

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

(tē·kūn) To mend, repair, and transform the world.

MARCH/APRIL 2006

IRS TARGETS
CALIFORNIA CHURCH
Freedom of the Pulpit
AN INTERVIEW WITH
William Sloane Coffin
SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
Passover 2006

Fear

How the Right Rules

MICHAEL LERNER
Challenging the
Voice of Fear

FRED BRANFMAN
Torture and Being
"Good Americans"

HENRY A. GIROUX
The Politics of Lying

KATHLEEN KERN
Corporate Complicity
in Congo's War

Sharon Welch: Enduring Peace | Religions Denounce War
Listening to Matthew Herbert | Post-Holocaust Judaism
Reviews: *Gate of the Sun*, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

\$5.95 U.S. \$7.95 Canada





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Michelle Bachelet
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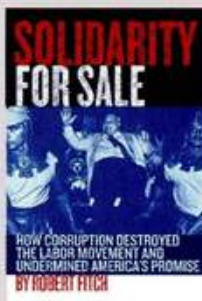
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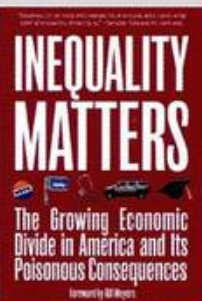
By Robert Fitch. Public Affairs Books, 2006

IN THIS GROUNDBREAKING STUDY of how corruption destroyed the labor movement and undermined America's promise, Robert Fitch tells the story of how significant figures in the labor movement have betrayed and defrauded their own members. Though Fitch sometimes projects evil intent where it may not have existed, the larger picture presented here is at once discouraging and a manifesto for labor union transformation. Fitch believes revitalizing the union movement is indispensable for those who wish to build a democratic society in the United States. *Solidarity For Sale* makes an utterly inspiring case.

**INEQUALITY MATTERS**

Edited by James Lardner and David A. Smith. The New Press, 2006

THIS COLLECTION OF ARTICLES gives us the latest details on the growing economic divide in America and its consequences. The gap between rich and poor is greater today than fifty years ago, bigger than that of any other Western nation, and as Bill Moyers points out in the introduction to this volume, will not change until ordinary Americans get mad enough to organize. While *Inequality Matters* never provides an analysis of why Americans don't do anything about their plight, it does provide some of the basic facts to repudiate contemporary fantasies about equality and opportunity, which dominate public discourse.

**INSIDE TOYLAND: Working, Shopping and Social Inequality**

Christine L. Williams. University of California Press, 2006

SOCIOLOGIST CHRISTINE L. Williams takes low-paying jobs at two national toy store chains and reports on the techniques of influence used by mass merchandisers. Williams doubts that consumerism can ever be replaced, but she believes that we can teach our children how to bring equality and humanity into the world of consumption by demanding decent work conditions, wages, and benefits for those who manufacture and sell children's merchandise. Though Williams tends towards resignation at times, *Inside Toyland* is a compelling read for those critical of the commercialization of childhood.

**REDESIGNING DISTRIBUTION**

By Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott and Philippe van Parijs. Verso Books, 2006

IN POST-COLD WAR AMERICA, capitalist orthodoxy is the new common sense. Because it is the hegemonic ethos in our culture, one would be hard-pressed to not describe it as a religion. Yet, surprisingly, there is little to no engaged improvisation with capitalist ideology. In *Redesigning Distribution*, the authors explore two revolutionary proposals: a universal monthly stipend given to all citizens to provide Americans with an adequate standard of living, and a system of stakeholder grants so that no one should live in poverty. Social Democracy? Absolutely.

**A VISION OF HOLINESS: The Future of Reform Judaism**

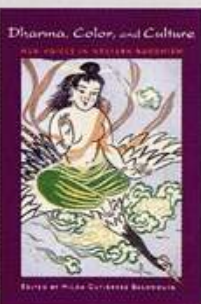
By Richard N. Levy. URJ Press, 2005

RICHARD N. LEVY PAINTS A HOPEFUL picture of how Reform Judaism is moving in a dynamic direction. Along with Lawrence Hoffman, Eugene Borowitz, Rachel Adler, and Eric Yoffie, Levy has been at the forefront of a movement to deepen the spiritual foundations of Reform Judaism. Levy connects his enterprise with the powerful lobbying effort of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center under the leadership of Rabbi David Saperstein, doing his best to overcome the perception that the turn toward spirituality meant abandoning the political idealism that inspired Reform rabbis to play a supportive role in the Civil Rights movement. Every Reform congregation ought to use this inspiring book.

**DHARMA, COLOR AND CULTURE**

Edited by Hilda Gutierrez Baldoquin. Parallax Press, 2005

THE BUDDHIST NOTION OF NON-attachment has been attractive to many Americans who interpreted this mandate as an excuse to not bother themselves with the suffering of others. In this collection of articles we hear from Native Americans, African, Asian, and Latina/o lovers of the Buddhist path who apply this wisdom to their own experiences. Maxine Hong Kingston and others look at the truth of suffering and the pain of invisibility and exclusion. Others explore the relationship between internal and external suffering, how to deal with anger at those who inflict unnecessary suffering on others, and how to move beyond suffering into a life of kindness.



Readers Respond

BREAST CANCER LINK?

HAVING RESEARCHED THE abortion-breast cancer link (ABC link) for over thirteen years, I have gotten used to the third-hand mudslinging of such non-scientists as Diana Dukhanova [*Tikkun*, Jan/Feb 2006], but I never lose my sense of dismay at the callous disregard for women's rights and women's health that such ideologues display. Ms. Dukhanova might just consider why the ABC link continues to have traction in the world of public health policy, no matter how many times she flings the terms "junk science" and "pseudo-science" around. The fact remains indisputable that a woman who chooses to abort a pregnancy faces a higher long-term risk of breast cancer than if she chooses not to. Even the most steadfast "pro-choice" advocate scientists, such as Dr. Lynn Rosenberg, have admitted that under oath in court.

Contrary to what many breast cancer advocacy groups continue to claim, we do know that factors concerning pregnancy and child-bearing are responsible for most cases of breast cancer. Breast cancer rates have skyrocketed in the

Western industrialized world because women are having fewer or no children, start having them later, breastfeed them less, and put off child-bearing in large measure through the use of potent synthetic contraceptive steroids in pill, patch, ring, injectable or implantable form, as well as abortion, and many use steroids post-menopausally (i.e., HRT) as well.

Really, Ms. Dukhanova, it's hardly good form to trash a source of information you have not seen fit to consult. Dare I call it "junk journalism"? Women surely deserve better.

—JOEL BRIND, PH.D.
President, Breast Cancer
Prevention Institute
Poughkeepsie, NY

Diana Dukhanova responds:

The National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have all refuted a link between abortion and breast cancer. This hardly supports Brind's claim that the link is "indisputable."

My assertion that the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute was misleadingly named stems from the fact that, while it is a legitimate medical institute, all the information it presents is clearly slanted against the practice of elective abortion,

which it calls the "single most avoidable risk factor for breast cancer." Anyone researching Abortion-Breast Cancer Syndrome should find it worthy of pause that the institute claims to have found an indisputable link that the impartial medical organizations listed above have not.

One of my main goals in writing the article was to speak out against the

commandeering of the language of feminism by anti-choice forces. Brind's "women deserve better" quip at the conclusion of his letter only serves to illustrate my point. Anti-choice forces are using a theory, disputable at best and false at worst, to scare women away from making their own choices. This is not mudslinging, Dr. Brind. This is fact.

From Tikkun.org

TO JOIN IN THE DEBATE, VISIT WWW.TIKKUN.ORG/LETTERS.

I LOOKED FORWARD TO THIS EXPLANATION OF Chanukah ["Chanukah," *TikkunMail*, Dec 22] as something to share with my son, who will soon celebrate his Bar Mitzvah. But I found it disturbing. You glorify orthodoxy, the reactionary rejection of modern life, and make the ancient Jewish struggle sound chillingly like that of today's Islamist radicals. This is not the lesson of Judaism that I plan on passing along to my son.

Perhaps the Judaism that we teach our children is watered down. We teach tikkun and tzedakah, and we try to use the example of the history of Jewish persecution as a tool in valuing all people. But we reject orthodoxy, rigidity, and anti-modernism because it's another wolf in sheep's clothing—whether it is from the Christian right, the Islamist right or the so-called Jewish "progressive" movement.

—LEE CRESPI

Michael Lerner responds:

This is precisely the problem with right-wing movements. They're hegemonic because they challenge global capitalist modernity by promoting self-defeating ways of rebelling against it. I want to isolate what is positive in these movements—like faith, for example—and reclaim it from appropriation by reactionaries.

Send letters to managing editor
@tikkun.org or to 2342 Shattuck
Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA
94704. Letters may be shortened for space.

MODERN MIDDLE EAST

JOE LOCKARD'S REVIEW OF Ilan Pappé's *The Modern Middle East* [January/February 2006] is a disservice not merely to Pappé, but also to *Tikkun's* readers. To begin with, it is hard to understand why *Tikkun* would assign the task of reviewing the latest work of one of Israel's most learned and distinguished historians to someone whose professional credentials as either an historian or an expert on the Middle East are not—shall we say—easily discernible. Surely Pappé, who has perhaps contributed more than any other single historian to our understanding of Israel's early history, is deserving of a much more professional review.

Even if there was a case for initially assigning the review

to someone whose main field appears to be English literature, why did you proceed to publish such an incoherently written piece, riddled as it is with pretentious and self-important jargon? Not only is it impossible to understand Lockard's argument, if he has one, but even more fundamentally he fails to fulfill the first function of a book reviewer: to tell us—in clear English—what the book is actually about, what it covers, and what are its main arguments.

—JEROME SLATER
Buffalo, NY

Joe Lockard responds:

In response to Jerome Slater, Tikkun's editors are aware of what I am not. This English professor lived in Israel for seventeen years, is an Israeli citizen, taught at

Israeli universities and has published a substantial body of essays and reportage on Middle Eastern politics and culture. Professor Slater's appreciation of Pappé as the leading historian of early Israel is not widely shared in Israel, and his view of the proper elements of a review essay is heavily prescriptive. Most importantly, the notion that only specialist professional historians are qualified to discuss history is one that serves to limit participation in public discussions. To the extent that professionalization excludes the subjects of history from such discussions, it acts to deprive rather than inform.

CHURCH AND STATE

ON DECEMBER 8, 2005, I described to my wife the

"hunger" I had sensed in the three dozen community leaders who had attended my school district's "Education for the 21st Century" dialogue. A few days later I read Michael Lerner's editorial, "Hostile Takeover," [*Tikkun*, January/February 2006] and his use of this same word, "hunger." Lerner attributes this hunger, felt by so many Americans, as a search for meaning, purpose, and being valued—as a desire for increased spirituality. I agree. My school citizens' comments were expressions of their desire to be to be acknowledged and valued by their neighbors.

How we get to that state of increased spirituality is what concerns me. Yes, "keep(ing) values out of the public sphere" is a non-starter

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EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

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PUBLISHERS	George & Trish Vradenburg
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Liz Winer at 510-644-1200 or liz@tikkun.org

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Mark Werlin at 510-644-1200 or members@tikkun.org

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as the results of recent national elections have established; the Democratic Party has failed to understand this hunger for spirituality. But, if we erode the separation of Church and State, what doctrine replaces it? I fear that doctrine might be "inclusivity."

