children's Health Insurance program. Government programs do reduce the extent and depth of poverty.

Internationally, ours is the first generation in human history with the ability to feed all the world's people; to provide housing, education, and health care for everyone; to combat disease, hunger, and poverty. The World Bank estimates it would cost \$15 billion a year to provide universal primary education for children in eighty-eight developing countries. The World Health Organization says it would cost \$21 billion a year to provide basic health care for people in those same countries. Giving school children lunch in forty-four poor countries would cost \$6 billion a year. Why aren't we providing universal primary education and school lunches and basic health care? Why wasn't it an issue in the presidential campaign or right now in Congress? St. Luke reminds us that from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required. And from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

You want to end terrorism? Meeting the needs of people around the world and in our country will be infinitely more effective than all the bombs and bullets and tanks and war planes we can ever build. There are countless numbers of good people who devote huge amounts of their time and energy to feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked. But it's freeing the oppressed and confronting and changing the systems that perpetuate hunger and poverty that's difficult. It's difficult for most of us to see how we can get out of this mess. Thirteen hundred of us are gathered here with hope and determination. Hallelujah! This is no small achievement. Without trying to put any kind of guilt trip on us, we all still know that real change won't begin to happen unless this type of gathering is truly multiracial. Additionally, we bring a lot of different agendas with us to this community table. And that's as it should be. The progressive community is far more decentralized, anarchic even, than the hierarchical Religious Right.

But I'm going to venture forth and say to you that I believe our first order of business must be to end this insane and horrible war in Iraq. A powerful book I recommend to you is Chris Hedge's *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*. Never has that title been so exemplified as in George W. Bush's invasion and conquest of Iraq. Even those who approve of war have to be ashamed at the colossal stupidity of the planning, or lack thereof, involved in this war. And the sheer breadth and depth of the lies that this war was based on are monumental in scope. Imagine if it had been led by a President Gore or Kerry—and it's not hard to do—and think of the daily hue and cry that would be issuing forth from the Religious Right, Rush Limbaugh, and the Republican Party

calling for the head of a President who so ineptly prepared for a post-war invasion reality and repeatedly lied about the presence of weapons of mass destruction. Impeachment proceedings would be under way now, and rightly so. But nothing is to be heard today from the so-called "opposition party." Let us, then, be the ones bold enough to declare that the emperor has no clothes.

World oil production will peak soon, never to increase again. Demand will continue to increase. Without a shift to new sustainable sources of energy and a dramatic change in our daily lives in the industrialized countries, disaster awaits. This war is about oil. It is about securing Iraq's oil fields for our use. It is about stopping other nations from getting what we want. It is about killing those who get in our way. Ending the war in Iraq is not just the right thing to do; it is absolutely necessary for us as a nation to acknowledge reality and move forward to a better future. As for weapons of mass destruction, I don't want any nation or group to possess them. Is it unthinkable for the President of the United States to articulate that vision? Let us insist that the moral and spiritual responsibility of our leaders is to embrace and work for a world without any weapons of mass destruction anywhere.

Our responsibility as spiritual people is to urge one another to avoid falling prey to consumerism and materialism—not because we don't wish for people to have an abundant life with adequate shelter, food, and clothing, but because we understand that for a new spirituality to be realized, people must not be trapped by the endless quest for material goods. We must oppose the death penalty, not because we believe murderers should run free, but because we believe in the power of love, grace, forgiveness, and redemption, and we know that violence begets violence. We insist on higher fuel economy standards and oppose drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, not because we believe that sport utility vehicles are inherently evil (although they may be), but because we believe the earth itself is in peril. We periodically support boycotts of corporations because we support migrant laborers, healthy working conditions, and freedom from tyranny. We witness the powers and principalities in state capitols, Washington, and in the United Nations, not because we seek special favor or legislation for ourselves, but because we seek to call institutions to accountability on behalf of the children, the weak, and the impoverished.

Power, happiness, and success as the world defines them are ours if we have the will to fight for them hard enough. But joy, peace, and love are divine gifts freely given to us. W.E.B. DeBois said, "Mighty causes are calling us. The freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty—all these and more, but they call with voices that will mean work and sacrifice and even death."

Mercifully grant us the spirit of Esther that we may say, "I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish."

Carol Lee Flinders

Dr. Carol Lee Flinders is the author of the critically acclaimed Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics, along with numerous other works including At the Root of Longing and Rebalancing the World. She has taught courses in mystical literature at UC Berkeley and at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and is currently a fellow of the Spirituality and Health Institute at Santa Clara University.

I don't know that anyone is more directly, continuously, or universally hurt by religious fundamentalism than women. That's why so many of us are here. I'm here also as someone who has thought long and hard about violence—about, for starters, the 70 million people who were murdered in Europe and Soviet Russia between 1914 and 1945—and asked how it is that human beings can do this to one another. This behavior arises out of this remarkable ability that human beings share only with chimpanzees (with whom we share about 98 percent of our DNA) to pseudo-speciate, to look at another human being and decide that they are actually of another species and therefore killable by us.

I have come to believe that while there are a great many ways to foster that clever little trick in a person's mind, few of these are more effective than bringing them up in the bosom of a family, a community, and a religious tradition that systematically discounts, silences, and demeans women and girls. And of course the problem with pseudo-speciation is that once its logic is established in your head, it conditions how you view the rest of the world. Which is to say that even if I wanted to stop being a feminist, I really wouldn't feel that I had any business stopping. Because it really isn't just about women, it's about everybody. We cannot afford to live in a post-feminist world, any more than we can live in a post-Kyoto world, or a post-Geneva Accord world.

Years ago, Berkeley's own poet/activist Ishmael Reed said bitterly that feminism had destroyed the Left. That was so painful for some of us to hear. However, over time, I have realized that it was probably no more painful than the pain that women inflicted on a great many men when we were in the midst of the lancing of that terrible boil of feminist grief and anger. We have all hurt each other a great deal in that conversation. We all have a lot to answer for. But we don't get to walk away from it.

Women will be wholehearted supporters of an effective progressive spiritual movement. But there is an enormous difference between what they will contribute in any event and what they would happily bring to the table—passion, intelli-

gence, resourcefulness—if the right kind of invitation is extended and sustained.

I want to begin with a couple of short, playful stories about how a river came into being. Both of them begin in the south of India in the midst of a devastating drought. The wells are dry, the temple tanks are lined with dust, and the crops have failed for three years running. And the sage Agastya prayed that his people would be relieved and his prayers found their way to heaven. "Go to the Himalayas," he was told, "and bring back a pot of the eternal snow waters so you can start a river."

Agastya did exactly what he was told, and when he returned home, he looked around for the ideal place to start a river. A dirty-faced boy showed up around then and Agastya said, "You hold the pot while I go look for the right place." And each place was too high, or too dry, or too low. Nothing was going to work quite right. Pretty soon he looked around and realized that the boy had deserted the pot. Just at that moment, a big crow came down and knocked the pot over. Agastya became enraged, and he stomped and he cursed and he yelled. And at that point it turned out, of course, that the boy was Ganesha.

Ganesha was the son of Lord Shiva. He had also come down from the Himalayas, and had quickly decided where that river was going to go, and had set the pot down and vanished. At that point, Ganesha appears in all his splendor, laughs and asks, "Why are you cursing? All I did was start your river for you!" Agastya looked down, and, sure enough, bubbling from the pot at his feet came the clearest stream imaginable. It wasn't just a stream, it was the goddess Kaveri. No sooner had she touched the ground than she spread out into a wide gorgeous flowing river, dancing in the sunlight and bringing life to the whole parched peninsula, chuckling softly to herself as she flowed down the hills to the warm embrace of the bay of Bengal.

"Well that's not what I heard," said the sister-in-law from two villages over. In her account of the story, the protagonist was a small girl named Kaveri, the daughter of a sage named Kavera. And it is she who appealed to the gods on behalf of her dry and dusty region. "Let me become a river," she prayed. And for days she didn't sleep, eat, or move. Finally, her desire was granted. In the meantime, sage Agastya had happened to come along and see this beautiful girl. He was so struck by her beauty that he begged her father to give him her hand. Well it's an unspoken rule that sages don't say no to other sages, so Kavera said to his daughter, "What am I going to do?" She said that it was okay, and told Agastya, "I will

become your wife, but if you leave me alone, no matter how briefly, I will leave." The two of them were married, and not long afterwards he went out one morning to take a bath. (That's what one narrator says; the other narrator says "No, no, no, the gods called him on really urgent business.") In any case, Kaveri woke up one morning to find Agastya gone, and when he came back, she told him she was leaving.

Agastya raged, wept and stomped, but Kaveri was nearly oblivious to Agastya's tantrum, because her metamorphosis had already begun. And soon all you could see of her beauty was the ripples catching the light, like a woman's long, waving, unbound hair, its colors shifting continuously. And if you visit the source of the river Kaveri, you will see that just below the holding tank, where waters are collected for pilgrims to bathe in, the stream vanishes and then reappears. That's because when Kaveri became a river, she had to go underground for a while to escape her angry husband. Once a year, Kaveri has the power that her cousin Ganga has all the time. Her waters can wash away any sin, any negativity. She, like Ganga, stands for IS: unconditional love.

Well, of course the stories are about a river, a region, and the people who love the river—and the idea that the river is, in fact, one of their own beautiful women. (Similarly, it was said of St. Clare of Assisi that after she died, the eulogist called her a clear spring of the Valley Spoleto.) The Kaveri stories also constitute a playful poke in the rib at the institution of learned holy men. There are occupational hazards to being a professional religionist in India. Especially the tendency to have a short fuse, and to be up to one's knees in water before one knows what is happening.

Now the stories really aren't about gender at all. They are stories about forces in consciousness. They are stories about grace upwelling whenever we get ego out of the way. They are stories about immense spiritual resources that can well up even in the simplest person when you give them a chance, when their desires are unified. This can happen within a person or a movement. This can happen to a person like Michael Lerner, who basically stopped sleeping for five months to make this conference happen.

We are here together not because our country is a dusty place that needs a river. It's more like one of those deserts that spreads itself aggressively across the rest of the world.

I repeat: the stories are not about gender. There is a little of the headlong reckless lover of the divine in all of us. Left-brain, right-brain struggling all the time to come into a working relationship. The stories aren't about gender and yet of course they are! And that is the thing, of course, about gender. Is it about biology? Is it about conditioning? Well, yes and no. Can we do anything about it? Yes, we can. That's the kind of conversation we have to have.

In India, while temple priests and sages do a great deal to preserve the religion, they know perfectly well that tradition is really transmitted in the home by mothers, grannies, and sisters-in-law who tell the bedtime stories and carry out all

kinds of little celebrations as well. Like Kerala's celebration of the New Year, which comes in April. In this tradition, when the kids go to sleep at night, the mother builds a lovely little arrangement of flowers, food, and whatever jewelry she has on the *puja* table (altar). Right in the middle is a mirror.

The next morning, one by one, she brings the children in. "You have to keep your hands over your eyes," she says "Don't look." Then she stands them right in front of the altar, they say their mantra, and the mother says, "When you open your eyes, you are going to see the Lord." And they open their eyes, and for a split second they believe it: "Oh! Lakshmi! That's me. That's who I am." That's what that tradition is designed to do, to let the children know that the Lord is not just in the temples. The Beloved is right inside of them.

Spiritual awareness in that tradition is understood to flow down the mother line, like a river. India, like most traditional cultures, gets that between women, the earth, and the sacred, there is an unbreakable nexus. India recognizes that eco-feminism is a manifestation of the mother in every woman. There are a hundred stories, and they all have the same message: "Don't mess with the Mother!"

The goddess or deity of intelligence, of art and poetry and science and music—everything that requires intuitive flow—is the goddess Saraswati. And her river has been invisible for nearly 5,000 years. But it's okay, because she moves underground, like intuition.

The reason I've taken such care with what our friend George Lakoff calls a "framing metaphor" is that it places in our minds' eye a model of religion that recognizes that every traditional religion flows along two different planes. There is the world of temple priests, sages, Sanskrit pundits, and holy texts. And then there is a rich polyphonic, home-based plane that is direct, irreverent, earthy, collaborative, prone to peals of laughter, very connective, and, above all, characterized by the image of flow.

Implicit in stories like the ones I've just told is a quiet reminder that religiousness itself precedes all religions. That before there were temples, temple priests, or Sanskrit texts, there was a longing in the human heart to transcend separateness, and there were all kinds of means intact to do this. We have always known how to be religious. Thus, from this point of view, every religion is a wonderfully poetic, haunting celebration of that longing for unity. And at the same time, every religion is a hijacking, a regrettable contraction of what Huston Smith calls "the primal religions"—how we were religious before there were religions.

A deity that had been fluid, nameless, formless, and everywhere, is imprisoned in particular forms once humans start producing religions. And the form these religions take? God lives way up there, god is a guy, and every once in a while he can be summoned down into the community where we can see him—if you have got a celibate man in elaborate robes who knows the magic words. And of course the ultimate form of hijacking is religious fundamentalism, in which the

It is really important for a spiritual progressive movement to develop an eye and an ear for when people are leading deeply passionately spiritual lives, even when they are not using the language that would mark them out as religious. Take Doctors without Borders, for example.

core truths of the great faiths—*love thy neighbor as thy self, feel the sufferings of others as thine own*—are eclipsed by a litany of strictures about “them and us.”

What is the antidote? Jim Wallis has proposed that the antidote to bad theology is good theology. I’d prefer to suggest something even more basic: no theology is as transformative as the simple fact of a life that’s on fire with the love of the Good, the True, and the Right.

And that’s what Kaveri symbolizes: “Just strip away everything about me but the river. I just want go out there and serve life.” It came to me, when I was writing about the middle ages for *Enduring Grace*, that flowing around those increasingly elaborate theological and architectural structures, those elaborate hierarchies, and the militancy of a church that was newly universal and evangelical, there was this river—a religious voice that is consistent whether it’s Mechthild of Magdeburg who’s speaking or Julian of Norwich, or Clare of Assisi. This voice is chronically irreverent, earthy, collaborative, impulsive, timeless, and improvisational.

When Catherine of Genoa suddenly saw the light, she couldn’t stay two minutes longer in the beautiful home she had in one of the better neighborhoods of Genoa. She was suddenly out in the slums, taking care of people with syphilis and polio and so on.

This fresh religious voice makes startling assertions. As Catherine of Genoa it might say “my ‘me’ is God.” As Julian of Norwich it proposes that the only way you can do justice to Jesus Christ is to say He is our mother.

It’s useful to talk about this stream of the Christian tradition as “vernacular spirituality,” because of course it didn’t speak Latin. Latin was the language of the universities, it was the language of the Holy Roman Empire. By contrast, what these women did, because they weren’t university trained, was to write in these brand new languages that were just coming up from the grassroots; they were absolutely fresh. Every metaphor you coined, you coined yourself. You didn’t get it out of Virgil. The writing is absolutely lovely and inherently subversive. The imagery of birth comes in a lot. Vernacular spirituality culminates in the Beguines, the first women’s movement. They were the order that wasn’t an order, a group of women who looked around and said, “We can lead lives that configure to Christ’s without having to take permanent vows and without placing ourselves under male authority.” It was the religious equivalent of “we don’t need no stinking badges.”