A week after my community meeting, a neighboring town, Manhasset (New York), had its annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony at one of its parks. A Roman Catholic priest had been invited to bring greetings. In his remarks, the priest made reference to "Jesus Christ, Our Savior." The Town Supervisor, a Jew, was apparently appalled, and said as much. He publicly reminded the priest and the hundred attendees that the ceremony was not a religious one and,

therefore, all remarks should be neutral, or at least more inclusive of other religions.

Of concern to me is what others will do with a universal call, from Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, for a spiritual vision defined by government.

If one manifestation of government support for spirituality is inclusivity, and inclusivity becomes the legally accepted alternative to separation of church and state, who will judge who and what will be included? Yes, we need to feed this universal "hunger." But let's do it carefully.

—NAME, ADDRESS
WITHHELD

Editor Responds:

What we need is inclusivity in a context of neutrality. For example, I propose

that a wide variety of creation stories be taught, including those of Native Americans, Greeks, Babylonians, early Egyptians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in a course on world religions. Beginning with the sixth grade, every school would teach a world religions course in which we have presentations by all the world's major traditions.

According to this proposal, each religion gets a video that presents its perspective on an issue appropriate for that grade level. Every one of these videos would compellingly advocate the truth of a given religion's particular worldview. The teacher's responsibility would be to present the video without comment. The video would

start by encouraging students to report the names of teachers who do comment and fail to remain neutral. Guilty teachers would be brought up on charges for this interference.

Any school that elected to adopt this policy would be required to present the views of each of these religions every year through the twelfth grade. The school remains neutral, yet inclusively presents a large variety of perspectives. I don't think that this can be done, however, with public celebrations of a religious nature. Therefore any public facility used for the celebration of one religion should be equally available to all for the celebration of their events, with equal support from the officials of the civic entity involved. ■

Our alumni have authored hundreds of scholarly articles, scores of masterful commentaries and a consumer's guide to medieval medicine.

No one can accuse Maud Kozodoy of being narrow-minded. With a background in physics and molecular biology, Maud entered The Graduate School with a unique perspective on Jewish thought. Maud's research blends history, science, poetry, philosophy and Judaica with original insights into medieval Jewish scientific literature.

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Maud Kozodoy

Doctoral Candidate
Medieval Jewish Studies
JTS
New York, NY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Current THINKING

Twenty Years Young

Saying that American culture privileges youth is not necessarily a compliment.

It often means we prefer naivety to experience or impulsiveness to sophistication. When we are at our best, however, what we mean by youth is the combination of passion and energy that drives ideas forward.

All this to preface the magazine you now hold in your hands. This May, *Tikkun* will be twenty years young.

To celebrate, we've given ourselves what the magazine industry calls a "redesign," under the superb guidance of our art director, Jonathan Wieder. Our goal is to bring the passion and energy we feel to the surface, in a magazine that is easier to read and that better reflects who we are and where we are going.

Tikkun was founded as a Jewish critique of politics, culture, and society. We are still that, but we've also become a place for Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and others who are spiritual or "spiritual but not religious" to explore the intersection between spirituality and politics. The Jewish tradition of social justice is relevant



for anyone who believes, as we do, that an authentic spirituality requires political action. Increasingly, our readers remind us that the reverse is also true: that political action is most effective when it speaks to our deepest spiritual needs.

In a world where we often hear only the voices of cynicism, *Tikkun* has remained deeply committed to hope. Rather than paint the world in black and white, we listen to what others feel and say, and seek ways to answer their needs within a progressive framework. In these ways, *Tikkun* has become a magazine that fully embraces

its larger mission of *tikkun olam*, "healing the world."

The redesigned *Tikkun* allows you, the reader, greater ease in finding the articles that may interest you the most. If you are attracted to a provocative analysis of politics and culture, turn first to our editorials and our "Politics and Society" and "Culture" sections. If you aspire to the social justice and peace elements in your own religious or spiritual tradition, you may find yourself drawn to our interfaith "Spiritual Activism" section. If you care about what it means to be Jewish today, check out our "Judaism" and "Culture"

sections. And, no matter what your spiritual background, if you are perplexed or angered by the situation in Israel, be sure to turn to the "Israel/Palestine" section. Or be like us, and read them all!

What matters to us is that you find in *Tikkun* a politics you can believe in, a culture that makes sense, and a spirituality that resonates with your highest aspirations.

We appreciate the support we have received from readers like you through our twenty years. We'd really like to know what you think of *Tikkun*'s new look. Please email us at editors@tikkun.org

COMING SOON

Starting in February, Michael Lerner will embark on a North American reading tour in support of his brand new book, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right*.

FEBRUARY 23RD

Corte Madera, CA

Book Passage 7 PM

FEBRUARY 26TH

Seattle, WA

United Church of Christ 10 AM

Temple Beth Am 3 PM

Third Place Books 5 PM

University

Unitarian Church 7 PM

FEBRUARY 27TH

Seattle, WA

Eliot Bay 7:30 PM

FEBRUARY 28TH

Seattle, WA

Seattle City Club 12 NOON

MARCH 2ND

Chicago, IL

Northwestern

University 6 PM

MARCH 5TH

Portland, OR

First Unitarian

Church 9 AM and 11 AM

First Congregational

Church 7 PM

MARCH 6TH

Eugene, OR

Temple Beth Israel 7 PM

MARCH 7TH

Portland, OR

Portland State

University 1 PM

Powells Bookstore 7:30 PM

MARCH 8TH

Miami, FL

Books & Books 8 PM

MARCH 9TH

Miami, FL

Beth David

Congregation 7:30 PM

MARCH 14TH

Washington, DC

Politics and Prose 7 PM

MARCH 19TH

Atlanta, GA

The Temple 10 AM

MARCH 20TH

Austin, TX

Bookpeople 7 PM

MARCH 22ND

Los Angeles, CA

Loyola Marymount

University 7 PM

MARCH 26TH

Louisville, KY

The Temple 5 PM

MARCH 27TH

Pittsburgh, PA

Pittsburgh Jewish

Community Center 7:30 PM

MARCH 28TH

Philadelphia, PA

Free Library 12 NOON

MARCH 30TH

New York City, NY

Open Center 8 PM

MARCH 31ST-APRIL 1ST

Santa Fe Conference

Location TBA

APRIL 2ND

Albuquerque, NM

First Unitarian

Church 9:30 AM and 11 AM

University of

New Mexico 2 PM

APRIL 4TH

Toronto

TBA

For more information and updates please go to www.tikkun.org or call 510-528-6250.

President-elect Michelle Bachelet speaks during a news conference at a hotel in Santiago, Chile. Bachelet is the first woman to be elected president in Chile.



Hope from the South

The recent electoral victories of Michelle Bachelet of Chile and Evo Morales of Bolivia, joined to the militant voice of Ugo Chavez of Venezuela and the increasingly independent path chosen by the Argentinians, have given hope to those around the world who wish to see an improvement in the living conditions of the world's poor.

For decades, U.S. corporations and a U.S.-dominated global economy have touted the "improvements" they've made to third world economies even as people in those countries became impoverished. How could that be? How could you say a country is getting "richer" when most of its people are becoming poorer? Well, it's possible if you judge a country's wellbeing only by its total income. If there is huge growth in the income of the upper 20 percent of the population, that can cover dramatically significant declines in the incomes of the lower 80 percent of the population.

But people in these countries are catching on to this accounting trick. That's why Chileans just elected a president who has promised to build a more equitable and tolerant society, based on "understanding, tolerance, and—why not say it—love."

We should rejoice when, instead of turning to armed struggle and terrorism, the people turn to the ballot box and vote in administrations that seek to defend the poor and improve their economic wellbeing. The people of South America not only deserve our active support, but can be a model for us in overcoming our own country's growing income gap.

Violence for Peace?

Munich the film, Bush and the War Against Terror, and the Problem with Being Realistic in Foreign Policy

BY MICHAEL LERNER

A CLOSE FRIEND OF MINE CAME OUT OF STEVEN Spielberg's *Munich* with what has become a predictable reaction in the Jewish community: "Well, the movie makes a good case for why violence just generates more violence. And yet, it has no solutions, and neither does anyone else. I just don't know how to answer when my relatives in Israel tell me that 'it's a harsh world, and retribution doesn't always work, but there's really no alternative when dealing with the kinds of ruthless people who murdered athletes at Munich than to track them down and kill them so that others who engage in this kind of activity learn that they will pay with their lives. Let's not be naïve about how evil these terrorists really are and how unlikely they are to be moved by our decency. It's a terrible world we live in, and we should mourn the choices we have to make, but we really have no alternative but to defend ourselves from these madmen.'"

I understand the appeal of this argument. Unfortunately, it is the same logic that brought us the war in Iraq as a preventive measure against terrorism, and it is the same logic that leads the United States to spend hundreds of billions of dollars each year on wars and preparations for future conflicts.

It's not that the argument being made has no plausibility. It's just that the strategy that it suggests has been tried for the past five thousand years, and it keeps on failing and keeps on reproducing a world in which violence increases each century. In the case of *Munich*, it leads to the reality of the Israel/Palestine conflict, in which each side points to the violence of the other as justification for its own violence yet to come. There is no end to it.

Do we really need to go through a series of twenty-first century nuclear wars to get humanity to reject this kind of thinking? Its logic is self-fulfilling: "The other side will strike us first if they get nuclear weapons, so we've got to strike them before they do." That's what policy makers are talking about in relation to Iran. If this logic doesn't impel nuclear madness

from U.S. war planners, as it likely will, it will certainly move planners in China or Pakistan or elsewhere at some point in the next forty years as U.S. global power inevitably diminishes.

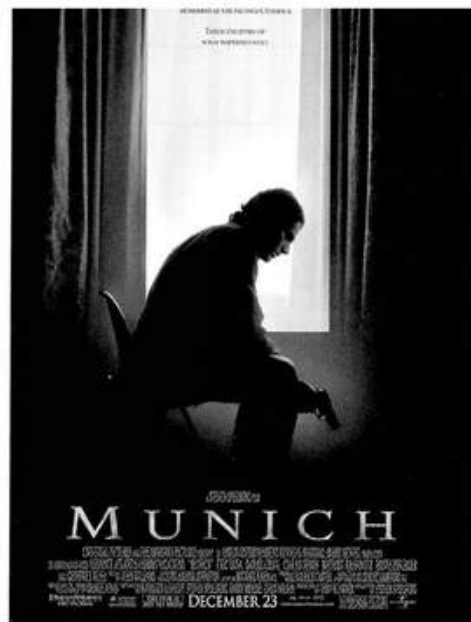
Here's the answer from America: "We just need to make sure that it's only the good guys who have these weapons." So, our argument to Iran and to North Korea is something like this: "Don't you see that Americans are good guys with only peaceful intentions, and so are our allied states who have nuclear weapons like Israel? That's why we have a right to these weapons—because we are so responsible in how we use violence. Whereas you guys are really the bad guys, don't you get that? So obviously you shouldn't have the right to develop these weapons."

Guess what? That argument doesn't feel very convincing to the states involved. Nor to the Chinese or Russians who are

Please read Rabbi Lerner's new book *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* in the next two weeks.

Barnes and Noble and Borders are the two most important booksellers in the United States. They sell front-table space in their stores to publishers, but will not do so for books that they don't believe will achieve high-volume sales. So even if we tried to buy the placement for *The Left Hand of God*, we couldn't, unless sales are high in the first few weeks. That means that you need to act now. If there is a large demand for the book from the outset, the chains will keep it up front. Otherwise, within a few weeks it will be on the back shelves, and a few weeks after that it will disappear from most retailers except for a few specialty stores.

This book offers us a unique opportunity to break through to mass consciousness with a spiritual politics. Create a study group with friends and neighbors—so that they can read it together. Encourage everyone you know to get a copy. If these ideas get more widely read, your own highest ideals will get taken more seriously.



blocking any imposition of U.S. rule on those states. So, yes, maybe some military strikes by the United States or Israel against Iran will set them back a few years, but, no, this is not a long-term strategy that will actually deter anyone from developing nuclear weapons.

The same argument holds for the terrorist front. The United States can say to the peoples of the world: "We are the peace lovers, and those terrorists must be isolated because they are the violent ones." But given the war in Iraq, and the U.S. role in the world for the past fifty years, very few countries are persuaded by such an argument.

Now my point is not that America is worse than other countries that have in the past achieved the status of running a global empire or that there is moral justification for terror. I abhor terrorists and want to see their way of life defeated, just as I abhor empire builders. Our task is not to set ourselves up as judges of which of the various forces of violence is better than others. In such a match-up in the world, I'd side with the United States, although its actions are morally offensive, because it still has democratic institutions and human rights that are superior to other purveyors of violence in the world. But that judgment should not stop us from asking if the path that Western governments are pursuing is a path that is likely to lead us to safety and security. This question is not about who is good or who is bad, but about what works. And the policy of violence against violence has not worked and will not work for any sustained period of time for any major power in history. In short, the "realists" are not actually realistic.

What would be realistic today would be to try to deal with the life situations that make people so angry and desperate that they are willing to listen to terrorists or champions of state violence.

In my book *The Left Hand of God* I give a detailed account of how this works, so here I'm only giving the briefest reference to that argument. On the one hand, we have to deal with the reality of global material suffering: 2 billion people living on less than two dollars a day, 1.3 billion living on less than one dollar a day, and hundreds of millions of refugees living in

A poster for Munich, and the real thing, in 1972.

conditions where water is scarce and physical security non-existent. On the other hand, we have the culturally devastating impact of the values of global

capitalism: the globalization of selfishness, materialism, and cynicism; the resultant breakdown of families and communities of meaning (religious and cultural); the imposition of market values and market consciousness; and the ridiculing of love, kindness, generosity, awe and wonder at the universe, or anything else that can't be shown to be useful in producing power, money, or immediate gratification.

Dealing with this will take a two-pronged strategy, described in *The Left Hand of God* as "the Strategy of Generosity":

First, a Global Marshall Plan that dedicates for the next twenty years at least 5 percent of the gross domestic product of the G-8 countries to the task of eliminating global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate health care, and inadequate education (not only in other countries, but in the United States as well).

Second, a massive reorientation of values in the advanced industrial world, what we in the Tikkun Community and the Network of Spiritual Progressives call a New Bottom Line, so that institutions and social practices get judged efficient, rational, or productive to the extent that they maximize love and caring, ethical and ecological sensibilities and practices, kindness and generosity, all of which inspire us to see other human beings as manifestations of the sacred and encourage us to respond to the universe with awe and wonder.

"Sure," you might object, "those are pretty ideas, but first we need to create safety in our world, then we'll talk about love."

Well, it will never happen in that order. The strategy of using violence to secure a world of nonviolence has failed over and over and over again for the past five thousand years, and there is no rational reason to think that it will work now.

"Ok, you've got a point," the skeptic might respond, "but why can't we do both?"

For the people who say we can do both, let's try it. Let's see which candidates for public office are willing to commit

themselves to a budget that gives as much to global healing as to “defense” and “homeland security.” Let’s simply demand that our candidates for elected office commit themselves to voting against any military expenditures that are not matched dollar for dollar by expenditures whose sole goal is to end poverty—around the world and at home.

That would be a good step. But as the skeptic would reply, American politicians would think this was “hopelessly naïve” because it couldn’t gain enough support. So our own friends, the liberal and progressive candidates who will soon be asking you for your energy and your money to support their candidacies, will tell you that they are not going to make that kind of 50 percent pledge, nor even a 25 percent pledge, because they already know in their bones that no one will join them. So this “realism” leads them back into the same corner of supporting

generation of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Indonesian, Iraqi, Russian, Turkish, Jordanian, Argentine, Brazilian, and South Korean workers what is rational—namely to pursue self-interest without regard to the consequences for others and to learn how to compete in the endless struggle of all against all (Tom Friedman’s best-selling book *The World Is Flat* gives a perfect description of that world in between his breathless cheerleading for it). That’s why, if we want safety and homeland security, we not only need a strategy of generosity, but a New Bottom Line in our own society as well.

Utopian? No. What’s utopian is to think that we can continue using violence against violence as a way to end violence.

I don’t expect that a world addicted to violence can go “cold turkey” on violence right away. But we could take some powerful first steps. We could implement the 50 percent rule—demand

LET’S DEMAND THAT OUR CANDIDATES for elected office commit themselves to voting against any military expenditures that are not matched dollar for dollar by expenditures whose sole goal is to end poverty around the world and at home.

expenditures that guarantee precisely the world we don’t believe in.

What if we did take the 50 percent rule? It would not be enough. Not only because it would not be a large enough financial commitment, but also because there’s more to this problem than can be dealt with by a strong financial commitment (though that is a very important first step).

The anger at U.S. hegemony around the world is not just about money; it’s also about values. It’s about a Western capitalist worldview that anyone with the slightest sensitivity to spiritual or humanistic values will find offensive, but it’s nevertheless the worldview that is presented by international corporations that are shaping the world and teaching the next

the money each government spends on military spending be matched by contributions to a Global Marshall plan.

And we could implement the New Bottom Line. (See the Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that is part of the program of the Tikkun Community and the Network of Spiritual Progressives to see how this could happen in a concrete way. To read the Amendment, visit www.tikkun.org.)

And we could set up a global system that allowed for an international nonviolent peace force to intervene in small regional disputes, the UN to send armed peacekeepers to rescue populations that faced human rights violations or potential genocide that could be prevented by a commitment of less than 20,000 troops, and agree that there would be no military interventions by any country or set of countries that sent more than 20,000 troops into a given area to engage in armed intervention without there being a global vote in which two thirds of the people of the world affirmed such intervention. We have the technology today to provide a reasonable way for people to vote electronically in every village in Africa and Asia if that were our desire. We could provide debates presenting both sides of any argument, which people would have to listen to in order to vote. And we could make it possible for people to vote in conditions that were safe and allowed them to vote anonymously, should they be fearful of being persecuted for their opinions.

Difficult as such a scenario would be to implement, it would be far less costly and far more moral than letting the logic of violence for violence’s sake continue. And if you disagree with some specifics of this proposal, come up with your own alternative—because this is the debate we really need to have: about what would work to break the cycles of violence that

Stew Albert 1939–2006

Stew Albert was a Contributing Editor of *Tikkun*, wrote frequent book and movie reviews for us, and brought his warmth and humor to struggles for peace and social justice. He and I were clubbed and gassed together at the Chicago demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in 1968. Stew helped foster my friendships with Phil Ochs and John Lennon, and he joined *Tikkun*’s critique of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Read his book *Who The Hell is Stew Albert* to get a full sense of this irrepressible spirit who was a cofounder of the Yippies and a Shayne Yid—a beautiful exemplification of what’s best in Judaism. —Michael Lerner

have been generated by imperial powers and the inevitable rebellions against their imperial rule (whether that rule is exercised by overt interventions like that of the U.S. in Iraq or China's in Tibet or Russia's in Chechnya) or through the more subtle forms of economic and cultural domination that are just as powerful as imperialist violence and can at times provoke just as much outrage.

Steven Spielberg's *Munich* is brilliant in showing a small part of the human cost of such political logic. Unfortunately, we don't get to see it played out in the lives of the families in the Palestinian world, possibly because showing that would have been construed by American film reviewers and the Jewish community as "moral equivalence," treating the lives of the terrorists as equally valuable to the lives of those that they killed. But we've consistently argued in *Tikkun* that this argument is perverse.

Of course there is no moral equivalence, because from the standpoint of the world's religious and spiritual systems, every human life is ultimately precious and unique, and so no suffering on the part of one human can be justified by the suffering or death of another. There is never moral equivalence, because there is never any way of measuring the spirit of God in some mechanistic, materialistic, or mathematical formula. Every human being is precious to God, an embodiment of the holy, and every unnecessary loss of life or suffering is an infinite tragedy.

If we would allow ourselves to view the human situation from outside the box created by the media, politicians, and corporate opinion shapers, we'd realize that humanity is heading

towards extinction—if not through the destruction of the environment first, then quite possibly through nuclear war.

From the most narrow standpoint of self-interest, we need to get over the limitations of thought imposed by the realists, and recognize that we are on a crazy, self-destructive path. In *The Left Hand of God*, I explain what we can do to change the current discourse. I present a Progressive Spiritual Covenant with Americans. Let me know what you think *after* you've finished reading it (rabbilerner@tikkun.org). Better still, after you've read it, start a study group with as many people as possible, and come to our Spiritual Activism Conference in D.C. May 17 through 20. It's going to be an amazing event, with speakers ranging from Network of Spiritual Progressives' co-chairs Cornel West and Sister Joan Chittister to Iraq war opponent Cindy Sheehan and progressive Evangelicals like the Reverend Tony Campolo and Glen Harold Stassen. On the Thursday of the conference (May 18) we will be meeting with our own individual Congressional representatives to present the Spiritual Covenant as a jumping off point for trying to change the discourse in America.

You heard about it first in *Tikkun*. We are giving you the first chance to register. But space in D.C. is even more limited than it was in Berkeley, so don't be among those who said, "yes, I plan to go" but waited to register until there was no more space! Do it as soon as you've finished reading the book. To register go to www.spiritualprogressives.org, call 510-528-6250, or email NSP@tikkun.org.

In the Shadow of the Hamas Victory

The 2006 Israeli Elections

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE LABOR PARTY—freed of the opportunists who were always more interested in their own power than in serving the cause of peace and justice and who jumped into Ariel Sharon's Kadima Party the moment they saw that it would be a surer path to power—has reconstituted itself as a party with some interesting ideas and principles. Amir Peretz, the new leader of Labor, has been a champion of social justice for the most oppressed members of Israeli society. At a time when one out of three Israeli children lives in poverty, a voice for that constituency is badly needed. The government employees, kibbutzniks, and

professionals who constituted much of Labor's traditional base were rarely able to get enthusiastic about a social justice agenda when the party was under the control of its old elite.

The bad news is that even when Labor allies with Yossi Beilin's Meretz party, the share of the votes it gets is less than 25 percent. The biggest bloc in the Knesset is made up of the "realists" who followed Ariel Sharon into the Kadima before Sharon's stroke. They supported the prime minister's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank, believing that only a tough leader with a reputation for hostility toward the Palestinians could lead the country out of the Occupation.

We may never know what Sharon would have done had he



remained prime minister. Yet those who began to redefine Sharon as the ultimate peacemaker were surely misunderstanding his path. Sharon may have been a pragmatist, but he was also a territorial expansionist who never gave up his commitment to grab as much land as possible for the State of Israel. Fearing the power of international pressure, Sharon made clear to his party that the unilateral move from Gaza was in the service of creating international support for Israel to hold onto much of the West Bank.

Sharon's refusal to negotiate with the mild-mannered and peace-oriented Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, his systematic demolition of the PA's civil infrastructure, followed by the ludicrous demand that he would only deal with the Fatah-dominated PA if they used their destroyed security apparatus to repress Hamas precisely when the PA had no power to do so, and his insistence that the withdrawals from Gaza and the northern West Bank would be unilateral, all served to weaken the PA and give credence to Hamas' claim that Israel was not responding to the nonviolence of Fatah, but to the violence of Hamas. This was no surprise to those who understood that Sharon's major aim was to create a reality in the Palestinian world in which Hamas would become dominant, and the rest of the world would then abandon any efforts to press Israel into territorial compromises beyond those that Sharon intended to make unilaterally. It was a brilliant strategy for the expansionists, and it is now in full bloom.