And the wonderful thing is that the mystical visionary experience of these women was as extreme as their rejection of conventional religious experience. Mechthild of Magdeburg is probably my favorite. She was particularly in love with the imagery of flow. For her, grace was symbolized by wine and blood, by tears, and by honey and milk.

According to Mechthild of Magdeburg, the Trinity is the headwaters of the love flood where God enters the world, “the true greeting of God, which comes from the heavenly flood out of the spring of the flowing Trinity that takes all strength from the body and lays the soul bare to itself.” And when the soul is united with God in mystical union, she says, “it begins to taste his sweetness. The power of the holy Trinity flows through the soul and body like mother’s milk.”

So you see how different this was, how much its own powerful voice it was, like that river, exactly like Kaveri, for exactly the same reasons.

For these Christian mystics like the Beguines and Mechthild of Magdeburg, there were chilling words from the bishops: “they will get husbands or they will be put in an approved order immediately.” They were simply too threatening to the dominant vision of religious orders. Well, that river went underground, but it has been working its way back to the surface for the past 150 years. Only instead of just speaking the vernacular languages—French and Middle English, Italian and German—it doesn’t even speak “religious” anymore, necessarily.

If a spiritual progressive movement is to resemble the river Kaveri—if it is to be welcoming to “vernacular spirituality”—it must develop an eye and an ear for when people are leading deeply passionately spiritual lives, even when they are not using the language that would mark them out as religious. Take Doctors Without Borders, for example. They don’t sit around and talk about Scripture, do they? They just jump in and do this incredibly courageous, selfless work, and they really have no sense of borders.

When Julia Butterfly Hill climbed up that tree, she didn’t say a lot about Jesus either. But it was all about peace. It was her expression and her passion for truth. When I was listening to Van Jones on the radio, speaking about Earth Day, he made this amazing connection when talking about the children of Oakland and the hard time they have breathing, and the great big semis that idle for hours down by the docks, waiting for cargo from the container ships to

carry stuff that we don't need but buy anyway, from all over Asia. When he made this connection, it affected me immediately, so that now, every time I buy something that I really don't need, something inside me stops, and I think of those

Carl Pope

Carl Pope is national chair of the Sierra Club.

We live in a world we did not create, we could not reproduce, we do not understand. The very air we breathe is produced by processes we are utterly incapable of replicating ourselves. Our bodies each day are dependent on gifts from millions of species, many of which we have never seen or named. We are rather helpless without the rest of creation, and it is extremely difficult to understand how those who are utterly dependent on millions of other species can claim for themselves the right of ownership.

Environmentalism as a movement and as an ethic has done a rather bad job dealing with the implications of our dependence. Environmentalists have tended to bog down into ultimately sterile debates over the relative priority of different facets of justice. The claims of the future or the obligations of the present to that future—inter-generational equity—are posed as in conflict with the needs of the powerless and the dispossessed among us. All of this is somehow portrayed as being in conflict, at least in the view of some deep ecologists, with the call and the needs of the rest of creation upon which we depend.

But I want to go back now in history, because this dilemma we are dealing with is not new or recent or unique. Neither our ideas, nor our failures are our own.

It is the tenth century. Across the Arab Empire the Prophet Mohammed's original call to justice has been corrupted and degraded by the dynasties which succeeded him. Their enormous material and military successes have led to a civilization widely viewed by its own people as morally and spiritually corrupt. The united community of Islam that the prophet, peace be upon him, envisaged has been divided between Sunni and Shia, Ali and his son Hussein martyred. The prophet's revolutionary insistence that women be admitted as participants in his community has been subverted and supplanted by the patriarchal oppression of the Christian and Zoroastrian empires that preceded and surrounded Islam. The insistence of the early community on social equality has been corrupted by privileges, pleasures, and abuses of imperial power and military triumph.

The moment may seem familiar. It is a time when people

kids with asthma. And he didn't say anything about Jesus either, or Allah or Buddha at all. He just did the right thing. We could call it vernacular spirituality—or maybe just “stealth spirituality.”

crave spiritual rebirth. In Basra, Iraq, just south of the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, where Hussein and Ali were martyred, a group of spiritual leaders and intellectuals calling themselves the “the Brethren of Purity” set out to purify Islam through the pathway of knowledge. They set out to complete a universal encyclopedia, a work that will capture all of human wisdom within a spiritual context.

Knowledge for the Brethren is not divorced from God but rather flows from Him. Knowledge properly described and connected to belief is the tool with which the Brethren believe they can restore the community of Islam to its true callings.

At the center of the crisis that afflicted the Arab Empire was the enduring human dilemma of justice. All great traditions command us to justice, and the followers of all great traditions fall short of responding to that call. In response to this crisis of justice, the Brethren seek to go deeper. Islam is still in its intellectually open phase, so the Brethren go beyond the commandments of the Koran and the traditions of the faith as they inherited them; they seek to revive their faith by adding new understandings.

The encyclopedia they prepare has eleven volumes. One entire volume is devoted to the Brethren's new understanding of justice. They do not follow the tradition of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah or Ezekiel who denounce oppression; they do not speak truth to power as Daniel might have done; they do not preach the inevitable cruelty of life in the fashion of Siddhartha; and they do not focus on love like Jesus did. Instead, in a stunning and breathtaking ethical act of imagination, they extend the Muslim concept of justice to include not only humanity, but the entire animal kingdom. Much as George Orwell was to do much later in *Animal Farm*, they do this through a fable. This volume of the encyclopedia depicts an island in which animals have lived in a state of nature for hundreds of years because there are no human beings. There are only jinn—like the genie we know from the story of Aladdin. These spirits don't need to eat or drink, and hence have no need to enslave other creatures or each other.

The animals live in peace and contentment, each according to its own nature and its own needs. But a ship arrives on the island. The humans on board immediately attempt to enslave the animals if they are useful, and to persecute and hunt those that are not. The animals rise in protest. “By what right,” they

CONFERENCE ON SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

ask, “do people come and take away our freedoms?” “Here’s what the animals say to the king of the jinn: “Your Majesty, the verses the humans cite as the basis for our slavery point only to the kindness and blessing that God gave to mankind. For God said that he made them your servants just as he made the sun and the moon, the wind and clouds your servants. Are we to think, Your Majesty, that these too are their slaves and chattel and that men are their masters? No, God created all his creatures on heaven and earth. He let some serve others either to do them some good or to prevent some evil. God’s subordination of animals to man is solely to help men and keep them from harm, not, as they deludedly suppose and claim, in order that they should be our masters and we their slaves.”

They placed this appeal with the king of the jinns, and a trial convenes between animals and humans, which takes up the bulk of the book. The sides are well matched, but the modern reader, at least, has the definite sense that the animals have the best case. Humans argue that their gifts and culture make them the superior party. The animals quite convincingly demonstrate that each of the talents and technologies of people can be matched and over-matched by some member of the animal community. They argue: The camel, for example, despite his long legs and neck, finds his footing along the most arduous and treacherous pathways in the dark of night, while humans could not see without a lantern or a torch. The horse too sees in the dark, or at least hears distant footsteps in the dead of the night, and often wakes his master from sleep by nudging him with a foot to warn him of an enemy or a beast of prey. An ass or a cow is frequently observed to return to his familiar home when its master has led it away on a path that it did not know. Yet there are men who may travel the same road any number of times, still stray from it, and lose each other.

The animals also argue quite successfully that, viewed morally, they are the superior species. They do not make war upon each other. They do not accept bribes. They do not oppress each other. They do not ignore the commandments of their Lord. In fact, in the Muslim tradition, it is only human beings who decline the commandment to submit to the Lord. So it looks like we’re going to end up without any animals to work with at the end of the trial. But upon its conclusion, an Islamic holy man rescues the humans’ side of the case. However, his rescue is an ambiguous one, as the Brethren clearly intended. He makes a claim for humanity’s right not to oppress animals, but to make reasonable use of their services. And his claim is that only humans have the potential for choosing between spiritual decay and spiritual growth. It is this potential, which in the Christian tradition is free will to choose between good and evil, that separates humans from both animals and jinn. The king of the jinn finds this argument convincing, as do the animals. He reaffirms a hierarchy in which humanity has superiority and some claim over the services and assistance of animals.

Stated boldly, this may sound like the same old story. The story that Christians and Jews know from Genesis, the story

we encounter in our society today. But if you examine the ending of the trial more closely, what the Brethren attempted is breathtaking. It is the potential for spiritual growth, and only the potential for spiritual growth, that sanctions and warrants a hierarchy in which humans enjoy the services of animals. These Muslim Brethren appeared to have discussed and even devised the concepts we know today as “deep ecology”—the idea that other species have dignity, value, and hence, intrinsic rights. They viewed all of God’s creations as fundamentally equal. In the narrative of the trial, the concepts of both dominion and stewardship, which flowed from Genesis for Muslims as well as for Christians and Jews, are transformed from entitlements granted by God unconditionally to humanity into contingent rewards that must be earned by human spiritual growth. We are not entitled to enjoy the services and assistance of other species unless we devote the benefits we derive to the task of spiritual ennoblement. This effectively stands the conventional Judeo-Christian understanding of the relationship between humans to the rest of creation on its head.

This reading of our role in nature has important consequences for understandings of work. Islam, as I comprehend it, does not view work as punishment meted out at the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Earning a living is not a punishment for sin in the eyes of the Brethren, but a reward for virtue. But it is a reward that must be earned, because if work depends upon the labor of animals, as it did in tenth-century Iraq, and the use of animals is contingent upon spiritual growth, work too necessarily becomes contingent upon spiritual growth. Thus, in effect what the Brethren did was sanctify humanity’s relationship with nature, and to include within it the concept of work. They didn’t do this for the benefit of horses, camels, or gazelles. They did it to redeem God’s commandment to be faithful, to submit to the divine order laid out in the Koran and stated by the Prophet, peace be upon him.

The Brethren sought to reform the Arab empire in the Muslim community, and they concluded that the only way to do this was to broaden their dialogue around justice. They found it necessary to extend their concept of justice to the natural world. They did not succeed. The Arab empire they sought to redeem was overwhelmed by new peoples, ultimately by the Mongols, who didn’t embrace the Brethren’s goals or vision. Their concepts of deep ecology and sacred relationships with nature were effectively lost for centuries.

We’re gathered here today at another moment of empire. We too have lost the sacred connection between work and nature. We too are debating how to find the wellsprings of justice that have been silted and clogged. I want to suggest as we go forward that we may do well to try to set our sights as high as the Brethren of Purity, and to look to the place where our relationship with the natural world will redeem not only the ecological sphere but the human as well. □

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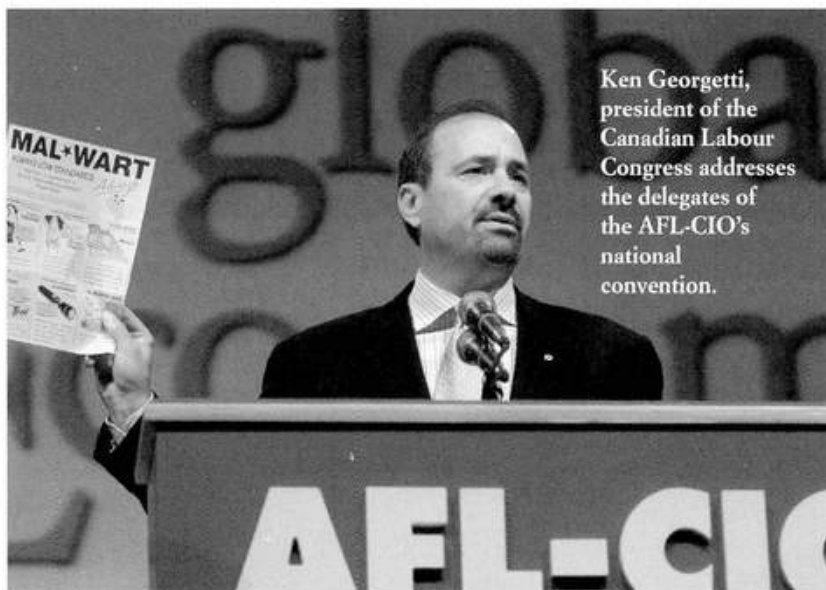
Why the AFL-CIO Split Is Not Labor's Biggest Problem

Paul Buble

The exit of the SEIU from the AFL-CIO in July of this year marked the biggest split in organized labor since the expulsion of the original CIO from the AFL in 1935. This event is bound to accelerate a centrifugal movement already present in labor during the past decade: the break-off of individual units from assorted parent unions and the "raiding" of one union by another for members of assorted locals. Calamity and doom are widely predicted by AFL-CIO loyalists and Democratic party officials. And, especially if you don't look at the broader picture, the doomsayers have a couple of powerful points.

For example, much commentary within and around the labor movement (before and since the split) has been highly negative about the rebels on the solid grounds that the SEIU will not be less bureaucratic than its rivals. Rebutting claims made by the SEIU that larger and more efficient units will necessarily have more success in mobilizing workers, these critics point out that the numerical expansion of union bodies does less than nothing to bring about a much-needed democratization. Indeed, SEIU leader Andy Stern has espoused an explicitly top-down model of organizing that old-time union activists see as a tragic rebuttal of the egalitarianism the union movement once represented. [See *Steve Early's piece in Tikkun, Volume 20, number 3, p. 45.*]

And then we have the Democrats. If the labor movement has been staggering downward, its descent has been less rapid than that of the Opposition Party, especially in an era of continued low turnout. Many believe the Democrats will be hurt by this division and the hard feelings engendered. And they may well be right. But whether all this is likely to be as important as, say, the attitude of Democrats in 2006 or 2008 toward an increasingly unpopular war/occupation, remains very



Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress addresses the delegates of the AFL-CIO's national convention.

much to be seen. What's likely is that hawks and trade-policy neoliberals who used to get AFL support just because they were Democrats will now have a harder time.

These concerns about bureaucracy and politics obscure, however, the *raison d'être* of labor. In the past, the workers at the center of the labor movement were blue-collar U.S. factory workers. Today, that view of labor seems unrealistic, since so few Americans work in factories. And that's just the point.

No one in the United States is untouched by capital's notorious "race for the bottom." Looking for ever cheaper labor, global capital outsources the actual task of creating value to immigrant workers (legal and illegal) and to workers overseas. These workers will perform their labor for pennies on the dollar. On top of their work a new American economy has been constructed, a largely white-collar services-and-finance specialty market. It is illusory, however, to believe that this economy could exist without the low-wage, immigrant, and global labor market. All Americans who get a paycheck have a vital economic relation to this immigrant and global labor force. And that's why tomorrow's labor movement must be legitimately and sincerely internationalist, or its collapse is dead certain.