We have feared this outcome ever since we saw how during

the late 1980s the Likud sought to build up Hamas as an alternative to Fatah, precisely because the Likud sought to sow divisions within the Palestinian political community. Instead of the Israel/Palestine conflict being seen as a struggle that could be ended by an exchange of land for peace, it could now be reconstrued as an extension of the war between the West and Islam, and in that formulation many who had previously called for Palestinian rights would support the expansion of Israel's settlement activities in the Occupied Territories.

The likely outcome of the Israeli election will be a government that will question the legitimacy of a Palestinian government that includes Hamas. We detest the terrorist acts of Hamas, just as we abhor the acts of state-sponsored violence (usually excused as "collateral damage") that have led Israel to kill at least twice as many Palestinian civilians as Hamas terrorists have killed Israelis. We will not close our lives or excuse away the violence from the "liberation struggle" any more than we do the violence of the occupiers. Every human life is precious to God and to us.

Yet, from our standpoint, the incorporation of Hamas into the Palestinian government provides a great opportunity for Israel to make a real peace. For the first time, the Palestinians could have a government that represents most of the Palestinian people and would be in a position to enforce an agreement for peace. Instead, we hear a chorus of commentators saying that Israel should not negotiate with Hamas since they are terrorists (the same argument that for years prevented negotiations with the PLO).

Yet, in a war, you negotiate with your enemies—not with the people whose behavior you like, but with the people who will actually kill you if you cannot work out a compromise. You can't stop war unless you speak with those with whom you are in conflict.

If Labor joins Kadima to form a coalition government, it should at least get two major concessions: first, an end to the pro-business policies that caused a huge increase in the gap between rich and poor in Israel during the Sharon years, and second, an end to religious coercion in personal affairs and the creation of a secular Israeli state that no longer imposes Judaism upon its secular majority. If Labor were to commit fully to those two positions and refuse to join the government without the power to implement them, it might win the respect of many who in the past detested Labor's inconsistencies (in much the same way that so many Americans detest liberals of the Kerry/Feinstein/Biden variety).

We wish Israel's new government well and pray that peace and justice will soon replace the reliance on power and demeaning of the other, which so often surface as a defense against both realistic fears and shadows of Holocaust trauma, and which have been so long a major part of the political

culture of Israel. But we have little real hope for the short term until Israelis and Americans understand that our own well-being depends on the wellbeing of everyone else in the world. In the Israeli/Palestinian context, that means that Israel's security will never be achieved through repression but only by helping the Palestinian people achieve the same level of security and welfare that Israelis rightfully demand for themselves.

Anyone who reads my book *Healing Israel/Palestine* (North Atlantic Books, 2004) can immediately understand that both Israelis and Palestinians have legitimate grievances, because both sides have acted with violence and terror toward each other, and that both sides need to repent and atone for past misdeeds. This is exactly why we need to start privileging compassion and reconciliation, rather than the path of hard-heartedness that both sides have too often shown one another. Unrealistic? Well, how realistic has the path that both sides have pursued for the past century been? It's time for a whole new way, a strategy of generosity to replace the strategies of domination and physical violence. The other path has never worked—let's give peace a real chance. ■

Rabbi Michael Lerner is the editor of Tikkun.

THE CONTRARIAN

Hope in American Policy

BY GEORGE VRADENBURG

PROGRESSIVES ARE IN PERSISTENT ATTACK mode on America these days. Everywhere they look, they can only see negatives—increases in poverty and the uninsured, deprivation of civil rights and liberties, rising racial barriers, and foreign policies driven by fear and militarism. To them, America has lost its way.

With that attitude, it is no wonder that progressivism is in trouble. Driven by hatred of George W. Bush, progressive leaders seem to compete in out-doing each other to find more things wrong with America. Rather than look for a better America, they seem to take great joy in America's decline. Possible Republican

corruption in Congressional lobbying practices? Great, that means we've got a chance in the November elections. Weakness in the economy, stalemate in Iraq? Good, that means Bush is in trouble. Progressives seem to be measuring their political standing by the size of the bad headlines for the "other guy," not by the forward movement of any positive agenda.

Progressives are out of touch with America. Americans are driven not by fear and loathing but by hope and optimism. Americans are not open to change coming from political leaders who are driven by "beating" the other guy. Instead, Americans want leaders who couch their message of change in a shared vision of the future.

Martin Luther King, Jr. went to the mountaintop and saw a future land of milk and honey. We all, regardless of race, were persuaded to follow him because he was able to paint such a vivid picture of a better America, one drawn in language from our shared Constitution and scriptures, and, in doing so, he touched on a shared ambition to better ourselves. Today, progress on civil rights and black poverty is stalled because America is being painted by progressives as so filled with barriers, hostility, and rigidity that it is impossible to see the path to a better place. Why do the hard work of trying to improve America when it is so much easier to blame others for making that work inevitably fruitless?

Were we locked in an inescapable and perpetual Cold War with Soviet Communism? Yes, said many. Yet Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher saw a world of prosperity and liberty for all and appealed to peoples behind the Iron Curtain to strive to achieve it. They did, and Communism collapsed from within.

Were women, by tradition and biology, necessarily bound to hearth and home and family? Yes, said many. Yet early feminists portrayed, again in the shared language and principles

of our Constitution, a land of greater opportunity, prosperity, and justice if women were accorded "equal" opportunity in all spheres of the economy and of society.

These global and domestic changes were led by those who were able to see, and able to communicate in language accessible to *all*, the better world that could be achieved *for all*.

If change is to occur, it will occur more rapidly and with less violence, if those who favor the status quo are persuaded that their own lives will be improved with change. To do so, the vision of the future must be inclusive, not exclusive.

Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and progressives, should not view themselves as enemies. Racial and gender injustice, poverty, and oppression are the enemies.

One should not gloat when one's opponent loses; one should take joy in the progress of justice, prosperity, and liberty.

Americans look to leaders able to articulate their shared values and to connect those values to sensible solutions to their problems. In 2006, progressives should be looking for that kind of new leadership. ■

George Vradenburg is co-publisher of Tikkun.

MASH DOWN BABYLON

I Dream of Ideology

BY JOEL SCHALIT

FOR MANY LEFT-WING OBSERVERS, IT WAS THEIR worst nightmare come true. A brand new political party without a platform was polling higher in election surveys than any of its long-entrenched competitors. Out of either disenchantment or desperation, the majority of Israelis indicated that they were willing to put their nation's fate in the hands of the unknowable. Some pundits even went so far as to argue that the public's preference for Kadima was a sign of the collapse of Israel's party system. Rejecting every parliamentary list as unsatisfactory, Israelis weren't so much placing their faith in a non-existent alternative as they were rejecting politics altogether.

To more conservative commentators, Kadima's popularity signaled a new political sensibility that had taken root in the wake of the Disengagement's success. Combining the Left's historical antipathy towards the Occupation, the settlers, and

religion with a neoliberal social agenda and a conservative outlook on security matters, Kadima's growing legion of enthusiasts was evidence of a growing centrist consensus overtaking Israel's radically polarized political sphere. Rejecting such ideologies as Right and Left as outdated and extreme, this phenomenon gives every indication that the average Israeli voter has finally come of age.

Neither analysis is entirely wrong. In a perverse way, each complements the other. The first evinces a well-founded fear of a disillusioned protest voter who, bludgeoned by terrorist violence, government corruption scandals, and declining social services, has had every ounce of idealism squeezed out of them and is thus willing to back any party capable of changing the status quo. The second imagines an increasingly commonplace, middle-class Israeli desire for a Third Way liberal party (not unlike Tony Blair's New Labor) that understands the needs of high-tech labor and

emphasizes market-based solutions to social problems. Both kinds of voters, regardless of their differences, inevitably collaborate with each other to bring about the election of the same political party.

Clearly, Israel's pre-election mood is complicated. As accurate as both of these interpretations are, the problems with them are even more important than the phenomenon that they describe. Both rightfully replicate the paralysis Israeli politics has been mired in over the course of the past fifty-eight years. And on that basis, during a time of radical uncertainty, both understandably project that this situation will continue on into the future. But they are both mistaken in assuming that the Disengagement has brought about a wholesale move to the political center. Instead, it destroyed Israel's post-Six Day War political consensus, which subordinated every issue of national concern to the settlement project and the defense of the territories, blowing apart the entire fabric of Israeli party politics.

The problem with the new centrism is that it's being promoted as though it were a new consensus, when in fact it is a potential ideology of a political party that hasn't yet determined what it believes. Even more distressing is how convincing an argument it makes for itself as a generalized

political phenomenon when the two Israeli parties that historically have been the most influential—Labor and Likud—have, in the wake of the Disengagement, become more ideologically distinct than ever. With the former now the standard bearer of a newly confident Left, and the latter now the party of the extreme Right, one would be hard pressed to say that Israeli politics is entering a new period of ideological homogeneity.

This is exactly why Kadima is polling so well. Without an identity, led by former members of both Labor and Likud, it epitomizes the schizophrenia of a country recently—though not totally—freed from a history of stifling political conformity. However, this does not mean that we need not worry about Kadima, because we should. Given the political histories of its leadership, we have every reason to fear that the ideology Kadima will espouse is neoliberal, and though the party may distance itself from the irrationality of the Occupation, what it's really in search of is a kinder and gentler form of conservatism. ■

Joel Schalit is managing editor of Tikkun. He is currently hard at work on his third book for Akashic, Israel vs. Utopia, and producing the forthcoming Elders of Zion album.

VOICE FOR PEACE

Mr. Peretz, It's Time for Peace Now

BY MITCHELL PLITNICK

IN 2002, A BRASH NEWCOMER TO NATIONAL ISRAELI politics rose to the top of the Labor Party, defying polls that projected a clear victory for Shimon Peres. He ran on a peace agenda and excited some observers who thought he might challenge Ariel Sharon. But as the campaign wore on, Amram Mitzna softened his peace message. Many of his potential supporters were uninspired, and the Arab community in Israel essentially boycotted the elections. In the general elections, Sharon trounced Mitzna.

One shouldn't draw too close a parallel between Mitzna and

the new Labor leader, Amir Peretz. Each has strengths and weaknesses the other does not. But Peretz should learn from Mitzna and not make the same mistake he did.

In his campaign for the Labor leadership, Peretz criticized Sharon's unilateralist strategy. He made it eminently clear that peace could only be achieved by working with Palestinian leadership, and that Sharon's unilateral strategy had undermined Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. This was a key factor in his victory.

After winning the Labor election, Peretz understandably moved to reassure the centrists in his party that he is not

moving Labor too far to the Left. While we in the peace camp might prefer it otherwise, Peretz will not be in leadership very long if his constituents believe he is much more radical than they are.

On January 20, Labor announced its platform, and Peretz demonstrated that he may be willing to heed public opinion and press forward with it. In the wake of a poll that showed that 54 percent of Israelis would be willing to cede parts of East Jerusalem in exchange for peace, Labor came out and proposed that Israel give up the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. It is encouraging that Peretz would take public opinion and try to push it a little further toward peace, which it seems this platform does.