Paul Buble teaches labor and cultural history at Brown University and co-edited Wobblies! A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World.

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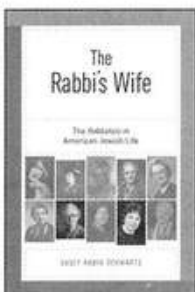
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History

The history of U.S. labor shows that the union movement is invigorated when it is international, and fails when it looks solely to home. Indeed, the labor history of the past century indicates that internationalism married to disunity may be far better for the union movement than an exclusionary "unity."

The AFL provides a useful measuring stick for the power of internationalism precisely because that federation stood, until the middle 1990s, consistently against immigrant labor and real internationalism. Indeed, in the name of "labor unity" the AFL has had a sad history of excluding non-whites and others who did not "qualify."

Ninety-three years ago, the "Bread and Roses" textile strike shook up both the barons of industry and the staid and conservative AFL. The radically egalitarian Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sought to unite unskilled and mostly immigrant workers in the United States with their European, Asian, and Latin American counterparts, promising (although never achieving) an international labor movement that would radically change the U.S. economy. Suddenly, unionizing was "in," the buzz word of the day, and unions of the unskilled grew.

World War I provided an excuse for federal laws mandating the expulsion-without-hearing of any immigrant suspected of sympathy for the IWW. Though the AFL picked up thousands of members during the war, it fell away to a shadow of itself in the 1920s. Not even the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed shook up craft union leaders, who opposed much of New Deal labor legislation as an invasion of their chosen territory.

Organized labor did move forward, massively, during the 1930s, thanks in no small part to organizational disunity bred in part on the grounds of internationalism. The Committee for Industrial Organization, expelled by the AFL, became the Congress of Industrial Organization, mobilizer of millions. The AFL got into the act mainly as competitors, offering safe, conservative unionism against the purported Red Threat as well as the "Jewish Threat." The two labor federations actively competed for members, and membership skyrocketed.

The rocket crashed a few years after the Second World War, when red-baiting became rampant and nearly a dozen highly militant unions were driven out of the CIO for political cause. The touted labor unity achieved thereafter (in 1955) marked, in many ways, the victory of the old AFL model. A significant number of government employees at various levels (from teachers to federal bookkeepers), successfully moved toward unionization, giving the new AFL-CIO a fresh white-collar image—both a much-deserved victory for professionalism and a reminder of unions as tending to represent the aristocracy of labor. And there, practically speaking, the door closed. Women and minorities, most notably those within the post-1965 wave of immi-

grants not already in jobs with unions, were likely never to be unionized. AFL-CIO leaders with corporate-level salaries were occasionally heard to observe that they already had all the members they needed. They certainly didn't need or want help from the 1960s and 70s generation of anti-war, anti-nuke, feminist, gay and lesbian activists.

Thus the steady shutdown of factories from the early 1970s drove organized labor ever downward. A few small unions (such as the once-large, then heavily-raided United Electrical Workers) remained outside the AFL, and it was here, most significantly, that some of the earliest cross-border activity began. A few uniquely growing unions that had placed their faith in organizing nonwhite workers and immigrants—the Service Employees International Union foremost—and took a leading role in overturning the inept and

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stumbling AFL leadership at the historic 1995 convention. Here the roots of the newest disunity can best be located.

Given this history, the current disunity is not necessarily a problem and may actually be a positive sign. What matters most, however, is not the disunity itself, but whether the breaking off of SEIU and other unions is a harbinger of an improved model committed to internationalism.

A revived union movement here at home certainly must hold onto its white-collar members and expand their ranks as far as possible. Over the short haul, labor's progressives who have abandoned the AFL and those who remained inside will be better off if they can find ways to work together. But the future of labor lies principally in those massive numbers at the bottom of the heap: the immigrants, minorities, and others whose membership would transform any future federation into an egalitarian social movement linked self-consciously to the fate of working people around the globe. Nothing less can possibly succeed. □

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Leibowitz's Tragedy

Micha Odenheimer

*Yeshayahu Leibowitz, winner of the Israel Prize in 1992, ranks as one of the twentieth century's most important Jewish progressives. A professor of biochemistry at the Hebrew University, Leibowitz was both a philosopher and a fierce critic of Israeli politics. Immediately following the 1967 Six Day War, Leibowitz was one of the first Israelis to argue that the Occupation would have a morally corrosive effect on Israeli society. Identifying the imbrication of religion and nationalism in Israeli politics as idolatry, Leibowitz contended that Halachah (Jewish law) is essential to Judaism, and that separating religion and state in Israeli society will foster religious observance and regard for Jewish law. Leibowitz died in 1994 at the age of ninety-one. For an introduction to his work, see the 1992 anthology *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*.*

When we first see of the hero of *Leibowitz in Maalot*, it's a grey, rainy Jerusalem morning, and he is walking, jerking his legs forward in a movement of purposeful determination, the rest of his body gliding gracefully to catch up with his unstoppable will. Leibowitz is seventy years old and at the height of his powers. His long face is impassive, its crags and wrinkles like a mountain carved by millennia of inclement weather, expressing wisdom undiluted by either hope or despair, anxiety or wonder. It's a face hard to imagine ever having been young, but as the film progresses, and he listens in deadpan silence to attacks on his ideas and person, another Leibowitz, youthful and glamorous, like a 1940s movie star, flickers for a moment to the surface. When he speaks, his voice is higher pitched than expected, dense with compressed emotion, yet precise and skillful as a surgeon's cut. It rises to a crescendo, this voice, as it travels beyond the usually acceptable boundaries of volume and intensity, and then, just before the point of no return, where it seems as if something—either Leibowitz or his audience—is going to explode into flames, the voice cools off, empties itself of passion. Suddenly, something becomes clear: none of this is personal—there are no hard feelings left in the room as Leibowitz ceases to speak, only hard ideas that leave no room for self-indulgence, still less for self-consolation. Then the great head leans forward,

resting; the impassive mask, the persona, unmoved by the great torrent of emotion he has released and summoned back, like a sorcerer recalling his genie, returns.

Watching the film it is impossible not to fall in love once again with this giant. It is easy to remember why, at least since the aftermath of the 1967 war, when he set the agenda of ending the Occupation and supporting the creation of a Palestinian state, Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, black Kippa and punctilious devotion to Halachah notwithstanding, served as a potent symbol of moral clarity for the Israeli Left. The film reminds us of the sharpness and purity of his vision, evokes for us the image of a man whose unshakeable convictions allowed him to brave the fiercest storms and yet remain sheltered within their innermost point of calm—a sight perhaps even more poignant today than during his lifetime. And yet seeing Leibowitz also reminds us of a harsh, perhaps tragic, irony. Leibowitz's weighty presence as sage of the Left, despite his reputation as one of the most significant Jewish philosophers of his time, only served to raise higher the barricade between the religious and secular camps in Israel—thus allowing the messianic Right and the haredim a virtual monopoly on the emotional, and thus political, power of tradition. At one point during the public evening around which Yigal Burstein's excellent film is centered, Yisrael Eldad, the Lehi leader and right-wing intellectual who accompanied Leibowitz to Maalot, exclaims "Leibowitz, not one person has ever started *laying tefillin* because of your ideas." "Of course not," answers Leibowitz, unperturbed. "No one can make someone else *lay tefillin*. They have to *want* to do it themselves."

Yet why should they want to? Leibowitz, always relentlessly systematic in his arguments, sealed off nearly every possible avenue that might lead a secular Israeli to wonder whether something relevant to his own life might lie within the treasure house of Jewish practice and tradition. First he reduced Judaism to Halachah. Over and over again, invoking empirical methods borrowed from the natural sciences, Leibowitz "proved" that commitment to Halachah was Judaism's only quality and measure, the single continuous and distinct feature of its 3,000 years of existence. Although he ridiculed the use of history as a religious category, Leibowitz himself employed history to discount other forms of Jewish religious expression (such as Kabbalah), as late-coming addendums to Judaism, passing phenomena that had no authentic claim on the Jewish soul or imagination. Using a circular argument that claims as an unstated axiom

Micha Odenheimer is a writer, rabbi, and activist living in Jerusalem. He is a frequent contributor to Ha'aretz. This article originally appeared in the June, 2005, edition of Eretz Acheret, and is adapted here with their permission.

the notion that only ideas or practices which were exclusively Jewish were Jewish at all, he disregarded both adherence to the Bible and the theological belief in the oneness and unity of God as characteristic of Judaism—after all, Christians as well as Jews believed in the Bible, and Muslims in the unity of God, and in any event, Maimonides idea of God's oneness and those of ARI (Adonenu Rabbi Titzchak, or Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) do not coincide. Like a chemist seeking the irreducible elements in every compound, Leibowitz ignores the possibility that Judaism, like everything alive, is a complex and delicate balance of body and soul, reactions and relationships, beliefs and practices, ideas and actions. Practitioners of Halachah can certainly sympathize with Leibowitz's emphasis; without Halachah, Judaism would have surely died, just as without lungs or blood or kidneys, human beings cannot survive—but Leibowitz's need for purity of definition, his desire to defend Jewish practice against the autonomous impulses of modernity led him to a logical error. Judaism may not survive without Halachah, but that does not mean Judaism *is* Halachah and Halachah alone, no more than a man can be reduced to his organs or his bloodstream.

But Leibowitz is not satisfied by the reduction of Judaism to Halachah. He goes further—he needs to purge Halachah of any external human meaning or internal emotional resonance. In one of his typically extreme formulations, Leibowitz argues that the content of Jewish prayer is completely irrelevant—prayer would be just as meaningful to him, he says, if the Halachah commanded him to read from the New York City phonebook three times a day. Invoking both Kantian metaphysics and Maimonidean negative theology, Leibowitz presents us with a concept of God as transcendent and unknowable, bereft of any human meaning. The only way to stand before God is to take upon ourselves “the yoke of Torah and Mitzvot,” transcending ourselves completely in our performance of acts of worship whose vectors point beyond any imaginable horizon. To attribute human meaning to the commandments, to derive emotional solace, spiritual pleasure, or any individual or collective benefit from them, to believe that we are bringing ourselves or the world closer to ethical perfection or salvation through our religious devotion transmutes religion, according to Leibowitz, into a form of idolatry, into the worship of humanity or the self.

In one of his typically extreme formulations, Leibowitz argues that the content of Jewish prayer is completely irrelevant—prayer would be just as meaningful to him, he says, if the Halachah commanded him to read from the New York City phonebook three times a day.

According to a story told in a number of versions, the founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem Tov, once committed an error that, while seemingly minor, was judged harshly in the divine realms because of his elevated stature. A heavenly voice called out the terrible decree: Israel Baal Shem Tov has lost his portion in the world to come. “Finally,” the Baal Shem Tov responded joyfully, “I can serve God truly, without the hope of reward.” Take the Baal Shem Tov, subtract the joy, and you have the vision of Judaism Leibowitz presented to Israel's secular intellectuals—a vision so bleak that it affords no passageway in. Could that have been another reason why the secular Left felt so comfortable embracing Leibowitz? Is it possible that they welcomed Leibowitz not in spite of his version of Judaism, but rather because his version was so pure and abstract that it could have no possible claim on them,

because its referents point to a universe that was so clearly beyond anything human beings were capable of seeing?

Yet despite his claims, Leibowitz's religiosity, like his voice, is actually full of emotion. There is, first of all, his fierce hatred of idolatry, which he describes in the film as his primary motivating force. But there is something else as well. Throughout his profoundly moving and surprisingly lyrical essay, “Practical Commandments,” one can sense Leibowitz's admiration of halachic man as an existential hero, performing the endless Sysiphean task of self-transcendence through the strength of his iron will alone. In following this will, Leibowitz says, man can overcome the social, biological, and emotional forces that would otherwise control him completely. Sealed within this will alone, in a subjectivity that it is impossible to communicate to

others, is the only possibility of human freedom.

This is not, however, the way Leibowitz wanted things to be. Michael Sheshar, who in collaboration with Leibowitz produced a series of books that provide the best window we have into his thinking, pointed out a remark that Leibowitz made towards the end of their first book together, *On Just About Everything*. “My predicament,” Leibowitz says, “is that I sometimes have to argue with people who just don't understand, or don't want to understand.” Sheshar told me that Leibowitz was referring to his conversations with people in the secular Left, who were unable to inhabit or truly empathize with his religious sensibility.

This quandary hides, however, an even more tragic element of Leibowitz's life as a religious thinker. The reduction

of Judaism to private, un-communicable, existential acts of will was a process that an earlier Leibowitz desperately warned against and hoped with all his might to avoid. In a series of essays written in the early 1940s, before the founding of the State of Israel and before the horrifying extent of the holocaust had become known, Leibowitz identifies "The shifting of the center of gravity of a person's life from the personal to the public—where public matters become the primary content of a person's life" as the essential feature of modern life. Far from freeing man, Leibowitz says, modern culture has "swallowed up" the life of the individual into collective life. This poses an immense religious problem for Jews, because "The Torah has been emptied of its social content, more and more with each passing generation. The Torah," Leibowitz continues, "—in the form in which it has crystallized today—lacks any real substance, because its content, which deals with the private life of human beings, has become marginal in terms of the real problems of human life and existence."

In the seminal passage of an essay called "Educating towards the Commandments in Modern Society," Leibowitz writes:

Through the shrinking of religious life into the framework of the private and personal life of man, little by little, religious thought also began to shrink into this framework as well, until the feeling was created, consciously or unconsciously, that the world of Torah is a small island within the great ocean of human life, and it has potency only in regards to that small circle which man can draw around himself. Little by little, Jews began to see the Torah as something whose demands relate only to personal life. Whatever is outside the four cubits of Halachah—these are matters upon which the Torah's seal cannot be perceived. Moreover, the Torah's obligations cannot affect this realm, just as they cannot affect the weather. Thus the feeling spread and penetrated deep into the subconscious mind that political and social life, technological and scientific dilemmas, and the structure of the economy and the government—are matters about which the Torah determines nothing....If the Torah offers no guidance in these matters, then it is as if the Torah in its entirety has been invalidated and annulled.

What Leibowitz hoped for was nothing less than a religious revolution, in which the religious public would take responsibility for creating new halachic legislation appropriate for a people about to organize themselves as a state and a society. In doing this, they would override the rabbinical authorities who, "for very understandable historical-psychological reasons," were not up to the task. Since Halachah had been sequestered in the personal realm, Leibowitz understood that meta-halachic categories would have to be used in order to evaluate new social realities. "The religious authority of this halachic legislation," Leibowitz continued, "cannot be called into question, even when it overturns existing

Halachah, as long as it emerges out of a real effort of the religious public to truly understand the Torah and out of a sincere desire to fulfill it."