Yet it still does little to challenge the Kadima party on the peace question. Ehud Olmert has also indicated potential willingness to cede parts of Arab East Jerusalem, though he has not actually said he would do this. The Labor platform includes keeping the major settlement blocs and completing the Separation Wall in the West Bank. The winning strategy Peretz employed by stating that unilateralism can't work seems to be largely absent from Labor's rhetoric even today. Peretz' rush to embrace unilateral moves in the wake of Hamas' electoral victory only blurs the distinction between Labor and Kadima even further.

Peretz is on shaky ground in defense matters and in dealing

with the Palestinians. He is certainly correct that economic issues are his strength and that they should be at the forefront of his campaign. But he is making a mistake in toning down his peace rhetoric.

While Kadima has gotten stronger, and Likud has been consolidating its strength among right-wing elements, Labor has hovered in polls between a projected eighteen and twenty-three seats in the next Knesset. Kadima, which Labor once looked poised to challenge, has left Labor in the dust. It seems unlikely that a peace platform that so closely resembles Kadima's can return to Labor the six to twelve seats it has lost in the polls since the high-water mark of Peretz's victory.

Peretz is only beginning his campaign, and he has bolstered Labor's ticket with some recognizable names with strong defense backgrounds, such as Ami Ayalon. Kadima is almost sure to win this next election, but Peretz has a chance to make Labor a significant opposition party and position himself well for the next elections. If he wishes to do so, he must show the Israeli and Jewish public that he has a workable plan for ending the Occupation. Ceding the peacemaker role to Kadima can only lead to disaster, for Labor, for Israel, and for the Palestinians. ■

Mitchell Plitnick is the director of education and policy for Jewish Voice for Peace.

TIKKUN COMMUNITY/NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES

What We're Doing

BY MICHAEL GALVAN AND ROBYN THOMAS

AS WE LISTEN TO MEMBERS OF TIKKUN COMMUNITY and Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) chapters around the country, one point of discussion keeps arising. What is the relationship between the Tikkun Community and the Network of Spiritual Progressives? Are the two groups inclusive or exclusive of one another? If I join one group, am I a member of the other? Are they in competition with one another? Let us share a few thoughts, which we hope will provide some clarity.

The Tikkun Community's goal is to build an international network of people who share an intellectual and spiritual perspective. We are activist social healers bringing a progressive

spiritual politics into the world. We are supportive of one another and help each other sustain a commitment to a transformative social agenda. Members of the Tikkun Community seek to spread a recognition of our interconnectedness, of the spiritual dimension of life, and of the necessity for a New Bottom Line in all of our economic and social institutions.

Many Tikkun Community chapters have a special focus on healing the situation in Israel/Palestine. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict impacts the entire world. No clearer example is needed of two groups of people, each with its story of trauma and dehumanization of the other, who must learn how to tell the other side's narrative in a convincing and compassionate

way. Only when both sides recognize that both have virtues, as well as faults, can they hope to move to a real reconciliation of the heart.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP), a project of the Tikkun Community, represents the application of the Tikkun perspective to America. We are an interfaith organization composed of people who are religious, "spiritual but not religious," or secular and who support a politics of meaning. We believe that we not only have material needs, but have spiritual (meaning) needs as well. We bring this perspective to American society to bridge the artificial binaries of Right/Left, red/blue, and religious/secular.

Our goal is to reclaim the spiritual dimension of American society from the Religious Right and to challenge the hostility to spiritual concerns in some sectors of the Left. These two extremes will not build a world of peace and justice. As Pope Benedict XVI stated in his Message for the World Day of Peace, 2006, "nihilism denies God's existence and his provident presence in history, while fanatical fundamentalism disfigures his loving and merciful countenance...."

The NSP will focus on changing the role of spirituality in American politics. The NSP has as its specific agenda the dissemination of our spiritual progressive analysis of American society. We commit ourselves to the task of transforming our country from a society with its Old Bottom Line of selfishness, fear, and exaggerated individualism to one with a New Bottom

Line of generosity, love, and collaboration.

This January, the leadership of the Tikkun Community and NSP began holding a monthly conference call. In our first conversation, several people talked about the need for a common effort for all of us to engage in. Amongst the possibilities discussed were the 10,000 Kites initiative, Boston's Global Warming Project, and whether to join other peace organizations in advocating final status negotiations in Israel/Palestine. Clearly, much is being discussed. Please watch out for more developments.

December and January have brought some changes to our National Office Staff. Simone Richmond and Lynn Canning, who served as National Organizers for the Tikkun Community/NSP chapters, have moved on to new projects and are no longer with us. In December, Michael Galvan, a Roman Catholic priest who has a Ph.D. in Spirituality, joined our staff as National Organizer for the Tikkun Community and the NSP. Nichola Torbett joined us this January as the Coordinator for the May Spiritual Activism Conference. Both Michael and Nichola are excited about working at Tikkun/NSP. Please contact them and let them know how they can be of help to you (mgalvan@tikkun.org, nichola@tikkun.org). ■

Michael Galvan is the national organizer for the Tikkun Community and the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Robyn Thomas is the executive director of both organizations.

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SPIRIT Matters

Selections from forthcoming books, articles, and talks



REDISCOVERING JUDAISM

*Excerpt from The Heart Has Reasons: Holocaust Rescuers and Their Stories of Courage by Mark Klemperer.
(March 2006, The Pilgrim Press)*

What is the point of trying to do good at all? That was the question that troubled me after hearing Ted's tale of Vos, the man who had been broken by the Nazis, attacked by the Resistance people he'd made great sacrifices to help, and then brutalized by Dutch prison guards. I knew, of course, that heroes aren't indestructible and that good deeds often go unrecognized, but I guess that somewhere in my mind the comic book heroes and fairy-tale endings I'd absorbed in childhood—the ones I had relied on to assuage my fears as I grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust—were still exerting their influence. Or perhaps I was still recovering from my ten years as a studio guitarist in Los Angeles, thinking that everything one does, even if it appears to be for others, should finally yield some personal reward. The rescuers, however, didn't think about personal rewards. They simply recognized a desperate need and took action. It's a bit like the midrash of how the Jews came to be the "chosen people": every other nation was offered the responsibility, but only the Jews accepted (Avodah Zarah 2b; Sifra; Brachah). Like the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, the rescuers accepted first, and only later fully understood what would be involved. On the other hand, by doing what they deeply believed to be right and just, there was a reward, one that blurs the distinction between the "altruistic" and the "selfish" gesture: by acting on behalf of others, they were safeguarding their own humanity.

Hearing how the rescuers became involved in their resistance activities had a particular resonance for me because when I first went to the Netherlands I was trying to figure out what to do with my life. Joseph Campbell's exhortation "follow your bliss" sounded good, but

what could constitute bliss? It wasn't until I met Gisela and Hetty, who made up songs to entertain the other inmates in Ravensbrück, did I realize that it might mean a state of contentment and self-respect that has nothing to do with outer circumstances—a sense of satisfaction at having done the right thing, at having stood up for what one believes, at enjoying a good reputation with the people who most matter, including oneself.

During those months in Holland of getting up early every morning, taking the train, and ringing the doorbell, something passed between me and those who welcomed me into their homes that was more than just words. Henry James may have described it best when he wrote about "those invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual." The love that permeated my time with the rescuers made it clear to me that the path they have taken is far superior to the crowded superhighways of ambition and consumption that many people in the U.S. imagine will make them happy. Though most of them live modestly, the rescuers are rich in *chesed*, in loving kindness.

After returning home, I discovered that part of me was still gazing at the vistas that had opened under the rescuers' expansive influence. As I traveled on a Trailways bus from New York City to Ithaca in December 1996, I tried to hold on to my memories of them, even as the sight of acres of cars parked in front of huge shopping malls reminded me of a life I knew well, but no longer wanted.

It was my last semester as an undergraduate at Cornell, and suddenly the emphasis on achievement and grades seemed out of balance. I knew that I was in the midst of a moral and vocational sea change, but with graduation fast approaching, I felt pressured to quickly decide my next move, so as not to be left behind in the "real world" I would soon re-enter.

And yet the rescuers' choices—both during and after the war—suggested that finding one's way in life is not so much about using the will as it is about willingness; not so much about setting goals and pursuing

them as it is about being open to life and able to respond to it: response-ability. After all, most of the rescuers had had educational and professional goals before the Nazis invaded; if they'd held to their plans, they might have graduated on time, but they would have missed the opportunity to save the lives of hundreds of children. I decided to do less planning and calculating about my future, and more listening and responding. I also did some volunteer work at a hospice, and later, at a homeless shelter. In short, I aspired to be a bit like the rescuers. Looking back now, ten years later, I see that by moving through the world in this way, my calling has taken care of itself.

I learned some practical things from the rescuers, which can be summed up in a few sentences: Spend less than you earn. Save some money. Give some money away. When I visited one of the rescuers recently, he had a six-inch stack of letters on his dining room table. As we sat down and he moved them out of the way to make more room, he mentioned that they were fundraising letters from various charities. He lets the letters build up, and then, once a year, goes through them and writes checks to the worthiest causes. But he feels bad for the other organizations, so he writes little checks to many of them also. "Even a small donation can give a lot of encouragement to people doing good work," he explained.

What a nice way to spend an afternoon. Beats trying to figure out what's going on with the plastic in your wallet. When I lived in Los Angeles, I rarely gave away money but I must have had a dozen charge cards. I was always trying to keep track of them, and I often spent too much. Now I have one. Life is good.

However, after being around the rescuers, it is difficult to conceive of my life as merely a personal journey, disconnected from civic and political concerns. Through their influence, I became aware of the tremendous opportunities that exist to join with others who also want to spend not only their money but their time to help build a more just and compassionate society. I have discovered that there are a mind-boggling array of good causes out there, and that the people championing them typically believe, as do the rescuers, that it's better to care about others than to watch out for yourself; that if you care about others, things will work out; and even if they don't, you won't regret it. As I've gotten involved with some of these causes, my sense of connection to others has been restored, and I now think of myself as a part of a caring community striving to effect positive social change all over the world.

As for my own personal debt to the rescuers, there is a deeper layer still, for they have revived my relationship with Judaism. Many of the rescuers told me that they hadn't registered a difference between Jews and non-Jews before the war, but that Hitler changed

all that and there was no going back. As the Nazis imposed their divisive way of seeing humanity onto the entire Dutch population, it became impossible not to see Jews as Jews; instead of ostracizing them, however, the rescuers came to their aid. This often brought them into close contact with strong Jewish individuals and a rich Jewish culture, even as that culture was being eradicated before their eyes.

When I met with the rescuers, I sometimes sensed that they were looking at me as a child or grandchild of someone they had rescued. They definitely saw me as Jewish, and that in itself had a profound impact. Why? Because being Jewish meant something different to them than it did to me.

I had been brought up with "Judaism lite"—the half-hearted observance of certain customs, rituals, and cultural traditions—superimposed on a mostly unspoken family history of trauma and dislocation. By contrast, the rescuers had had a tremendously powerful experience of Judaism. They associated it not only with the incredible endurance that Jews demonstrated during the Nazi occupation, but also with a vibrant canvas of culture and religion that had enlivened all of Amsterdam before the war. They saw all this as my inheritance, and thought I was helping to carry it on. They didn't go out of their way to affirm my heritage, and yet, by seeing me in that continuum, they did just that. Ironically, it took people who were not Jewish to introduce me to a Jewishness I had never before encountered.