What happened to this vision of a new Halachah, which would plumb the depths of the Torah for guidance in regards to labor practices, economic policies, the uses of science and technology, and a hundred other topics? In "On Just about Everything," Leibowitz admits to Michael Sheshar that one thing that happened was the Holocaust. Leibowitz had hoped, it seems, that when Eastern European Jewry poured into the newly founded Jewish state, the conditions would be ripe for religious revolution. Without them, there was no collective committed enough to Halachah to transform its horizons from within. When Sheshar tried to press him to restate his vision in 1986, Leibowitz argued that it was no longer a living possibility, and it was thus a sterile exercise to talk about it. "You are seeking guidance for something that does not exist. The situation is that the public is not willing, and thus the concept does not exist. You are looking for a solution to the problem of a triangle that does not have three sides."

The only hope Leibowitz retained that Judaism might spring back from its nearly comatose state and begin to affect the public realms of life (whose influence in the modern era was overwhelming) depended on first radically separating religion and state. "Until this happens," Leibowitz told Sheshar, "I can find no interest in involving myself in the question: what is to be done?" The founding of the State, which Leibowitz had earlier believed afforded an unprecedented opportunity for religious transformation, had instead resulted in its degradation. In *Leibowitz in Maalot*, Leibowitz tells of a conversation with Ben Gurion in which he argued that the integrity of Judaism depended on its complete independence from the State. Ben Gurion understood him very well. "You want Judaism to be an independent factor whose views every Israeli government will have to deal with?" Ben Gurion told him, "I will never allow that."

Is it possible that Leibowitz's very frustration with the state of Halachah, its paralysis and inability to break free to address the truly great questions of modern human life, which lie in the public realm, were responsible for driving him towards a religious model that was so deeply personal, so sealed off and incommunicable that it eventually resembled a kind of religious autism? Did Leibowitz trap himself in a kind of Catch-22 whereby he refused to or could not articulate an expansive religious vision that might have drawn towards it important segments of the secular public because there was no collective ready to make it a reality? And most importantly, have we arrived at a time in the life of the State where the moral authority of the government and of the official religious institutions have deteriorated to such an extent that Leibowitz's original vision might once again be heard? □

It Takes Two to Tango: From Unilateral to Bilateral Plans

Shamai K. Leibowitz



Between August 15 and September 12, the Israeli government executed its hotly debated unilateral Disengagement plan, evacuating twenty-one Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and four Jewish settlements in the West Bank, along with dismantling its regional military installations. Authorized by the Israeli government in June 2004, the Disengagement was the first official plan ever published by an Israeli government in which Israel explicitly agreed to dismantle Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. It is not surprising, therefore, that the international media was full of praise for Prime Minister Sharon and his government, hailing the Disengagement as a “historic moment” and a “turning point” in the violent history of Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

However, the Disengagement plan was harmful to the peace process for two basic reasons: (1) It does not effectively

end the Israeli Occupation of the Gaza Strip, and (2) it announces Israel’s plans to consolidate the Occupation and annex at least a significant part of the West Bank.

Moreover, the Disengagement plan was in clear violation of the Quartet-proposed Road Map For Peace, which set out a framework and timetable for establishing an “independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors” by 2005. With the Disengagement plan constituting the “only game in town” for nearly a year and a half, it became an excuse for Israel to frustrate the application and execution of the only existing—and mutually agreed upon—bilateral initiative to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The World’s Largest Prison

According to the terms of the Disengagement, Israel retains exclusive control over Gaza’s airspace and continues to guard and monitor the external land perimeter of the Gaza Strip, with the exception of its southernmost border. It seals off Gaza from the ocean by having granted security control of its coastline to the Israeli navy. The Disengagement

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plan similarly gave Israel control of Gaza's water supply, electricity, and communications infrastructure. According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, by the standards of international law, even though Israeli forces are no longer present in the Gaza Strip, Israel still remains an Occupying Power.

Analyzing these elements of the Disengagement plan, the inescapable conclusion is that it was merely a restructuring of the Occupation. Instead of controlling the lives of Palestinians from within, Israel now controls Gaza from without. Effectively, Israel has turned Gaza into the world's largest open-air prison, with 1.3 million Palestinian inmates. Despite such facts, the Disengagement has created an undeniable precedent that can be construed as a first step towards a comprehensive withdrawal from the entirety of the Occupied Territories. In order to constructively embrace this possibility, it is necessary that we think through how this might be achieved by negotiation, rather than by unilateral decisions by the Israeli government.

A Three-Step Transformation Plan

STEP 1: NEGOTIATE. The Israeli government must officially convert its Disengagement initiative into a *bilateral agreement* that will call for both Israelis and Palestinians to take significant steps towards realizing the goals of the Road Map.

The desired result would be an initiative that would supersede all previous plans and agreements: a Comprehensive Bilateral Peacebuilding Plan. The aim of the CBPP would be to take the current Disengagement plan and transform it by setting out a detailed blueprint for achieving the goals set

forth in the Road Map. The main guidelines of the Peacebuilding Plan should include achieving complete sovereignty for the Palestinians (and not chicaneries like Oslo), imposing an unequivocal obligation—on both Israelis and Palestinians—to comply fully with international human rights covenants, zero-tolerance policy toward killing or harming civilians, establishing joint media enterprises, and ensuring an economic recovery plan for Palestinian society.

STEP 2: FOLLOW THE WORLD BANK'S RECOMMENDATIONS.

In its December 2004 report, the World Bank analyzed the Disengagement plan and issued several key recommendations. It pointed out that for a Palestinian economic recovery to be possible, the Israeli government will need to roll back the system of restrictions on the movement of people and goods imposed since the beginning of the Intifada, and allow a third-party deployment in security and customs arrangements. To effectively harmonize the Disengagement plan with the goals set forth in the Road Map, the World Bank recommended the following steps:

- Deploy a neutral international force to monitor the Gaza border crossings and also serve as a dispute resolution mechanism.
- Dismantle the system of over 700 checkpoints and barriers in the West Bank.
- Establish a secure, efficient and reliable Gaza-West Bank transport link.
- Permit the construction of a roll-on, roll-off cargo port in Gaza, and allow for a helicopter service between Gaza and the West Bank and Jordan.
- Israel must maintain, at a minimum, the current Palestinian

labor levels within Israel at least until the end of the decade.

The Israelis and Palestinians should incorporate these recommendations into a formal binding agreement, as these recommendations are extremely important due to the dire state of the Palestinian economy. Given the depth of the economic crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, securing work and a future for one's family features very high on the agenda of the ordinary Palestinian and has a direct correlation to issues of security and stability. For example, instead of "washing off" Gaza's 1.3 million inhabitants, Israel should have a vested interest in offering them economic growth and prosperity. As the World Bank makes clear, this can happen only if the above-mentioned recommendations are implemented.

STEP 3: AGREE ON INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION. The most important component of the World Bank recommendations is the deployment of an international armed peacekeeping force. This is highly critical, because most likely it will be the only way to keep the peace and prevent the eruption of hostilities—which are still predicted due to the many years of occupation and the high levels of hate and desire for revenge that it has created in both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

In June 2003, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan publicly called for the deployment of an international UN buffer force in the West Bank and Gaza, emphasizing that this would be the only way to stabilize the region. Following his call, European Union foreign ministers agreed to consider having EU armed forces take part in a peacekeeping force to be deployed in the region. But Israel's objections scuttled the plan and the international community took no further action.

The Disengagement marks a perfect time to revive this idea and implement it. Under this model, deployment of international peacekeeping forces would be implemented through a Security Council resolution that would establish a UN-based "INTERFIP" (International Forces In Israel/Palestine). These forces would assume the task of a supervisory authority, be deployed in security and customs arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza, and monitor Gaza's seaport, airport, and border crossings. INTERFIP forces would be authorized to restore peace and security in the West Bank and Gaza, protect and guard Israel's borders against infiltrations, and facilitate humanitarian assistance operations to the Palestinian population. In addition, they would serve as liaison between Israeli security forces and the Palestinian security authorities.

Former NATO generals have suggested a different version

of international intervention, publicly supporting the deployment of NATO forces in the West Bank and Gaza. NATO is perhaps better-suited to this task than the UN because both Israel and the Palestinian Authority would feel comfortable with NATO. Any NATO peacekeeping force in the region would report to the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who is always a U.S. officer, thereby allaying Israeli concerns, while European involvement should satisfy Palestinians.

Overcoming Israel's Longtime Objections

Since the first Intifada, Israel has refused to agree to the deployment of international forces in the Occupied Territories out of fear of relinquishing control over its security to a third party. Recently, when World Bank representatives brought up this possibility in their discussions with the Israeli government, the Israelis again fiercely resisted the idea. However, despite successive Israeli governments' sole reliance on their own security forces, the Israel Defence

Forces have failed to bring security to the Israeli people. The closures, curfews, and checkpoints that Israel has imposed in the Occupied Territories have yielded dismal results. Through public pressure and diplomacy, the Israeli government must be persuaded to reconsider its position on this issue. The reasons for doing so couldn't be more obvious.

For the past five years, Israel has been afflicted by more terror and violence than any other country in the industrialized world. Despite Israel's huge investment of money, resources, and human effort in building and maintaining the most powerful army in the Middle East, Israel has become the place in the

Despite Israel's huge investment of money, resources, and human effort in building and maintaining the most powerful army in the Middle East, Israel has become the place in the world where the chances of a Jew being killed just for being a Jew are the greatest.

world where the chances of a Jew being killed just for being a Jew are the greatest. This fact, all too often ignored by the mainstream Israeli press, proves that Israel needs to rethink its overall security strategy far beyond withdrawing behind a Separation Wall and securing its perimeters with remote-controlled combat vehicles and high tech sensors. Israel must understand that a strong, well-armed international peacekeeping force is in its best interest.

A similar idea has worked between Israel and Egypt. In 1981, following the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) were deployed in the Sinai to maintain the peace between Israel and Egypt and prevent rearmament of the Egyptian Sinai. It has some 2,000 troops from eleven countries (including two U.S. battalions) operating under U.S. civilian and military leadership. The general calm on the Israeli-Egyptian border that has prevailed

and the good relations between Israel and Egypt prove the MFO is an effective and successful model. The deployment of a similarly comprised international force to the West Bank and Gaza could be highly effective and meaningful.

Diplomacy, Lobbying, and Economic Pressure

Since the Palestinian Authority has officially welcomed international intervention, the international community must focus on pressuring Israel to agree to this idea. The international community can pressure the Israeli government by making economic aid dependent upon the acceptance of the deployment of an international peacekeeping force.

A key element in getting Israel's agreement would be the American Jewish community. This powerful and organized community should mobilize its institutions to apply pressure on Congress and the American ambassador to the UN to ensure that when the UN Security Council issues a resolution to deploy international peacekeeping forces to the West Bank and Gaza, the U.S. will not veto it. Moreover, American Jewish organizations can coordinate a lobbying campaign whereby they meet with Israeli politicians to persuade them of the great benefits that lie in international intervention—especially in the form of US-led NATO intervention.

Some Israeli politicians, such as former Israeli Minister of Internal Security Shlomo Ben Ami, have already expressed support for this idea. By sending experts to meet with Israeli politicians, and especially by linking economic aid and donations to the implementation of this idea, it is not improbable that Israel will eventually agree to the deployment of peacekeeping forces.

Learning from Past Mistakes

While raising illusory hopes, the Disengagement plan is really worsening the already dire economic situation in the Occupied Territories and likely to cause a return to the familiar cycle of violence. Though it was launched with much media attention and fanfare, it does not promise a brighter future for Israel and the Palestinians. Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community need only look back to the failed Oslo Accords to realize that declarations, unilateral steps, and interim agreements do not guarantee progress and peace.

Many experts have attributed the deterioration and eventual collapse of the Oslo Accords to the flawed idea of "interim agreements" and the absence of international peacekeeping forces to monitor and enforce those "interim agree-

ments." The same mistakes should not be repeated. One of the most fundamental concepts in Judaism is *teshuva* (repentance). Even peacebuilders must do *teshuva*. If Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders are to correct their past mistakes, they must immediately announce their willingness to transform the disastrous unilateral Disengagement plan into a Comprehensive Bilateral Peacebuilding Plan. The Israeli government must be pressured until it declares its acceptance of the Road Map, its willingness to comply with human rights treaties (including the prohibition on summary executions, house demolitions, and construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem), and its agreement—in the interim period—to the deployment of international peacekeeping forces.

At the same time, Palestinian leaders should condemn, more loudly and unequivocally than they are doing today, any form of terror. Furthermore, they should engage in a public relations campaign reaching out to Israelis, showing that a Palestinian state will be committed to democracy and civil liberties. A significant, albeit little-noticed, step in this direction is the final draft of the Palestinian constitution, which includes strong condemnation of terror ("Palestine is a peace loving state that condemns terror, occupation, and aggression") and a strong emphasis

on civil liberties, gender equality, and accountability. Of key importance is Article 5, which states that "the constitution guarantees equality in rights and duties to all citizens irrespective of their religious creed."

By comparison, Israel has no such constitutional provision and, practically speaking, has implemented discriminatory laws and policies that deviate far and wide from this basic democratic principle. This demonstrates the need to focus on constitutional rights in both societies, nurturing a new generation that will be committed to core human rights.

This cannot be done with the presence of an oppressive occupying army. Consequently, deploying a strong, effective international peacekeeping force is essential for the success of the Comprehensive Peacebuilding Plan. It is the basic ingredient that will allow for the flourishing of people-to-people peacebuilding plans and programs. It is now the role of the international community, and especially American Jewry, to seize upon this window of opportunity, and, without any further delay, pressure Israel to allow the deployment of an international peacekeeping force. If the United States wants to act as a true friend and ally, it must join the World Bank, the UN, the EU and ex-NATO generals in demanding that the Israeli government agree to this key concept for the achievement of a secure and peaceful Middle East. □

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The Bell Jar Shatters: The Political Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch

Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

At the end of August, Dahlia Ravikovitch, one of the great Hebrew poets of our time, was found dead in her apartment in Tel Aviv. The outpouring of grief in the Israeli media testifies to the major role that Ravikovitch played in the world of Hebrew letters.

Ravikovitch was well-known for the fearless clarity with which she took on political issues, not only in her poetry but also in the public arena. She frequently participated in protests against the Occupation and the oppression of the Palestinians. Nor did Ravikovitch hesitate to speak out about Israeli society; as Lawrence Joffe noted in an obituary in the *Guardian*, "She campaigned for Palestinian rights, and against messianic settler nationalists, yet she also criticized her fellow Israeli secularists' 'culture of nothingness.'" Whenever Ravikovitch appeared on TV, speaking truth to power in her precise, unadorned language, undeterred and undeflected by the scripted pronouncements of politicians and generals, there would be a morning-after tempest in all the newspapers. Poets still have a vital presence in Israel, it appears—especially considering their marginality in our own society, where such a response would be unimaginable.

At a writers' conference in Berkeley in the late 1980s, we asked Dahlia

Ravikovitch what made her turn so forcefully to the political in her poetry after years of writing primarily personal lyrics. Her answer came quickly: "Till the invasion of Lebanon [in 1982], I managed somehow to go on living inside a bell jar. But then suddenly, all at once, when the invasion started, the bell jar shattered. Now there's no wall between the political and the personal. It all comes rushing in."

At the time of her death, Dahlia Ravikovitch was considered Israel's greatest living poet. She produced a powerful body of work—ten volumes of poetry, three collections of short stories, and several books of childrens' verse—and translated Poe, Yeats, and Eliot, as well as children's classics, into Hebrew. A much-beloved poet, widely honored for her artistry and her courage, Ravikovitch enjoyed canonical stature from the beginning of her career, and was considered a cultural icon in Israel.

No other Hebrew poet, with the exception of the late Yehuda Amichai, was so universally embraced by Israelis, whatever their political convictions. Ravikovitch's poems, like Amichai's, were integrated into all facets of Israeli public life—set to music and adapted in theatrical productions, experimental films, dance performances, and art exhibits. Her work has long been a staple of the Israeli school curriculum, re-

quired reading for matriculation exams, as well as the subject of numerous articles, monographs and dissertations in Hebrew. And her poems have been appropriated by politicians past and present, who were given to reciting her work on public occasions even when clearly troubled by its critical stance.

Among Ravikovitch's many awards were the Bialik Prize, the major Israeli literary award, the Prime Minister's Prize, and the Israel Prize, the highest national honor. When awarding her the Israel Prize in 1998, the judges noted: "Her poetic style is distinguished by its skillful synthesis of a rich literary language with the colloquial idiom, and of her personal outcry with that of the collective. This has made her the most important—indeed the most distinctive—Hebrew poet of our time. She is the central pillar of Hebrew lyric poetry." Her poems have been translated into numerous languages, ranging from Arabic and Chinese to Serbo-Croatian and Vietnamese.

Ravikovitch was born in 1936 in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv. She studied English literature and Hebrew linguistics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her first book of poems, *The Love of an Orange*, appeared in 1959 when she was 23, immediately establishing her as one of the leading voices of the post-1948 generation, alongside her elders Yehuda Amichai and Natan Zach. This was followed by nine other books of poetry, including the collection *All the Poems Till Now* (1995), whose publication was a major event in Israeli cultural life, as well as three short story collections, the latest published just a few months ago. Ravikovitch also

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worked as a journalist, media critic, and teacher. She lived in Tel Aviv, which she loved and despised with the passion of an intimate: "Filthy Mediterranean city, how my soul is bound up with her soul. / Because of a lifetime, / an entire lifetime" ("Lying Upon the Waters"). For years she occupied the same small apartment on Yehoash Street, not far from the sea. It was there that Ravikovitch took her own life on August 21, after struggling for many years with severe depression.

The Israeli public was fascinated by her comings and goings; her reclusiveness and striking beauty lent her a kind of celebrity status. The color of the coat and shoes that she wore to public events was considered worthy of notice in the gossip columns. Several years ago, when she consented for the first time to be interviewed about her personal history, the popular daily *Yediot Acharonot* published a four-page spread with banner headlines proclaiming: "Our Greatest Poet Breaks Years of Silence." And this past December, on the eve of the publication of a volume of her autobiographical short stories, *She Came and Went*, the weekend magazine of that newspaper published a six-page in-depth article about Ravikovitch's life and times, "The Burden of Loneliness," accompanied by full-page color photos. That burden has now become more manifest with her tragic death.

When she was six, Ravikovitch's father was killed by a drunken driver. She moved with her mother to a kibbutz but left at thirteen, moving from one foster home to another during her teenage years. The loss and displacement of these early years shaped her social sensibilities and informed her writing. "If I didn't know despair myself, I wouldn't be able to feel the anguish of the oppressed," she said in an interview.

Vulnerability was a major subject for Ravikovitch—"vulnerability on the verge of breakdown, as if her soul were fighting for its very life," in the words of Meir Wieseltier, the leading poet of the

younger generation. But, as Wieseltier notes, her speakers wield that vulnerability, paradoxically, as a source of strength. Ravikovitch wrote of the emotional disconnect in the private as well as the social and political spheres—the self in a state of crisis refracting the moral disintegration of the nation.

In Ravikovitch's first four books of poems, the political poetry was veiled and distanced, either geographically (in poems about Australia, Chad, and Cameroon) or historically (the Roman conquests, the Crusades). But the late 70s marked a major turning point in her poetic development: a thoroughgoing assimilation of the political into the realm of personal nightmare. This was a period of great upheaval in Israeli society (*Ha-Mahapakh*), when Menachem Begin's Likud rose to power for the first time, routing the Labor Party and converting the economy to stock-market-driven capitalism. Then came Israel's incursions into Lebanon, culminating in the 1982 invasion. These shattering

events coincided with the birth of Ravikovitch's son Ido—the "true love" in the title of her 1986 book of poems—which made her more attentive, if possible, to human vulnerability. It is during this time that she emerged as the leading poetic voice among feminist anti-war activists. From that point on, feminism and peace work became inseparable for her.

Ravikovitch's political activism attracted notice, and not just in the Israeli press. A revealing incident was cited in a 1997 article in *US News and World Report*, "Making Peace Where Politicians Fear to Tread: Israelis and Palestinians Who Defy the Extremists." Ravikovitch's expression of "defiance" was very much in character: she brought chocolates to a ten-year-old Palestinian boy she had befriended in Hebron, and arranged for a local Boy Scout troop to spend a day with Israeli teenagers in Haifa. This was the first time most of these Palestinian children had visited Israel proper, or spoken to an Israeli other

A MOTHER WALKS AROUND

A mother walks around with a child dead in her belly.

This child hasn't been born yet.

When his time comes the dead child will be born

head first, then belly and buttocks

and he won't wave his arms about or cry his first cry

and they won't slap his bottom

won't put drops in his eyes

won't swaddle him

after washing the body.

He will not resemble a living child.

His mother will not be calm and proud after giving birth

and she won't be troubled about his future,

won't worry how in the world to support him

and does she have enough milk

enough clothing

and how will she fit a cradle into the room.

The child is a perfect *tsaddik* already,

unmade ere he was ever made.

And he'll have his own little grave at the edge of the cemetery

and a little memorial day

and there won't be much to remember him by.

These are the chronicles of the child

who was killed in his mother's belly

in the month of January, in the year 1988,

"under circumstances relating to state security."

THE FRUIT OF THE LAND

a farewell song to the good old days

You asked if we've got enough cannons
They laughed and said: More than enough
and we've got new improved anti-tank missiles
and bunker busters to penetrate
double-slab reinforced concrete
and we've got crates of napalm and crates of explosives
unlimited quantities, cornucopias,
a feast for the soul, like some finely seasoned delicacy
and above all, that secret weapon,
the one we can't talk about.
Calm down, man,
the Intell Officer and the CO
and the Chief of Police
who's also a colonel in that hush-hush commando unit
are all primed for the order: Go!
and everything shined-up like the skin of a snake
and we've got chocolate wafers on every base
and grape juice and Tempo soda

and that's why we won't give in to terror
we will not fold in the face of violence
we will never fold, no matter what
with our heavy-duty billy clubs.
God who has chosen us from all the nations
comforteth with apples
the fighting arm of the IDF
and the iron boxes and the crates of fresh explosives
and we've got cluster bombs too,
though of course that's off the record.
Serve us bourekas and cake, O woman of the house
for we were slaves in the land of Egypt
but never again
and blot out the remembrance of Amalek
if you can track him down, and if you seek him in vain,
Blessed be the tiny match
that a soldier in some crack unit will suddenly strike
and set off the whole bloody mess.

than a soldier, according to the reporter, who added: "Such meetings are the staple of grassroots peace work. The goal is to break down stereotypes and give the 'enemy' a human face." In 1999, in a much-publicized incident, when the Israeli army evicted some 600 Palestinian cave-dwellers south of Hebron, claiming the areas as a closed military zone, Ravikovitch joined a handful of other writers to protest the attempted transfer of a Palestinian population—a dangerous precedent. In recent years, despite her frail health, she maintained her active engagement by word and deed, motivated always by a deeply intuitive understanding of the human pain at the heart of the ongoing political crisis.

The past two decades mark the crowning achievement of Ravikovitch's poetic project—the period when poetics and politics, the private and the public, merge with extraordinary expressive force in her work. Since the early 1980s her poetry has explored the parallels between the plight of the Palestinians, the suffering of Jews in the Diaspora, and the constraints on women in Israeli society. Ravikovitch speaks with authority

for the forces of peace and justice, while representing with preternatural sensitivity a woman's critique of patriarchy. The depth and subtlety of her artistry enable her to treat these complex political and cultural issues in works that retain their considerable force as poetry.

In her recent poems, through a mostly female cast of characters, Ravikovitch reenacts Israel's political drama. There is, for example, the grieving Israeli mother who loses her son in a questionable military operation ("But She Had a Son," "What a Time She Had"), paired with a pregnant Palestinian woman who loses her fetus as a result of a beating by Israeli soldiers ("A Mother Walks Around"). There is the Israeli woman poet, subject to ridicule because of her critical stance toward the policies of her government ("Free Associating"). There is the young (apparently Arab) shepherdess who becomes a victim of rape and murder, and the Israeli woman who hovers surrealistically over the scene, watching from a safe distance and doing nothing ("Hovering at a Low Altitude")—"a parable," as Robert Alter has written, "of the moral untenability of detached observation in any political realm."

In "The Captors Require a Song,"

Ravikovitch invokes Psalm 137, a central text in Jewish cultural memory, which articulates the impossibility of singing the Lord's song in a state of exile and oppression:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we
sat down, yea, we wept, when
we
remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the
willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us
away captive required of us a
song;
and they that wasted us required
of us mirth, saying, Sing us one
of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a strange land?

In a harrowing, sardonic reversal, Ravikovitch presents the Israelis as captors who violently extract a song from the throats of the displaced Palestinians:

Sing us one of the songs of Zion
for an ear that hears not . . .
Quick, sing us a new song,
a song we will yank from your
throat with pliers . . .
We hung your harps
far, far away
upon the willows.

Israeli-Palestinian politics are only a special case, albeit heightened, of the general concern that unifies Ravikovitch's oeuvre, a concern with the devastating consequences that unequal power relations present to the individual and society. This persistent interest in the dynamics of power is prefigured in her earliest poem, a parable about the passion of an orange for the man who eats it ("The Love of an Orange"). While the early work addresses this issue in poems about fathers and daughters, the dead and the living, the later work revisits it in poems about male-female relationships and the power of institutions like the army and the rabbinate over the lives of women and children. Even the mundane struggle for survival during economic hard times becomes a legitimate subject for poetry in these later works. As elsewhere, Ravikovitch's self-mocking humor deflates and de-sentimentalizes the poet's crisis: "To hell with the poem, what I need is 120 shekels" reads the first line of a poem called "Parnasa" ("Making a Living").

Ravikovitch's early poems employ traditional forms and a highly stylized, archaic language resonant with biblical and liturgical cadences, alongside experimental verse that draws upon surrealist parable and avant-garde opera. These poems are firmly situated in the Jewish textual echo-chamber, but their allusive style also reveals the influence of modernist Anglo-American poetry, particularly Eliot and the early Yeats. In her later work Ravikovitch consciously renounces the figurative riches of poetic language to make room for a stark poetry of statement. The result is an emotionally-charged simplicity and an enhanced focus on lyrical narrative and portraiture. Her emotional range is wide, from savage sarcasm, self-deprecating humor and pointed irony to restrained pathos and prickly ambivalence. In addition to her poetry about politics and the human condition, many poems explore questions of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics with analytical rigor and "a

cold incisive glance," as one critic called it. All of this is accomplished with poetic nuance and a subtle hand, held in check by skepticism and humility about her task as a poet.

The poems we are presenting here were written in the early 1990s, in response to the first Intifada. They are the work of a politically engaged poet who struggles to find meaning in a world

ruled by warmongers. In translating them, we wish to honor that struggle. Now, more than ever, Ravikovitch's poems—provocative, unsettling, painfully moving—speak to our common plight. We believe that her complex view of a culture in crisis will have particular resonance for American readers today, given the increasing threats to free speech in our own society. □

Interview with Richard Zimler

Ben Naparstek

Richard Zimler will admit to being an unlikely chronicler of Jewish folk practices and mystical traditions. As he states, deadpan, "I'm a terrible Jew. I'm not the least bit interested in the rules and regulations." Yet the Portugal-based American novelist has just completed the loosely connected trilogy he calls the "Sephardic cycle," the final installment of which, *Guardian of the Dawn*, was published earlier this year. "What interests me about religion is the stories, the mythologies, which contain messages about the big issues—about how we should live, about what love is, about what sacrifice means," he says.

Zimler's secular strain is rooted in his family background. His father was a committed Stalinist, an overbearing figure who was intolerant of dissent. His mother was chronically depressed. "I had a typical New York Jewish dysfunctional family," he says. Zimler's indignation at social injustices and fascination with matters religious and occult was present from an early age; he studied

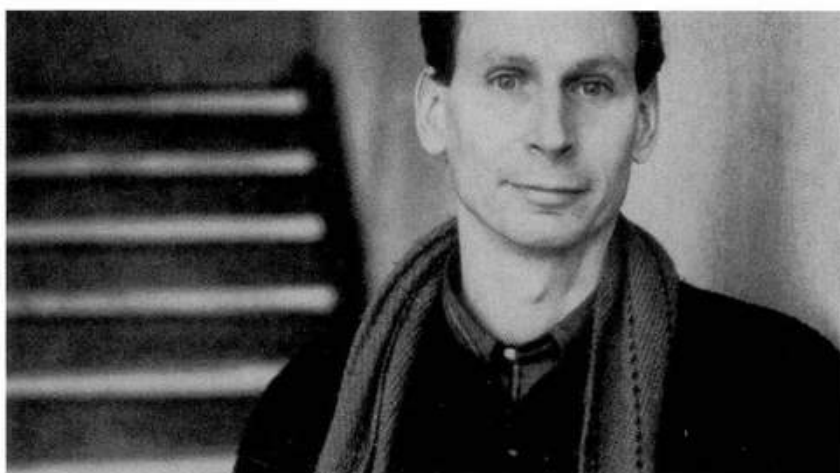
comparative religion at Duke before writing a thesis on street prostitution at Stanford.

Zimler is an unashamedly old-fashioned craftsman, writing baggy, plot-driven sagas with a strong political consciousness. In *Hunting Midnight* (2004) he shrugged off contemporary literary sensibilities to write from the perspective of an African slave. So it's not surprising that he sniffs at postmodern game-playing. "I'm not a postmodern novelist trying to be clever or illustrate some theory," he says. "I'm stupid enough to think that books still can change the world."

As a gay, Jewish expatriate in Europe, Zimler is a meeting point for different minority identities, which is perhaps why he writes historical fiction, to "give voice to those people who have lost the battles—those who did not succeed in controlling their own destiny."