After I returned home to the U.S., this new way of seeing Judaism stuck. Suddenly, its interweaving of social justice with spirituality seemed incredibly advanced and potent. Certainly the rescuers embody many of the ideals of Judaism. To know that, I needed only to remember some of the Torah I had read as a young person, passages such as Deuteronomy 10:17-19: "For the Lord your God . . . upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

However, as a young person, I never saw that commandment—repeated thirty-six times in the Torah—being fulfilled in any earnest way, except at the nearby suicide prevention and crisis service, which provided runaways with free counseling and set them up with a place to stay. I discovered that by running away myself when I was about fifteen, running from an emptiness so profound that to be with the caring volunteers at the crisis service felt like an emotional step up.

I've gradually come to realize, though, that the spiritual and emotional vacuum in which I was raised was yet another part of the legacy of having been born in the shadow of the Holocaust. My father, having lost faith in any God that could have allowed the death of

six million innocent people, tried to escape his sense of fear and rootlessness by fixating on material security. His childhood experiences of Polish anti-Semitism and Nazi hatred caused him to dig in his heels against a threatening world, and this meant armoring himself against any emotion that might make him vulnerable, including the whisper of his own spirit.

As a young person, I tried to kick a hole in that emptiness, which often meant rebelling against Judaism itself. I realize now that I was flailing against a post-Holocaust Judaism that had yet to recover its shining heart—a Judaism that had grown rich materially, due to the affluence of Jews in the U.S., but one that had remained spiritually bereft, even as my father had remained spiritually bereft. In the presence of the rescuers, I was finally able to break through that shell to breathe the fresh, heady air of a life lived on the other side of fear and trauma.

This was no small thing. Unresolved fear and trauma are more than old wounds that have not healed: they shape the present, and determine the future. Mistrust generates mistrust; abuse generates abuse. This is bad enough within a family, but when it happens within a community, or an entire society, the negative synergy can be deadly—as we see in Israel/Palestine today. Violence breeds fear; fear breeds violence. How to break the endless cycle?

There must be many ways, but I suspect it mostly happens one by one by one. I am grateful, in my own case, to have had the help of the rescuers. They present a crucial testimony to the Jewish community that the Jews were not entirely alone in the world during the Holocaust. The solace of that truth may be seen as a last parting gift from the rescuers to the Jewish people.

In contemporary Jewish circles, there is an oft-repeated folktale of how the saintly Baal Shem Tov used to go to a certain spot in the forest where he would light a fire, meditate, and say a special prayer on behalf of the Jewish people. Years later, one of his disciples went to that same place in the forest but didn't know how to light the fire. Nevertheless he meditated, and said the prayer. Still later, another disciple came along who knew neither how to light the fire, or say the prayer, but he was still able to meditate at the place in the forest, and that was sufficient. But finally, there came a disciple who said, "I am unable to light the fire. I do not know how to meditate, or say the prayer. I can't even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and that must be sufficient." And it was sufficient, or so we are told.

I believe that this tale obliquely expresses the sense of loss that Jews felt, and continue to feel, in the wake of the near-destruction of Jewish life and culture in Europe. To be sure, it ends with a message of comfort: the suggestion that remembering what was lost is suf-

ficient. But Judaism can't subsist on memories of a time when Jews lived full and vibrant spiritual lives, any more than the rescuers can subsist on memories of what they once did during the war. Though they told me hundreds of their stories, the rescuers did more than tell stories. By possessing a spirituality that was strengthened rather than shattered by the Holocaust, and by being powerful embodiments of the loving kindness through which, the Jewish sages tell us, the world is sustained, they were able to offer me a new vision of my heritage, one infused with *chaim*—life. In the course of being swept away by the immensity of their faith, I found myself carried back to my own.



March 20 will mark the third anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. As we go to press, 2,222 American troops have been killed, 16,420 have been wounded, and statisticians estimate that Iraq has sustained between 28,000 and 31,000 civilian fatalities. Despite these grim figures, the Bush administration continues to emphasize that such sacrifices have been well worth it. The dictatorial Ba'ath regime was toppled, its leader Saddam Hussein put on trial, and on December 15, 2005, under the protection of coalition forces, Iraqis voted in their first-ever parliamentary elections.

Despite America's efforts at helping foster a democratic political culture in Iraq, Americans are increasingly debating whether the war was indeed worth undertaking. Questioning everything from the Bush administration's justification for invasion to the economic and moral consequences of the conflict, America's religious leadership is beginning to speak up about the true meaning of the war for their congregations, offering concrete and humanitarian recommendations for its just resolution. In this brief set of selections, we offer excerpts of recent statements on the conflict by the United Methodist Church, Union of Reform Judaism, and the Catholic Church.



A CALL TO REPENTANCE AND PEACE WITH JUSTICE

*Endorsed by over one hundred Bishops of the United
Methodist Church, November 8, 2005*

As followers of Jesus Christ, who named peacemakers as blessed children of God, we call upon the United Methodist Church to join us in repentance and renewed commitment to Christ's reign of compassion, justice, reconciliation, and peace.

As elected and consecrated bishops of the church, we repent of our complicity in what we believe to be the unjust and immoral invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the face of the United States administration's rush toward military action based on misleading information, too many of us were silent.

We confess our preoccupation with institutional enhancement and limited agendas while American men and women are sent to Iraq to kill and be killed, while thousands of Iraqi people needlessly suffer and die, while poverty increases and preventable diseases go untreated.

Although we value the sacrifices of the men and women who serve in the military, we confess our betrayal of the scriptural and prophetic authority to warn the nations that true security lies not in weapons of war, but in enabling the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized to flourish as beloved daughters and sons of God.

We confess our failure to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to be a people who welcome and love all those for whom Christ died.

Aware that we are to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, we personally and as bishops commit ourselves to:

Pray daily for the end of war in general and the Iraq war specifically; for those who suffer as the result of war, including the soldiers and their families; for the Iraqi people in their struggle to find a workable form of government; and for the leaders of the United States that they will turn to truth, humility, and policies of peace through justice.

Reclaim the prophetic authority that calls nations, individuals, and communities to live faithfully in the light of God's new creation where all people know their identity as beloved children of God; where justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream; and where barriers are removed and all creation is healed, reconciled, and renewed.

Commit ourselves to peacemaking as an integral component of our own Christian discipleship, which means advocating and actively working for the things that make for peace: personal, institutional, and governmental priorities that protect the poor and most vulnerable; modeling an end to prejudice toward people of other faiths and cultures; confronting differences and conflicts with grace, humility, dialogue, and respect without being so cautious in confronting evil that we lose our moral authority.

We call upon all United Methodists to join in the pursuit of peace through justice as revealed in Holy Scripture and incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Let us move beyond caution rooted in self protection and recover moral authority anchored in commit-

ment to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Let us object with boldness when governing powers offer solutions of war that conflict with the gospel message of self-emptying love.

Let us with compassion share the pain of God's children who suffer from the devastation of war and those who live in poverty resulting from misplaced priorities and misguided public policies.

Let us work toward unity in a world of diversity, that all peoples will come to know that we belong to one another, and that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:19).



RESOLUTION ON THE WAR IN IRAQ

Union for Reform Judaism, November 18, 2005

Three years ago, the leaders of the Union for Reform Judaism addressed the prospects of war in Iraq. In September 2002, the Executive Committee of the Union's Board of Trustees discussed, at length, the morality and efficacy of the use of force. It examined the insights from Jewish moral rules regarding war and related issues, insights that remain relevant today....

These discussions of Jewish tradition and U.S. policy options led to the adoption of the position on "Unilateral Action by the U.S. Against Iraq" that supported military action by the U.S.—even unilateral action if necessary—only in the context of four propositions:

1. International cooperation is far, far better than unilateral action, and the U.S. must explore all reasonable means of attaining such support;
2. Non-military action is always preferable to military action, and the U.S. must fully explore all options to resolve the situation through such means;
3. If the effort to obtain international cooperation and support through the United Nations fails, the U.S. must work with other nations to obtain cooperation in any military action; and
4. The President should not act without Congressional approval of the use of force, including any unilateral military action taken by the U.S.

...As the United States enters its third year of an untenable war, with no end in sight, it is incumbent upon the leadership of the Reform Movement to confront these issues and take a position.

Therefore, the Union for Reform Judaism resolves to:

1. Reaffirm the principles espoused in its 2002 pre-invasion policy statement to guide us when and if future conflicts arise, and as a touchstone for assessing our current policy in Iraq, and note with grave concern that those principles were not followed when we went to war;

2. Commend our service women and men (and their families) who have answered duty's call and served our nation honorably, often with valor and distinction, and who have earned our respect and gratitude and that of the American people, and support generous benefits for them, both in Iraq and at home, thus honoring those who serve our nation and fulfilling our commitments to them; and specifically to:

- Demand that our service men and women receive appropriate flak jackets, armor and other equipment to afford them maximum protection as they carry out their mission; and

- Demand that adequate funds be made available to the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration to ensure that United States military personnel wounded in connection with the Iraq war receive the highest quality medical care available and that they and their families are afforded the necessary support (including counseling) to cope with their injuries;

3. Call upon the Bush Administration immediately to provide more transparency regarding all aspects of the war and a clear exit strategy to the American public with specific goals for troop withdrawal; some withdrawal of troops should begin after the completion of the parliamentary elections (currently scheduled for December 15, 2005) with the continuation of withdrawal implemented as soon as possible in a way that maintains stability in the nation and empowers Iraqi forces to provide for their national security;

4. Call upon Congress to:

- Provide more diligent oversight of the war and the expenditures related to it;
- Promote efforts to bring about, as soon as feasible, a withdrawal that supports peace and stability; and
- Ensure that the financial burden of the war fall not just on the poor and on future generations, but be shared equitably;

5. Call for a bipartisan, independent commission to determine the lessons learned from our strategic, intelligence, planning, and implementation failures before and during the war;

6. Call on all nations, especially those in the region, to:

- Terminate support for the insurgents and terrorists;
- Actively support the democratically elected Iraqi government;
- Provide tangible support, in the form of training and equipment, to facilitate the development of a professional Iraqi security force, and

- Assist in rebuilding the infrastructure of the country;

7. Condemn, in the strongest possible terms, violations of the Geneva Conventions and other applicable laws, including torture and abuse of prisoners and detainees in U.S. custody;

8. Condemn those who would use opposition to the war in Iraq as justification for anti-Israel efforts;

9. Call on congregations to:

- Provide a venue to address these issues;
- Advocate [in a manner] consistent with the principles set forth in this resolution; and
- Adopt respectful and meaningful methods of acknowledging the contribution of our military such as the use of prayers for the welfare of service members, listing names of military personnel lost in the line of duty in Kaddish prayers or in temple bulletins, or other appropriate ways.



TOWARD A RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION IN IRAQ

*A Statement of Bishop Thomas G. Wenski,
Bishop of Orlando, Chairman of the Committee on
International Policy, United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops, January 12, 2006*

THE CHALLENGE OF A RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION

Our nation's military forces should remain in Iraq only as long as it takes for a responsible transition, leaving sooner rather than later. We welcome recent news reports that suggest that troop levels will be reduced as Iraqis assume more responsibility for their own security. But it is important for the United States to send even clearer signals that the goals of U.S. policy are to help Iraqis assume full control of their governance and not to occupy the nation for an indeterminate period. As one example, our government should declare that the presence of U.S. military personnel and bases in Iraq must be an Iraqi decision that respects the needs and sovereignty of the Iraqi people....

VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

Our Conference unequivocally condemns all terrorist attacks, especially those that target civilians. We echo the teaching of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI: "Nowadays, the truth of peace continues to be dramatically compromised and rejected by

terrorism, whose criminal threats and attacks leave the world in a state of fear and insecurity." The use of force is never just when it fails to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants in a conflict.