In *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* (1998) Zimler set a literary whodunit against the backdrop of the Lisbon Massacre of 1506. Convinced of a kosher conspiracy behind the plague besetting

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the city, the gentiles of Lisbon rounded up 2,000 Jews and burned them in the city square. Zimler's exploration of this little-known episode of Portuguese history sparked some unexpected responses. "Because the pogrom is not taught in schools, people had no way of knowing whether that was fiction or reality," he says. "A lot of people came up to me and asked, 'Were we really that terrible? Did that really happen?'"

Guardian of the Dawn unfolds over the closing years of the sixteenth century in the Portuguese spice colony of Goa. The book's young narrator, Tiago, hails from a family of "New Christians," Jews forcibly converted to Christianity and exiled from Lisbon decades earlier. The story flickers between Tiago's recollections of his childhood and marriage and his current incarcerated state, as he becomes hell-bent on discovering the identity of the person who denounced his family to the Inquisition.

Zimler decided against traveling to Goa to research the novel. "I was warned that Goa has become a tourist haven," he says. "I wanted to keep an image of Goa at the end of the sixteenth century in my head. I was worried that the sights, sounds, and smells of the city I conjure up would become contaminated by modern development."

Guardian of the Dawn is a reworking of *Othello*, with lines from Shakespeare subtly woven in. "I tried to imagine what had gone wrong between Iago and Othello," he says. "After all, Shake-

speare gives us flimsy reasons for Iago's hatred of 'The Moor.' I take Iago and Othello back to their childhoods, when they were friends. I talk about the trauma that separated them, which made Iago hate Othello." The novel's final scenes, where Tiago avenges the deaths of his loved ones, were "liberating" to write. "I could write about someone who had cast aside his moral code," he says. "That was very exciting and challenging."

Zimler only recently became aware of the Inquisition in Goa. "Like almost everyone else in Portugal, I'd always heard of 'Golden Goa,' when that colony was the prosperous center of the spice trade. I never questioned that glorious image of a thriving and exotic city until I read about the Inquisition being established there," says Zimler.

Zimler began his career as a proverbial prophet, celebrated overseas while neglected in his own land. His New York agent sent the *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* to twenty-four publishers, from which Zimler collected twenty-four rejection slips. One publisher wrote that he had already purchased his Jewish book of the year.

So Zimler dispatched the manuscript to a publisher in his adopted homeland. Two months later, Zimler was summoned to the publisher's Lisbon burrow, where he was asked what he wanted on the cover of his book. It was only after *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* reached best-sellerdom in transla-

tions throughout Europe that U.S. publishers beckoned, and a bidding war ensued. Zimler says, "I wouldn't have a career if I didn't have that crazy idea of publishing it first in Portugal, and if my Portuguese publisher hadn't taken the risk of publishing an unknown American author."

Zimler moved to Porto, Portugal, fifteen years ago with his Portuguese-Mozambiquan partner, after his thirty-five-year-old brother died from an AIDS-related illness. He left San Francisco in an effort to "stop thinking about AIDS and death and start over." His brother's death spurred Zimler's most private and emotionally charged work, *Unholy Ghosts* (1996), which depicts a gay couple in Portugal as they suffer the blows of the health crisis.

What frustrated Zimler most was not that the book went unnoticed by the mainstream press but that the gay media also ignored it. "The gay press in America is hopeless with regard to gay literature," he says. "They make more money covering gay resorts and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. If gay writers don't write a novel with straight characters they won't get covered in the mainstream press. If they risk writing a gay novel they still don't get covered in the gay press. So it's a no-win situation."

Zimler's latest book, *The Search for Sana*, was recently published in the United Kingdom. It's a semi-fictional biography of a Palestinian dancer, Sana, who Zimler met at an Australian writers' festival in 2000. Sana approached Zimler for his autograph and spoke, wet-eyed, about the emotions *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* stirred in her. "I found her immensely charismatic," Zimler says. "She moved so elegantly and playfully and there was something mysterious about her too—a strange sort of reticence for someone so outgoing." The next morning, Sana jumped to her death before Zimler's eyes. Devastated, he wondered "if my book had anything to do with her desperate actions." He says, "That's what started me on my investigation of her past."

Even now, critical and popular

success hasn't entirely melted the resistance of the American literati. Zimler's agent decided to wait until after *The Search for Sana* is published in Europe before courting American publishers, anxious about peddling a polemical take on Israel/Palestine. That nervousness is understandable. As Zimler says,

"American Jews can be even more conservative and fundamentalist with regard to Israel than Israelis. In Israel you're allowed a range of opinion."

At first, Zimler was angered by his agent's reaction. "I felt like I was being censored," he says. "But then my agent explained that she wanted to test the

waters outside of America. After all, if the book gets good reviews in England, it will make it much more easy to sell. In the end, I agreed that it made sense." If the American publishing world's late recognition of his past efforts is any barometer, Zimler has nothing to worry about. □

Radical Nostalgia: Some Thoughts on a Jewish Literary Sensibility

Steve Stern

Growing up, I had a tenuous relationship with my own heritage. Raised in a Reform synagogue in Memphis that had expunged most vestiges of Old World tradition from its liturgy, I had little knowledge of or interest in the Jewish past. Classically assimilated and unbelieving, I was pleased that nothing beyond the map of Jerusalem on my face identified my otherwise invisible religious provenance. But that was before I started to write fiction. Once I did, I was assaulted by echoes from an undigested past, and in my case the echoes tolled louder than the original noise. Helpless to do other than listen, I was shocked and surprised (I still am) by how seductive I found the music. So seductive, in fact, that I could have wished myself lashed more securely to the mast of the twentieth century. Enticed despite myself, however, I began to imagine the mysterious transit of the blood in my own body's arteries—how it might have issued initially from the heart of some bearded Talmudist con-

ning his Hebrew text in a tumbledown study house in Pshitsk, how the blood had thinned over time to an eventual trickle as it branched like a river delta toward a desert suburb in Tennessee. It was a comfortable, nostalgic conceit. But there must also have been something of the Huck Finn impulse leftover from my Southern heritage at work, an adventuring impulse that made me want to un-tether myself from my own moment in time, to build a raft and paddle upstream to visit that noisome old Talmudist.

It was a longer and more arduous journey than I'd counted on. En route I wrote a story called "Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven" about an old man too obstinate to die, who is dragged off to Paradise by a frustrated *Malech Hamovess*, the Angel of Death, while still alive. I thought myself very clever. But not long after, having begun to follow the echoes back to their source, I discovered the legend of Enoch to whom only a couple of lines are devoted in the Book of Genesis. "He walked

with God, and was not," says the verse, and that was apparently all it took to trigger among the rabbis, for whom Scripture was a kind of trampoline, a whole mystical literature about Enoch the shoemaker, who was translated to heaven alive for his righteousness. There he became the Archangel Metatron who sits at God's right hand. I read about Serah Bat Asher, the original prototype of the Wandering Jew, who endured for many centuries on earth before she too was taken to heaven alive. Then there were the tales of the prophet Elijah, who regularly commutes between heaven and earth in his tatterdemalion disguise, dispensing mischief and mitzvot in equal portions; and the cautionary legend of "The Four Who Entered Paradise"—"...and only Rabbi Akiba descended in peace," for it's a dangerous business to trespass in heaven. Suddenly I didn't feel so clever anymore. Having tugged at the branches of my meager sapling of a story, I'd pulled up a root system as large as a giant sequoia's.

There's a tale in which Nachman of Bratslav, the great Yiddish storyteller, says to the scribe to whom he is dictating, "If only you knew what you write." "Surely I do not know," says the humble

Steve Stern is the author of several works of fiction, including Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven, which won the Edward Lewis Wallant Award for Jewish American fiction, and The Wedding Jester, which won the National Jewish Book Award. His latest novel, The Angel of Forgetfulness, was published last March by Viking Penguin.



scribe, to which the not-so-humble Nachman replies, "You don't even know how much you don't know." I was beginning to understand how much I didn't know. This was as scary as it was exhilarating. The analogy with Pandora's Box comes to mind, or its Jewish equivalent: the tale of King David who defied God's decree to lift the Foundation Stone of the world, thereby releasing chaos and perpetual night. In contacting the world of the archetypes, I felt I'd set loose a gang of dybbuks, golems, and demi-angels from an immemorial past to jostle among and perhaps displace the frail neurasthenics of the current moment, among whom I count myself. But who am I kidding? After all, nobody dies or goes mad like Rabbi Akiba's companions from exposure to a little antique lore; nobody has the sensory equipment anymore to even recognize the power that the moth-balled myths once contained. Still, my tentative researches had an impact, and sometimes I thought it would have been better to have left well enough alone.

In his "Before the Law" parable, Franz Kafka, the Jewish prince of hopelessness, tells the story of the man from the country who spends his entire life waiting for admittance to the Palace of the Law—only to be told by the gatekeeper at the end of his days that this particular entrance had been reserved especially for him. "And now," said the gatekeeper, "I am going to close it."

With that pronouncement the case for much of modern literature was similarly closed: the door to the truth of our essential selves was shut for good and all, and variations on a now-tired theme of alienation have since had to be sufficient. And lo, they were sufficient: it's been enough merely to long for a time when the Law was accessible, rather than live with the awful burden of having to accommodate it. But again helplessly pursuing echoes, I read this in Gershom Scholem: "A widely accepted belief of the later Kabbalah states that Torah reveals to each individual a particular aspect meant for him and understood by him alone." And: "In the Messianic Age, every single man [and woman] in Israel will read the Torah in keeping with the meaning peculiar to his [or her] root. This is also the way Torah is understood in Paradise." I don't think Kafka was aware of this notion. Yet even as he was denying the possibility of a connection with the Law (for which you may substitute self, truth, community, primal intelligence, the Godhead, what you will), he could not avoid the paradox of instinctively invoking the defining myths of the tribe. If not suggesting the Covenant itself, he was at least summoning an echo of the Covenant, and this inescapable paradox—of expressing desolation in the language of midrash, of faith—is the engine that drives all Kafka's work.

"Now there is a country that contains within it all countries," said Rabbi Nachman. "And in that country there is a city that contains all the cities of that country that contains all countries. And in that city there is a house that contains all the cities of that country that contains all countries. And in that house is a man who bears all this within him." Nachman is maybe describing the condition of the complete Jewish soul, and I suppose a good Jewish writer ought to have one. Problem is that the writer, like everyone else at our creaky juncture in history, can be willfully absentminded, cultivating the luxury of forgetting what he contains and the longing for what he's forgotten.

Lord knows we have so much to forget. Indeed, Jewish lore makes a shibboleth of forgetting: witness the paradigmatic legend of the Angel of Forgetfulness, who tweaks the newborn under the nose at birth to erase their knowledge of Paradise, with which it is assumed that life on earth would be intolerable. Consequently we are born with the sense of a radiant dream that has evaporated upon our waking, a dream we're condemned to spend our days trying in vain to recall. Or conversely, we're content to brood wistfully over our inability to remember. In an apocryphal story of the creation of Adam, the patriarch is given a light by which he can see everything at once: he sees all of his own life and the history of the world unto its very end. Then the angel who presented the gift, acting on behalf of God—who either wants to protect Adam from a searing vision or simply to preserve that vision for Himself—revokes the light. However, as nothing in Jewish lore is un-recyclable, the light—again according to Nachman—was never extinguished. He says:

Every story has something that is concealed. What is concealed is the hidden light. The Book of Genesis says that God created light on the first day, the sun on the fourth. What light existed before the sun? The tradition says this was the spiritual light, and God hid it for future use. Where was it hidden? In the stories of the Torah.

This is the light that renders those stories timeless, perennial, and authentic. Of course the brilliance of Torah, the mother of stories, has been considerably diluted over the ages, and the countless narratives that have borrowed the splendor of the archetypal tales (*mea culpa!*) have worn that splendor rather thin. Still it's pretty to think that in the truest endeavors of the Jewish literary art—Franz Kafka, Nachman of Bratslav—it remains possible to recover flashes of eternity from the sparks of holy light that can yet be extracted from them. And by that light you can see, if

you dare, forever.

It's interesting to note that both Kafka and Rabbi Nachman wanted their fictions destroyed at their deaths. Why? Was it a selfishness that wanted to deprive us of the stories the way the angel deprived Adam of his prophetic light? Or perhaps the pair of them, Nachman and Kafka, having themselves evaded the Angel of Forgetfulness's filip under the nose at birth (my theory), had inherited the angel's instinct to protect us from the pain of remembering, which is the original definition of nostalgia. They intended to turn their own shimmering truths back into amnesiac dreams, leaving us shadows for whose substance we might yearn our whole lives through. Whatever the case, we deem it fortunate that they were both betrayed, Kafka by his friend Max Brod and Nachman by his scribe Nathan, who preserved the tales. Which puts me in mind of a myth from another tradition, the one in which the knight Sir Bedivere, whom King Arthur appointed to throw his magic sword back into the lake, disobeys his master and then lies to him. In the end, however, he does fling the sword, and the arm of the Lady of the Lake breaks the surface to seize it.

A modern romantic might maintain that somewhere the sword and the hand are still visible, though the lake may have become a polluted backwater as clogged with muck as the Gowanus Canal. That muck is the shmutz of history and psychology that has encrusted and even obscured our myths over time. It cakes with the same detritus the Excalibur, the Ark of the Covenant, and Aaron's Rod, which is perhaps a blessing—because to scrape such items clean of their grungy insulation is to risk being overcome by their dormant power. To harness that power with a view toward reintegrating the past into the present, you need the boldness and imagination of a Rabbi Akiba, which who has anymore? There is, by the way, a version of the Nachman legend in which his stories are in fact destroyed, while his disciples breathe the smoke from their burning so that their master's

tales become mortally entwined with the helix of their own DNA.

A quaint notion, but let's face it: it's a long way from Rabbi Nachman, who lived in intimacy with the Law, to Franz Kafka, who lived in exile from it, making Kafka the avatar of the longing that is our legacy. Lamenting the loss of collective memory in his seminal work, *Zakhor*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi speaks of writing a history of forgetting. *Zakhor!* Remember! is the ancient biblical injunction, and Yiddish has its corollary in the curse: *Zolstu krenken un gedenken*, may you sicken and remember, as if memory were itself a symptom of a disease. George Steiner in *Bluebeard's Castle* calls Jews the great remembrancers, and insists that Hitler's primary motivation in murdering them was his conscious wish to murder memory, thereby killing the conscience of the West. He might have spared the six million, since memory has a way of eroding its own corpus. Grace Paley once said, albeit a bit glibly, that the Jews were not meant to occupy space but endure in time; Abraham Heschel called the Sabbath "a palace in time." Thus do we measure the Jewish year from holiday to holiday, so that the temporal is held in place by an armature of the eternal, and we may live in cozy contemporaneity with mythical events. But there's nothing cozy about the world of the archetypes.