At the same time our Conference reiterates that terrorism cannot be fought solely, or even principally, with military methods. As the USCCB Administrative Committee has warned in 2002:

This "war on terrorism" should be fought with the support of the international community and primarily by non-military means, denying terrorists resources, recruits, and opportunities for their evil acts.... As we confront evil acts, which no cause can justify, this "war on terrorism" must not deflect us from sustained commitment to overcome poverty, conflict and injustice, particularly in the Middle East and the developing world, which can provide fertile ground in which hopelessness and terrorism thrive.

HUMAN RIGHTS

In light of deeply disturbing and continuing reports of persistent violations of the human rights of persons in the custody of U.S. military, and more recently of reports of similar abuses by the newly reconstituted Iraqi forces, our bishops' Conference once again urges immediate steps be taken to end these violations, to prevent future occurrences and to discover how they came about. The abuse and torture of detainees violate human rights. They simultaneously undermine both the struggle against terrorism and the prospects of a responsible transition in Iraq. Such abuse undercuts our nation's moral credibility and damages our nation's ability to win popular support in other countries where backing is needed for the struggles in Iraq and against global terrorism. Defending the basic human rights of detainees can also strengthen our insistence on the humane treatment of our own military personnel who become captives.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Our Conference has repeatedly called for the protection of religious liberty in Iraq and renews that call once again. The Catholic bishops in Iraq have expressed serious concerns regarding conflicting provisions in the proposed constitution of Iraq and are wary of its implementation. In light of these concerns, our Conference urges the active support of the U.S. to encourage

clearer protection of religious freedom in both law and practice.

REFUGEES

The war and ongoing instability in Iraq have resulted in a significant flow of refugees from Iraq, especially among Christians and other religious minorities who suffer attacks and discrimination. Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel-Karim Delly of Baghdad has pleaded with Western governments to protect Iraqi refugees. Our Conference calls upon the U.S. to protect Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, including the Christian and other religious minorities fleeing Iraq. In particular, we call on the government to (1) designate Iraqi religious minorities as a group of special concern for the purposes of determining refugee resettlement eligibility, (2) eliminate current restrictions on family reunification eligibility in the refugee admissions program, (3) provide for expeditious, emergent refugee processing directly from Iraq for cases of particular vulnerability, and (4) carefully consider Iraqi asylum seekers' claims, especially religious minorities and other vulnerable individuals, and not reject their asylum requests on the presumption that conditions allow for a safe return to Iraq.

OTHER U.S. RESPONSIBILITIES

The very costly conflict in Iraq demands a major commitment of human and financial resources, but Iraq cannot become an excuse for ignoring other pressing needs at home and abroad, especially our moral responsibilities toward the poor in our own nation and in developing countries. Our Conference reiterates the need to protect the poor at home and abroad in setting our national priorities.

As pastors, we believe that a fundamental moral measure of our nation's budget policy is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of those most in need. Sadly, political pressure frequently has left poor children and families missing in the national debate and without a place at the table. Our nation

needs a genuinely bipartisan commitment to focus on the common good of all and on the special needs of the poor and vulnerable in particular. These are tough times. There are few easy choices. But there are some "right" choices. In a time of war, mounting deficits, and growing needs, our nation's leaders must ensure that there are adequate resources to protect people who are poor and vulnerable both at home and around the world. ■

SPIRIT MATTERS contains selections from forthcoming books, articles, and talks that raise significant spiritual, religious, or social theory issues that connect to the *Tikkun* project of healing and transformation of the world. Authors or publishers who seek to have work included in this section must send us the material for consideration at least three months prior to the cover date of the issue of *Tikkun* in which they'd like to be included, and this date must be prior to the actual publication of the book. Email submissions to rabbilerner@tikkun.org.

The Voice of Fear and the Voice of Hope

By Michael Lerner



FOR THE PAST SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS, much of human society has been torn by a struggle between two worldviews or ways of understanding what it is to be human. The one view tells us that we are born into a world in which each person is out for themselves and life is a battle of all against all. Others will dominate you unless you dominate them first. Security for ourselves, our families, our communities, or our nation depends on our ability to get the advantage over them before they get it over us. Fear of the other is common sense, the only possible response a rational person can have in a world where competition is required for survival. I call this the view of cynical realism, and the normal psychological state accompanying it is heightened alert and fear.

PROTECTING THE HOMELAND



There is a flow of social energy, a movement of consciousness, between hope and fear—inside each of us and in our society—and spiritual progressives can move that flow in a more hopeful direction.

the view of spiritual consciousness, or the unity of all being, and the normal psychological state accompanying it is heightened generosity and hope.

Much of what transpires in the world of politics is a reflection of the degree to which one or the other of these worldviews is on the ascendancy, though both views are almost always present and contending in the minds of most people in the Western world.

When the paradigm of fear is dominant, people look at all their experiences through that framework. At such times, politicians who speak the language of fear sound realistic, even profound, while those who talk about hope seem foolish and out of touch. These dynamics have been particularly evident in the post-9/11 world of American politics, in which the fear of terrorism has been used to manipulate the public into supporting politicians who seem to be the toughest militarists and are thus able to reassure the population that they can handle the seemingly ever-present threat. But the culture of fear extends far beyond politics. When fear prevails, those parts of our cultural heritage—religious texts, for example, or novels and poetry, or social and psychological theories—that validate our fears are deemed the most intellectually sophisticated, while those that embody elements of hope are dismissed as naive, with little to teach us. Conversely, when hope is in the ascendancy, politicians and theologians, novelists and social theorists who were previously dismissed as unsophisticated because they dared to articulate hope in a time of fear are now seen as visionary thinkers and leaders.

It's rarely the case that someone produces a decisive argument that proves one paradigm or the other. Rather, there is a flow of social energy, a movement of consciousness, both inside each person and in the society as a whole, between our most hopeful and our most fearful inclinations.

If we think of a continuum between two poles—the pole of hope and the pole of fear—then we can imagine that at any specific moment each of us is situated at some place on that continuum. In times when a large number of people feel their attention being drawn more toward the pole of fear, we can talk metaphorically about a flow of social energy moving in that direction. And we can experience in ourselves how frequently the voices of fear pop up precisely at the moment when our energies are moving toward hope.

On the most general level, the atmosphere in our society has oscillated over the years between these twin poles. After the stock market crash of 1929, when America was suddenly thrown into economic despair, many Americans felt their energy flow toward

The other view tells us that the world is composed of human beings who desire and need loving connection, recognition of who they are from others whom they respect, and joyous celebration of life and consciousness and freedom. According to this view, people are constantly seeking ways to cooperate, and they feel most fulfilled when they are needed by others and can generously provide care and assistance. Our fate is intrinsically bound up with the fate of others, and our own realization as human beings depends upon the fullest realization of the capacities and desires for love of everyone else on the planet. I call this

fear. The direction of the flow changed in the years of the New Deal, as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt convinced Americans that “there is nothing to fear but fear itself.” Fear again became dominant during the witch hunts of the McCarthy period, and the Cold War anticommunist hysteria made the Vietnam War seem plausible to many. Yet for youth coming of age in the 1960s the pendulum swung back in the direction of hope when the Civil Rights movement and other social change movements began to reclaim some of the highest ideals of American democracy.

The shifting balance between fear and hope is rarely based entirely on some “obvious” meaning of any event in our personal or communal lives. We usually interpret events through the framework of the underlying theories and worldviews we already hold. Skillful political leaders or movements can call upon these preexisting frames of reference in order to characterize an event as confirming our most hopeful or fearful predilections.

Take 9/11, for example. It’s certainly easy to understand why many Americans would feel frightened by such a terrible reminder of the fragility of their own lives and by the evident vulnerability of America to attack by a handful of extremists. Yet President Bush and others in both major political parties seized that moment to inculcate a much deeper level of fear in the population than the facts themselves justified. Suddenly we were told we were facing a well-organized global network of terrorists capable of launching many more 9/11s. From there came a systematic restructuring of American ideals and patterns of life. In the years since 9/11 we’ve been subjected to color-coded alerts to the present level of danger, rarely substantiated in any way that could be called credible. Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines have drenched us with anxiety-provoking images and unsubstantiated stories of threats against which we must be constantly vigilant. Arabs and Muslims have become instant targets of suspicion, discrimination, and arbitrary arrest. Intimidated into believing that extraordinary measures are needed to fight an ongoing war against terror that has neither well-defined enemies nor any plausible way of measuring victory, the American public has allowed its government to set up prison camps in which people are routinely tortured. And even though no link could be established between 9/11 and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, fear of terrorism became the primary argument for why we needed to invade and wage war against his regime, launching a struggle that has taken the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis and has maimed or killed thousands of American soldiers. As I write, over these past four years the number of people who have died at the hands of terrorists is less than one-fourth of the number of Americans who die in car accidents and less than one-third of the number of people around the globe who died on 9/11 from starvation and preventable diseases. All the same, since that day our social and political energies have to a large degree been devoted to preparing for a repeat of this kind of attack.

A different leadership, while acknowledging the need to take measures to protect America’s borders, might have focused greater attention on the heroism of thousands of ordinary Americans who responded with generosity and courage to the attack on 9/11. Hundreds of people gave their lives and countless others risked theirs to aid the victims of the attack, while millions more gave their money and in other ways demonstrated their sympathy and concern. This was a moment that could make us all feel optimistic about the human condition and the goodness that lies at the core of so many of our neighbors. Yet these points were made only in passing, while the chief political lessons drawn by our leaders and emphasized in the media were those that confirmed our fears, not our hopes. The facts did not require this—the misuse of 9/11 was a choice. But it was a choice rooted in a deeper paradigm of fear. It is thus critical that we understand the two contending worldviews and how they operate, if we are ever to move America away from its current domination by fear.

In the fear paradigm, human beings are imagined to have been thrown into a world based on the struggle of all against all, in which people seek to maximize their own advantage (or the advantage of a group to which they belong) without regard to the consequences for others.

Greed is one of the pathological consequences of fear. We believe that there won't be enough to go around, so we feel we must hoard. We suspect that others won't share with us, so we don't want to risk being exploited by sharing what we have with them. As long as we see the other as likely to take advantage of us, the idea of sharing seems self-destructive. The world is evil, and we must struggle on as best we can.

The voice of fear has its reflection in religious language. According to the paradigm of fear, God's religious path is primarily about creating boundaries and restraints and providing us with religious practices designed to prevent us from falling into the endless temptations that surround us. Individuals find meaning for their lives by being aligned with the divine energy that is protecting them and that guides them in how to deal with all the many dangers they face. Frequently, the spiritual energy of the universe is perceived as uniquely on the side of a particular group or nation (even though virtually every nation or group believes that God is on its side). Further, God is envisioned as a warrior: powerful, combative, and harsh in judgment. This is the Right Hand of God.

For some two billion people on this planet, material scarcity remains a central reality in their daily lives. To the extent that this is true, fear of destitution and abandonment may be much closer to the surface of consciousness, and trust may be harder to sustain. Voices that preach resignation, the inevitable triumph of evil, the fundamental corruptibility of the human soul, and the need to dominate before one is dominated may all seem more plausible when one's daily reality is filled with hunger, deprivation, and oppression. Even those who yearn for a different world may give up on the possibility of achieving that in any way other than through divine intervention. What an emotionally sustaining picture—to imagine the world suddenly being made right when God swoops down and decisively defeats the forces of evil in battle. God's Right Hand triumphs, and subsequently the good things of the world can flourish. I'm not surprised that many people follow the Right Hand of God.