Twenty years after "Lazar Malkin," I'm more ambivalent than ever with regard to the act of remembering; wearier and chastened, I'm no longer the intrepid time-traveler of the mid-1980s; Huckleberry Finn, *ce n'est pas moi*. These days, abundantly distracted by the *tohu vavohu* (chaos) of 2005, I'm more inclined to satisfy myself with a sentimental nostalgia for a mythical past I never knew. But then the echoes start up again, and I feel like that half-senile Ulysses in the Tennyson poem, compelled despite everyone's better judgment to mount yet another voyage. There's a passage in Kafka's diaries where he begins and abandons a story about the golem. In it the wonder rabbi is slovenly and overweight, his under-

wear visible beneath sagging breeches. In a smelly ghetto courtyard in full sight of his curious neighbors, he rolls up his sleeves like a washerwoman and begins to knead his lump of clay, and that's where the sketch leaves off. Could it be that the potential eruption of magic in such a fallen milieu frightened the skittish Franz away from his story? Personally, I don't blame him. But what if, instead of an aborted story, the maestro intended to leave us writers of Hebrew extraction with an assignment: that we should each, according to our means, try our hand at finishing his tale?

I believe that a story, if it's truly kosher, should function as a kind of cosmic template, its language tracing a prototypical pattern the way a rubbing traces the relief on an ancient tomb. Then, thanks to the conjuring power of language, the story stirs the inanimate; the tomb sculpture rises up and walks abroad like a golem aspiring to humanity. Of course, in the bracing old legends golems have the strength to overwhelm us and elude our control. A book may echo *the Book* more sonorously than the primary noise, a rude awakening but an awakening nonetheless. In the hands of the ideal Jewish storyteller, a narrative is a map leading back to the narrative's own source, and as in the process of tikkun, which is the reparation of the rift between heaven and earth, the words return the sparks like a guilty Prometheus to their original flame. The flame illuminates those places in our consciousness that have since gone dim, but unlike the burning bush, this flame can consume; revelation implies the peril of immolation. (Kafka: "A book should be an axe to break the frozen sea within." Or a flame to melt it.) This is the flame that gave Adam, whose formless clay was the original golem, his brief vision of eternity, the light that allows us, here at this darker end of creation, to view the earth in all its manifest beauty and terror from the vantage of Paradise. Then we quickly close the book, extinguishing the flame, though we remain vexed and disturbed ever after by its stupefying brightness. □

The End of Judaism?

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

- *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, by Caryn Aviv and David Shneer. New York University Press, 2005.

Judaism has discovered postmodernism, almost forty years after the French first began informing the rest of us about hybridity, multiplicity, and the impossibility of singular meaning.

What took us so long? Judaism has been wandering in that particular wilderness for over 2,000 years, a religion in exile, a religion in which the center—Zion—was persistently absent. A centered religion without a center—that paradox sums up postmodernity in a nutshell. No surprise that Derrida himself was Jewish.

Ironically, just as the rest of the world was realizing that the center was absent in the late 1960s, Jews finally secured their mythic center in the state of Israel (see: War of 1967). For the next thirty years, Jews imagined that the diaspora quest had been achieved, and that there was now one place in the world where Jews could finally be at home, centered, at rest. People, money, and prayers flowed to the state of Israel.

An odd thing happened on the way to Zion, however. People turned back. This observation is the great contribution of Caryn Aviv and David Shneer's new book. Money kept flowing, prayers kept flowing, but a lot of ordinary Jews realized that Israel was not actually the center of their lives. Diaspora Jews did not want to leave the Diaspora.

In chapters on Russian Jews, Ameri-



can Jews, and queer Jews, Shneer and Aviv argue that many of us prefer an exile that is no longer exilic.

What's more, Shneer and Aviv argue that many Israelis might just as well still be living in exile as far as the hope of Zion is concerned. Living in the Promised Land, they shrug off the promise, refuse the religion, and ignore the God of their ancestors who makes the land holy.

Who are we, if we are not diasporic, if we no longer believe in Zion? Aviv and Shneer call us the "New Jews." They argue that we have finally embraced the hybrid, multiple, unmoored identities that our ancestors were so desperate to give away. "If the concept of 'the Jewish people' means that Jews are all one, that we speak with one voice, that we inherently share a common understanding and vision of the world, then... yes, this is the end of 'the Jewish people,' and this development is good for the Jews."

You know Shneer and Aviv are on to something when you gauge the reaction of the institutional world to the arrival of the "New Jew." The efforts these organizations are making to encourage what we might call the "Old Jew" are overwhelming. In their second chapter, Aviv and Shneer dissect the "youth tourism" industry, which aims to create Jewish identity by sending youth to Holocaust sites and to Israel. For example, Taglit-Birthright Israel (www.birtherightisrael.com) is so desperate to reinforce the Israel-Diaspora bond that it will send any Jewish teenager to Israel for free—airfare, hotel, the works.

As Aviv and Shneer argue, these organizations mostly insist that being a good Jew outside of Israel means being in exile. They want us to embrace our Diaspora, whether that means pretending we really want to live in Israel; sending a financial guilt-offering to Israel in the form of cash; following the old-time religion that still mandates a prayer for the return to Jerusalem in every service; or, at the very least, celebrating the klezmer and knishes of the old-time Eastern European diaspora culture (see: *Heeb*).

Needless to say, most Jews aren't paying much attention to all that. We may send money or—in the lulls between suicide bombers—send our kids to Israel; we may listen to klezmer and bravely cry out "Next Year in Jerusalem!" each Passover, but Shneer and Aviv are right: many Jews have no plans to move. Zion is no longer the source of meaning for contemporary Judaism.

Does the end of Diaspora mean the end of Jewish identity per se? Aviv and Shneer argue it does. In an epilogue titled "The End of the Jews" the authors argue that "the only thing that Jews

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser is TIKKUN's Senior Editor.

have in common is the fact that they self-identify as Jews."

I find that hard to believe. Perhaps our authors have been drinking a bit too much postmodern tea.

Women are not women because we say so—though that is the case for a small group of transgendered folk. Americans are not Americans because we say so, though of course each year some people become American by taking an oath. Identity categories are not worn lightly.

One is initiated into being a Jew through rituals (both at birth and on conversion) and one remains a Jew by identification with a community, a tradition, and even, yes, a religion. A Jew calls herself a Jew because she feels bound in this way. Identity, rather than being a cloak we put on, is a skin that is hard to shed.

Just because we realize that there is not one way to be a Jew does not mean there is not something cohesive or binding for Jews in their Judaism. Jews share a mythic past in the Bible stories of Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses. Jews share a language, Hebrew. Even if they don't know the tongue, they know that it is their tongue. Jews do share a history, in this case a tragic history that has shaped Jewish communities across the globe.

These shared bonds do not make us "one" in the old-fashioned sense of one people. Jews from different times and cultures have experienced these shared phenomena differently. We are hybrids of different cultures. But the word "hybrid" suggests similarities as well as differences. A hybrid is a composite of the old and the new.

While Aviv and Shneer have a good handle on the cultural hybridity of the Jew, they somehow have managed to produce an entire book on the "New Jew" without once mentioning the tie that binds us most closely together: our shared understanding of God. Judaism was still, last I looked, a religion, and it is the way we approach God that holds us together. By scrupulously avoiding any talk of God, Aviv and Shneer have missed the real potential of their analy-

*Identity, rather than
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sis. They miss what is really missing.

For the last 2,000 years, Jews were not just missing a place. When the rabbis lost the ancient Temple in their Diaspora, they also lost the God of the Temple. When Zion went missing, so did God. Don't misunderstand. I am not arguing that Rabbinic Judaism was not a God-centered religion. Of course it was. But God was missing from that center. Rabbinic texts rarely discuss theo-ontologic issues such as God's existence, the nature of God's power, or God's role in human life. Rabbinic Judaism does not have a richly developed language of "faith" or "spirit." Jews were not expected to have a personal relationship to God (though some did). For the rabbis, the knowable God, the God of Moses and the Prophets, was lost with the loss of Zion. God was not dead—but God was absent. Instead of sacrificing to a very real God in the Temple, or forming a personal relationship with God (as post-Reformation Christians had done), Jews were expected instead to fathom what an absent God might desire, based on the traces of God left to us in the Torah and oral tradition.

Building a religion around absence—what a triumph! We must recognize it as a triumph, because Judaism persisted for 2,000 years in this form. This play of signification created by the absence of the ultimate Signifier led to a lively intellectual tradition in which no idea—even the idea that God does not exist—could be excluded per se. Much that we treasure most about Rabbinic Judaism comes from this rich interpretive tradition.

At the same time, the need of the community to define the absence around which it was bound led to an ever-growing set of practices encircling

this absent signifier. These practices were explicitly called "a ring around the Torah." Rings are circles, shapes based on a center whose presence is an absence. So the ritual practices of Rabbinic Judaism were bound ever tighter into a circle that might point to the presence of a God that was absent.

As the centuries passed, rabbinic Judaism increasingly strained under the two-fold requirement of a necessary openness to new interpretation on the one hand, and a growing rigidity of practice on the other. By the nineteenth century, European Jews were looking to rest on one side of the equation or the other. Reform Judaism sought a boundless, enlightened play of signification without reference to a commonly invoked center defined by practice; various Ashkenazic Orthodoxies moved to quell the play of signification by drawing the ring of practice and ritual ever tighter.

The twentieth century forced these contradictions to the breaking point. Just as the great Diaspora forced Jews to lay aside their Temple-based practice and develop what became Rabbinic Judaism, the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel may well force Jews to lay aside the growing contradictions of Rabbinic Judaism for a new form of Judaism.

The Holocaust not only decimated the centers of Jewish practice and the schools of rabbinic interpretation in Europe—the Holocaust led Jews to begin to ask questions that had been unutterable since the time of the Temple: who is the God of the Jews? What relation does this God have to my daily life? Will this God answer my personal prayers? God had to become a presence after the Holocaust if the survivors were to believe in God's existence. Survivors either abandoned theology or else demanded a personal God at whom they could rage, with whom they could argue, to whom they could pray. Defining a God through practice and ritual was no longer enough.

The God Jews now demand is not the God they had spent so many long

centuries trying to fathom. The God of our Fathers was distant, removed; the God we want now is near at hand. We are repeatedly told by the rabbinic tradition that the way to God is through the mitzvot, the deeds of hand and tongue. Now we want to experience God directly through our hearts.

This is a dangerous time for Judaism. If Rabbinic Judaism is indeed dying, we will have to find a new way of being Jews, or else Judaism and Jews will indeed disappear. We will have to find a way to reach out to a God who is personal and yet not a person (that would be Christianity). Instead of circumscribing a possible God who cannot be named, our rituals and practices must be able to open out to our own experience of God—even as they anchor our God experience within our tradition and community (if not so anchored, we would get New Age mysticism and not Judaism).

The good news is that many Jews are looking for a new way to be Jews. Jews who never left Zion—Mizrahim and

Sephardim—never felt quite the absence from an imagined center that Ashkenazim felt. For example, the Jewish mystical tradition, Kabbalah, was founded by Sephardim and has become an increasingly important resource for modern Jews seeking a personal relationship to God. So too are the works of Sephardi theologians, which are increasingly being read alongside the work of Ashkenazim in U.S. and Israeli seminaries.

Queer Jews also are doing a considerable amount of theological work in this regard. Many queer Jews have chosen Judaism or are involved in interfaith and/or interracial relationships, so they embody the kind of cultural hybridity Aviv and Shneer admire (the authors' first joint book was an anthology called *Queer Jews*). Yet, precisely because queer Jews have been so "othered" by mainstream Judaism, many have made it their mission to adapt Judaism to their needs rather than vice versa. The amount of new liturgy and theological

work coming from the queer community is overwhelming and promises much for a renewed Jewish future.

Finally, the Jewish Renewal movement, with which TIKKUN is affiliated, has attempted to bridge the Reform/Orthodox split by bringing a personal God and emotional intensity into a traditional Jewish prayer framework. Instead of calling for Jews to act as if they believed in a God whose paths could never be known, Renewal rabbis like TIKKUN's editor Michael Lerner tell their congregants that "The God you don't believe in doesn't exist." This is a God who is not absent, though also not entirely known or knowable.

The Diaspora is over. Rabbinic Judaism may be over too. Institutional Judaism is right to be worried. The answer, however, is neither to restage the old Zionist theology nor to assume that Jews will continue to self-identify as Jews through a love of *différence*. There is work to do. I think Jews are up to doing it. □

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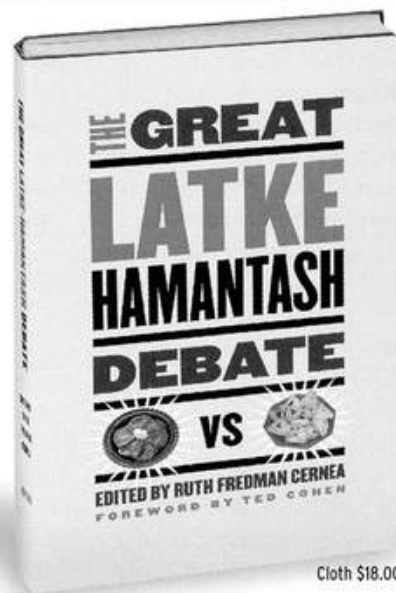
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The Value(s) of Identity

Joshua Jelly-Schapiro

- *The Ethics of Identity*, by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Princeton University Press, 2005

The decline that followed the New Left's mythic apogee in 1968 has been blamed on many things. Of all the factors posited, the theory that has attracted perhaps the most attention—and certainly the most debate—has been that the rise of identity politics has splintered universalist liberation movements.

Proponents of this argument say that ever-multiplying advocacy groups, forwarding the interests of competing identities, have led us to forget the broad categories that might unite us all—especially class—and have led to leftists wasting tremendous amounts of energy on symbolic battles such as campus culture wars. Others have countered that such movements—from gay liberation to black power to Asian-American pride—have not only been important in empowering oppressed groups, but have also injected crucial energy into progressive politics as a whole.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's *The Ethics of Identity* is not an intervention into this debate. It is rather an examination of the moral, social, and political implications of the ways we both form and articulate identities. It approaches the politics of identity only as incidental to a larger conceptual interrogation of "identity." But as such, *The Ethics of Identity* has more to say about the debate over identity politics

than many works that take identity as a given.

Appiah's scholarly project is to excavate the foundational texts of modern liberalism to see what they have to say about identity's relationship to liberty. "Do identities represent a curb on autonomy, or do they provide its contours?" Appiah asks. That is, does the process of figuring out who we are stand to make us freer or simply constrain us in the straitjacket of a predetermined label?

According to Appiah, this question is not new. What is new, however, is how we now think about identity in relation to "culture"—not high culture, but systems of meaning and allegiance that *all* people possess. Appiah, due to his own peripatetic life—he was raised in Ghana, educated in England, and has long been a professor in the United States—knows firsthand the profound inadequacy of asking people to attach all their loyalty to a single culture among many to which they might feel allegiance. Yet he is no friend of multiculturalism: the celebration of a culture—just like its degradation—always has a tendency to bind and make static that which is moving, complex, and varied. Thus, for Appiah, any cultural rights protected by the state must always be afforded individuals rather than groups.

The conceptual logic underlying this argument is hard to dispute. Multiculturalism, however, is as much a political program as a concept, and it deserves credit for its merits and effects as such. In this regard, it is clear that multiculturalism has come to function

as an essential counterweight to xenophobia and racism in many societies. The complex challenge that thus falls to multiculturalism's defenders is to figure out how to do justice to the fact that what we call "cultures" are themselves profoundly multicultural—and moreover, to recognize that we ourselves, as individuals, carry many cultures within us.

The intellectual tradition within which Appiah situates himself is the "sway-backed steed" of classical liberalism. Though perfectly worthy, this outlook does have its limits. Particularly glaring is the author's non-engagement with Cultural Studies, which has so relentlessly dissected the relationship between identity and the politics of liberation. As that tradition's chief exponent, Stuart Hall, reminds us, "one only discovers who one is because of the identities one has to take on in order to act." Developing a positive regard for oneself has always necessitated the formulation of an identity. The identities we take on may never adequately comprise the complexity of all that we are and believe. Yet it is only in understanding ourselves as *this* type of woman or *that* type of man, possessed of *this* nationality or *these* values, that we find the necessary foundation from which to speak and act in the world.

Given this truth, the conclusion Appiah eloquently affirms is spot on: the key to living a moral life is clearly not to seek to forego identity. On the contrary, it is to put identity in the service of becoming ethical human beings. The challenge, always, must be to understand and use identity as a means to achieving our humanity—and never, ever, as a substitute for it. □

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In the Name of the Father

Shai Ginsburg



■ *Thirst (Atash)*, Directed by Tawfik Abu Wael. 2004, Global Film Initiative. American Release, 2006.

In a deserted, unnamed IDF installation, where exposed gray concrete walls marked by bullet holes blend into the barren yellow dusty landscape, Abu Shukri and his family—the unlawful occupants of the site—make a meager living by turning illegally cut wood into charcoal. In Tawfik Abu Wael's beautiful film *Atash (Thirst)*,

however, this loaded setting forms the backdrop for an unusual story about the way violence and abuse are ingrained within the life of a family and perpetuated by its victims.

It has been ten years since Abu Shukri moved his wife and children from the nearby town, never to return. The small valley that encloses the military installation cuts his family off from the outside world, protecting them from the scandal that chased them out of their village. At the same time, from the very beginning, the desolate valley is

revealed to be prison-like. In it, Abu Shukri is able to maintain tight control over his family members, forcing them into seclusion. Consumed by the almost-constant need to supervise the charcoal fire (the importance of which Abu Shukri continually reiterates), the members of the family are not only barred from realizing their dreams, but ultimately lose their ability to imagine a new life possible beyond the valley's walls.

In the first scene of *Atash*, as Abu Shukri's family shuttles between a water tank—the only source of water—and the fire, Abu Shukri's son defies his father and runs off to school. Enraged,

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TELEVISION/FILM

Abu Shukri breaks the tank and states: "I'm fed up. I want tap water like everyone else." Ironically, Abu-Shukri's love and care for his family and his endeavors both to shield his family and to keep it together result in thirst. Accordingly, when he uses all the family savings to construct a pipeline, it only reinforces the fetters that ties them to the valley, because, as Abu Shukri's wife, Um Shukri notes, they could have rented a house anywhere with this money. In fact, throughout the film, every attempt to escape ultimately reinforces the family's inability to change its fortunes.

The construction of the pipeline brings some relief to Abu Shukri's family, but they soon find that they have to protect it from being sabotaged. This responsibility draws father and son together. Taking a gun out of its hiding place, Abu Shukri initiates his son into its rituals and responsibilities, as well as fears about "becoming a man." Appropriately, the gun maintains its attraction as a symbol of power and authority, even though Shukri is far from certain that he would be able to bring himself to use it should the need arise. The film's tragedy is derived from the fact that, as the son increasingly assumes this impossibly conflicted masculine responsibility, he both rebels against the tyranny of the father and assumes the same values and atti-

tudes that inform that tyranny.

Yet, it is not only the inherent ambiguity of characters and events that makes the moral categorization of the film's characters and their actions so difficult. It is also, as the first scene of *Atash* reveals, the logic of displacement that shapes its narrative. Events are not linked as a sequence of cause and effect, but rather are presented as a chain of substitutions of one idea for another in which the emotional intensity of one idea becomes detached from it and is passed to another idea. The series of substitutions is indeed so dense that it is often difficult to uncover the true motivations behind the behavior of *Atash*'s characters.

The most obvious example of such displacement deals with the relationship between Israeli military and political systems, and their Israeli-Palestinian subjects. While the film, with its focus on a Palestinian family's intense interpersonal relationships, never presents a direct encounter between Palestinians and the Israeli authorities, there is no doubt that Israeli presence shapes and molds the life of the Palestinian family and, to a certain extent, the pattern of victimization of the characters. Indeed, the very physical setting in which the film takes place points to Israel's powerful presence—even in its absence. Against the protest of his neighbor, who argues that he "fucks with an old dick,"

Abu Shukri proudly declares that he defies the Israeli act of land appropriation from its lawful Palestinian owners; nevertheless, the fear of an encounter with the Israeli authorities, which would result in the expulsion of the family from their home, continuously lingers in the background. In fact, the deserted military outpost had served to train Israeli soldiers in urban fighting strategies and thus forms a silent reminder of the brutal nature of the encounter between Israelis and Palestinians.

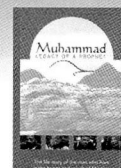
Yet in *Atash*, traditional cinematographic images of national conflict work counter-intuitively. Instead of representing clearly identifiable clashing forces, they uncover how political violence and abuse are internalized and become inherent to the very lives of the film's characters, independent of the Israeli presence. The covered faces of the characters, in which only eyes peek between a pulled sweater and a cap, are only too reminiscent of recent photos of Palestinian militiamen, though they are explained away by the characters' need to not inhale the thick smoke of a charcoal fire. Halima, Abu-Shukri's younger daughter, collects the empty rifle shells and hand grenade safety latches—signs of the violence that makes possible Israeli rule over Palestinians—that litter the ground, and weaves them into wind harps that she



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MUSIC

Between Hipsters and God, There's Sufjan Stevens

Charlie Bertsch

The usual suspects are here. Black Converse high-tops, alternative tattoos, nerdy thick-rimmed glasses worn more as spectacle than as spectacles



and the music itself hooks people in. Except for the diehard devotees in the audience, no one is

The line between singing in character and singing *his* character breaks down.

It is this confusion, however temporary, that perplexes Stevens's listeners the most. Because over time, in the interstices both of elaborately wrought—and sometimes overwrought—compositions that can sound like Philip Glass's attempt to become a pop musician, and of spare, whispery folk songs that cut the complexity of the former like lemon sorbet after a rich main course, he reveals something out of character with the circles he frequents. Stevens sings as a Christian. At first, members of his audience brush this realization aside. They are among hipsters, after all. Most of the people in this room devote their Saturday and Sunday mornings to servicing hangovers, not attending services. If they do believe in a higher power, it is a belief locked deep inside them, like a memory of early childhood that only comes out when they are mad or frightened or stoned. But as the clues pile up—references to divinity, righteousness, Bible study, Emanuel—they become impossible to ignore. Maybe Stevens is singing as someone other than himself, but if that is the case he shows a remarkable preference for first-person narrators who wear their religion, if not *on* the sleeve of their coat, then in the satiny lining inside it that flashes whenever they move.

Stevens does not proselytize. But his words and actions make it difficult to regard his first-person lyrics as out of character. Before he starts another song from *Illinois*, "The Predatory Wasp of the Palisades Is Out To Get Us!", he talks about going to summer camp as a child in Michigan. Someone in the crowd shouts out the name of a place. Stevens looks up, surprised. "That's where I was. I can't believe you've heard of it." He pauses for a minute, smiling. "This song is really set there, but I had to move the story to the Palisades in Illinois for the sake of the album." As the song begins, this confession gives the words the aura of a truth that transcends the domain of fiction. "Thinking outrageously I write in cur-

sive/ I hide in my bed with the lights on the floor/ Wearing three layers of coats and leg warmers/ I see my own breath on the face of the door/ Oh, I am not quite sleeping, Oh, I am fast in bed / There on the wall in the bedroom, creeping/ I see a wasp with her wings outstretched."

Like many of Stevens's lyrics, these lines are simultaneously mundane and otherworldly, detailed and diffuse. Although there's nothing overtly religious about them, they overlap so seamlessly with the ones that *do* make explicit Christian references that they acquire the inward glow of religious allegory. By prefacing the song with words that ground its imagery in a reality that he inhabits, Stevens puts his audience in the potentially uncomfortable position of concluding that the wall between the fiction of his songs and the fact of his life is a wall with a door locked only by their belief that a sophisticated independent-label musician, the darling of big-city critics, can't really be the believer he seems to be.

It's not necessary to attend a Sufjan Stevens concert to experience this sort of cognitive dissonance, of course. His albums *Greetings From Michigan*, *the Great Lake State*, and *Illinois*—the first fruits of a hopelessly ambitious plan to make a record for every one of the fifty states—resemble secular labors of love like The Magnetic Fields' three-CD *69 Love Longs* more than the fare at your standard Christian emporium. The illustrated booklets accompanying both records display a light-hearted faux primitive approach better suited to an art gallery than a church. The original cover for *Illinois* shows Al Capone, flying saucers, and Superman—Stevens's label was encouraged to remove the Man of Steel from subsequent pressings—against a backdrop of the Chicago skyline. Inside, a row of Santas cavort with deer, butterflies, and an image of Stevens re-imagined as Abraham Lincoln. *Michigan's* booklet devotes a full page to a field-guide painting of a robin with the caption "robin" beneath it, inspiring anyone who has seen David

Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, itself a Moebius strip of irony and sincerity, to wonder whether anything on the record should be taken at face value. Like the cheerleading between songs during Stevens's live show, these images circulate in a world where the absence of irony can only be registered as the most ironic irony of all.

That the impulse to look for hidden meanings should seem incompatible with Christian art is a sign, both of how far Fundamentalism has dumbed down the religion it claims to represent, and how much intellectuals' defensive response to Fundamentalism has left them deaf to the spiritual traditions it distorts and suppresses. If Stevens does have an agenda, aside from making beautiful and moving art, it may be to wake his audience up to the dangers in that brand of mutual ignorance. Interviewed last summer by the Internet music site Pitchfork, he addressed the resistance that many people feel to the religious content of his work. "I think an enlightened person is capable, on some level, of making the distinction between the institution of the culture and the culture itself. The institution of Christianity, the way that it's set up, it's institutionalized and commodified, and anytime that happens, anytime it's incorporated, it leads to disaster." He notes, "I have the same knee-jerk reaction to that kind of culture. Maybe I'm a little more empathetic to it because we have similar fundamental beliefs. But culturally and aesthetically, some of it is really embarrassing."

The real power of Stevens's work, particularly in a live setting, is to take this embarrassment and turn it on its head, leaving the hipsters in his audience embarrassed at their own discomfort with religious conviction. In the process, he reveals their desire to remain non-committal as a reflex that retards both thinking and feeling. Commit to the music and you just may learn to commit to the spirituality that motivates it. It would surely be a lot more rewarding than sleeping off hipster hangovers. □

Capsule Reviews

- Barbez, *Insignificance*. Important Records, 2005

From Sonic Youth bassist Kim Gordon to jazz-klezmer saxophonist John Zorn, Jewish American musicians make technologically enabled cultural syncretism central to what they do. All such cosmopolitan expressions imply the most hungrily revolutionary aspects of the erstwhile clichéd image of America as a melting pot of world culture. With the help of the ever-evolving tools around them, Jewish-American musicians no longer simply tolerate, but rather voraciously *participate* in, the mix. With their misleadingly titled third album, *Insignificance*, Brooklyn-based chamber-punk ensemble Barbez continues the tradition with a passionate blend of French chanson, Argentine tango, Eastern European folk, and underground punk, fuelled by twentieth-century technology.

Tellingly, bassist Dan Coates named his eight-year-old multicultural sextet after a similarly diverse Parisian neighborhood he once called home. But Coates is as keen on temporal blends as he is on ethnic ones. Songs like "Fear of Commitment" and "A Melancholy Picnic" depend as much on brazen singer Ksenia Vidyaykina's psychothera-

peutic lyrics as they do on their classical-folk tonalities. And whoever wrote the solemn traditional Russian ballad "The Sea Spread Wide" most likely never had in mind a version spiked at points with vituperative thrash-punk phrasings.

Coates also synchs up Barbez's aptitude for traditional sounds with a spotlight on the modern. Pamela Kurstin's theremin provides a haunted technological shade to radical German composer Hanns Eisler's "Song of the Moldau." Meanwhile, on the title track, Coates produces scratchy and laser-like electronic sounds with a modified Palm Pilot, creating a tense, forward-looking, anything-goes atmosphere that punctuates the mix that makes up *Insignificance*.

—Ron Nachmann

- Silver Jews, *Tanglewood Numbers*. Drag City, 2005

With both his books and his music, poet David Berman has carved out a comfortable niche as both a southern Jewish writer and indie musician. Much like his fellow Dixie Jewish scribe/crooner Richard "Kinky" Friedman did with straight-ahead country in the 1970s, Berman and his band Silver Jews have subsumed his compellingly observant Jewish-American literary intellect into a gentle, countrytinged indie rock idiom. The band continues on this path with their sixth album, *Tanglewood Numbers*.

Raised in Virginia, Texas and Tennessee, Berman now lives in Memphis, where he and his wife, Cassie, make up two of the city's 10,000 Jews. On *Tanglewood Numbers*, his often opaque lyrics document his recent battle against substance abuse. The Silver Jews—an indie all-star ensemble that includes guitarist Steve Malkmus and drummer Bob Nastanovich from legendary Nineties band Pavement—



provide appropriately melancholy back-up for Berman's vulnerable expressions.

Unlike Bob Dylan's controversial *Nashville Skyline*, Berman's version of country music is neither willfully mocking in its regionalism, nor bent on illustrating its novelty as a country record made by a band that is two-thirds Jewish and only one-third southern. Rather, *Tanglewood Numbers* speaks in what might be regarded as a voice of integration, where being both Jewish and southern is by no means the basis for a clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia. While Berman doesn't evoke Jewish themes per se, it's hard not to see the invocation of both Dylan (in the moralizing "The Poor the Fair and the Good") and Lou Reed, (in "Sometimes a Pony Gets Depressed") as expressing a distinctly indigenous, newly formed southern Jewish vernacular.

In a recent interview, Berman was asked if he had a rabbi. Answering affirmatively, Berman also sang the praises of his congregation's cantor, Lisa Silver, whom he confessed he secretly records at Friday-night services on a hidden digital recorder. In many respects, *Tanglewood Numbers* is its own stealthy monograph of a similarly ritualistic process—that of a gifted singer-songwriter and his friends bearing witness to a new Jewish culture, in all of its complicated, layered, and deeply personal glory. —RN □



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