To many on the contemporary political Left, the Right Hand of God consciousness is the only visible manifestation of religion, dominating American politics and leading people to support the war in Iraq, to attempt to pack the judiciary with right-wingers, to seek to criminalize abortion, and in numerous other ways to back policies based on domination. "Why should we listen to this talk of religion or spirituality," my friends on the Left say, "when in practice all that religious language turns out to be about is accepting domination and resigning yourself to oppression? Religion is just a way for people to accept what they believe they cannot change. Perhaps the one thing Marx actually got right was that 'religion is the opiate of the people.'" As they see it, religion is the problem, not the solution.

If the only manifestation of religion were the Right Hand of God, my friends on the Left would have a point. But the voice of fear and despair has never become the sole voice in our heads or the only melody in our souls or the only strain in religious and spiritual traditions. From the time we were born, we have heard a loving, caring voice that cannot be totally drowned out. Human infants could not survive the first several years of life without a nurturing loving other who takes care of them. Clinical studies have demonstrated that a child that is fed and clothed but not touched or given any external source of recognition will die. Without denying all the pathological behavior we may have experienced at the hands of our parents, the reality is that none of us would have survived had there not been a loving someone to nurture us, and that person could not have survived unless she or he was surrounded by a family or community that provided the primary caregiver with nurturance and support.

This initial, undivided love is the basis of the great spiritual traditions. Biblical religion does not start with evil and fear. The book of Genesis begins with a God who creates our universe and who then affirms the goodness of the world: "and God saw that it was good." Human beings are created in this divine image—we also are good. If there are distortions of that divinity in the world, they reflect mistaken choices, not the essence of what it is to be human. Cruelty is not destiny, because human beings have

been created in the image of a gentle, loving God. Imperialism and class conflict, murder and rape, anger and hatred—these are not built into the fundamental structure of reality. They are not inevitable. They can be changed through human action and more compassionate choices.

None of this is to deny evil and sinfulness as part of the daily reality of human life. We in the Jewish world talk about sin as a “missing of the mark,” as though we are an arrow that has gone off course, and we need periodic tuning up of our spiritual selves in order to get back on course. In Judaism, sin is overcome through repentance, a return (teshuvah) to the divine image in which we were created. In Christianity, sin is overcome through faith in the person of Jesus, whom they believe to be the Christ (Messiah), whose mission on earth was to enable human beings to once again find that divine good and hence repair the evils around them. In both traditions, we are told that evil can be overcome and that we need not live in fear.

The central story of the Torah is that of a people who are enslaved and then through divine intervention freed from slavery. Its message is one of hope: we can overcome oppression, the world can be transformed. In Judaism, the force that makes change possible is YHVH, the God-force of the universe. This God-force, a force of healing and transformation (tikkun), is the ultimate reality of the universe, the force that has shaped the universe from the start, the truth whose will toward goodness is manifested in the command to “pursue justice,” to “love one’s neighbor as oneself,” and never to “oppress the stranger.” This God is a loving being whose essential nature is compassionate, caring, forgiving, generous, and peace loving, even though God can at times be angry at the persistence of injustice and our indifference to the suffering we cause by participating in oppressive social or political systems. God wants us to care not only for ourselves but for everyone on the planet because we have all been created in the divine image. God needs us as partners in the healing and transformation of the world and as stewards of the well-being of the planet, and sometimes gets irritated or upset when we misuse God or Torah or Judaism as a vehicle to escape doing what we know we must do to heal the world. Although ultimately God cares for us, has compassion for our straying from our mission, God desperately needs us to get back on the path of healing the world, even with all our imperfections and weaknesses, as long as we too show compassion for others. This is how God is understood from the standpoint of the Left Hand of God.

If we want to find an answer to our current spiritual crisis and remake our society, the choice we face is not between religion and secularism. The choice we face is between the Right Hand and the Left Hand of God. Even if you are secular, you are called to choose between the paradigm of hope and the paradigm of fear, between a vision of a world in which love can be the central reality and a world in which power over others is the only realistic path. At every moment, we are unconsciously, but nevertheless quite determinedly, organizing our experience through one or the other of these paradigms. One of the goals of this book is to encourage us to become more conscious of which paradigm we are using at any given moment and to help us make it less scary to choose the paradigm of hope.

The world is not neutral. My faith tells me that the world actually tilts toward love and hope. Nor is my belief some New Age accommodation to modernity. The great interpreter of Torah, Rabbi Hillel, was challenged to recite the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel responded: “Do not do anything to your neighbor that is hateful to you. This is the entire Torah. Go and learn.” And the greatest expositor of Jewish law, Rabbi Akiba, taught that the central principle of Torah was, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He went on to explain that this statement was not just about inner feelings



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but about our relationship to property: "What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours." Need I add that, in articulating his view of God's call to human beings, Jesus later developed this message of love to an even higher level of sophistication and centrality, while parallel developments within Judaism and later in Islam have given that message of love a deep foundation in the religions of the West, however imperfectly those who practice these religions have actually embodied it.

This call toward a world of love and hope is counterbalanced by many moments of despair and fear both in ourselves and in our holy texts and spiritual traditions. We hold elements of both paradigms in our minds, both the Right Hand and the Left Hand of God, both fear and hope, and in every encounter we hear both voices, which together shape how we experience the world and one another. Exactly where we are on that continuum at any given moment is determined by a complex interaction among several factors: the legacy of our experiences in our families and in our early socialization in schools; our current life situations; the intellectual concepts, religious beliefs, and popular ideas that we have internalized; and our assessment of the extent to which those around us are conducting their lives according to fear or to hope.

Once we understand the paradigms of hope and fear, we have a framework within which to understand the political meaning of much of the culture, intellectual life, religion, and mass psychology that surrounds us. We need only ask of any phenomenon: "Does it tend to increase our hope or our fear? Does it make us more certain that the world is basically a scary place from which we must be defended, or does it support our inner conviction that more goodness and kindness and beauty and generosity and compassion exist in the world than we have been allowing ourselves to recognize recently?"

Do your own research. Ask yourself, where would you locate what you see and hear on the hope-fear continuum? Ask this question of every movie and television show you watch, every political speech or advertisement you listen to, every commercial and magazine ad, every piece of legislation, every political demonstration, every sermon or spiritual teaching, every theory of human development or of the natural stages in spiritual evolution, every social and scientific theory, every rock concert or rave that comes your way.

What you will find is that our culture is today profoundly oriented toward the paradigm of fear. Selfishness makes sense; generosity does not. In moments of fear, the hopeful side of religious traditions recedes, and stories, theologies, and interpretations of holy texts that see the world as a dangerous place and human beings as evil or fundamentally hurtful, or that justify the use of violence, or that see God as seeking revenge and the obliteration of enemies, or that view suffering as intrinsic and inescapable, or that justify passivity and an acceptance of the distortions in the world as unchangeable, become more prevalent. Religions develop that sanctify the people in the "in" group (the nation or the community of believers) and demonize those on the outside.

These same dynamics play out in the secular world and in secular theories of social change. When fear is ascendant, it is easy for theories to catch on that blame some evil other for the ills of our society and that assume that anyone who does not share this viewpoint is deluded. Theories become popular that see the contemporary distortions in human beings as built into the structure of reality, as an inevitable feature of human nature or of complex social organizations, or even as a result of bad genes or evolution or brain structure.

In the progressive world, the paradigm of fear is manifested through a lack of trust that we can transform our society and a growing cynicism about the possibility that people can ever be mobilized to struggle for the kind of fundamental changes that the world so badly needs. Liberals and progressives develop narrowly conceived technical solutions to social problems because they imagine that people are too fearful to even think about, much less fight for, the more fundamental transformations that are really needed. As they themselves begin to lose trust in the viability of their own underlying vision of what the world needs, they unconsciously communicate their own lack of faith in the American people, which only serves to increase our collective doubt that real

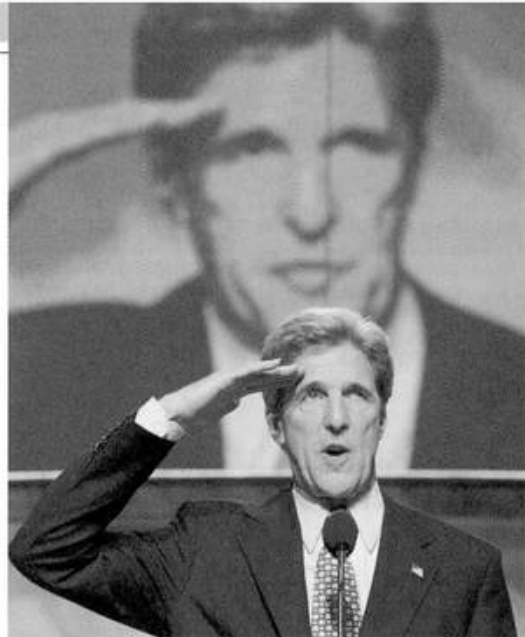
change is possible. But if real change is not possible, people reason, then tinkering with the system as it is may only antagonize the powerful who have the means to retaliate, for example, by moving their business to countries that offer fewer environmental restrictions and cheaper labor. If no credible vision for deep-seated transformation exists, if fear has won out over hope, then many people will try to accommodate to “reality,” and this often encourages them to affiliate with the Right, which seems more equipped to deal with a world based on fear.

The Right has learned how to use the paradigm of fear to dominate politics. It can take a distinguished army hero like Senator John McCain or John Kerry and label him “soft” on military matters, as George Bush did during the Republican primaries in 2000 and again in the presidential election of 2004. It can push through the Congress spending bills totaling hundreds of billions of dollars to fight the war in Iraq on the grounds that otherwise Americans will become vulnerable to terror. It can claim that to protect us from terrorists we must reduce our funding for social services so that we have more money for homeland security.

Instead of countering with a vision that validates the Left Hand of God, the Left, particularly the Democratic Party, tries to tinker with kinder, gentler versions of the Right Hand of God. But doing so only strengthens the widespread perception that everything is moving toward fear. And the more people believe that fear is the only sensible approach to reality, the less open they are to anyone who isn’t sophisticated enough or profound enough to understand how dangerous and hurtful the world truly is. To the extent that they allow their own fear to dominate, the Left becomes powerless to shift the discourse. Its supporters come to be perceived by many as a puny substitute for the right-wing “realists,” who always appear to have a much more savvy understanding of the world than all these weak-kneed liberals.

There is an inherent problem for those who espouse a politics of hope and a vision of love: that achieving a world of love and kindness cannot be done using the tactics of power and domination. If the Right Hand of God seeks to “win,” the Left Hand of God seeks a world in which winning is no longer the appropriate category, a world in which the humanity of all has been validated, including those who position themselves as “our enemies.” The Left Hand of God looks weak in part because it does not aim to dominate and control but rather tries to elicit a spirit of generosity and hope. Such a spirit does not show up on the radar screen of those who think of power in terms of capacities to manipulate or command people and resources for the sake of self-advantage.

It is no surprise that many who espouse the Left Hand of God have used the language of women’s experience to describe their vision. The Hebrew word for compassion is *rachamim*, from the Hebrew word for womb, *rechem*. The mothering we receive during our early years leaves an indelible impression on us, a belief that love is really possible, a love that is not about manipulation and domination but about the outpouring of generosity, about the world nurturing us with mother’s milk. Such images suggest a vulnerability that frightens those who believe that love and generosity are too “soft” to provide a foundation for significant victories in the tough-minded, power-oriented world of American politics. Yet the history of transformative movements from Judaism and Christianity down through psychoanalysis, feminism, civil rights, and the peace movement demonstrates the potential power that can emerge from a vision of love and kindness. Even when these movements eventually lost faith in their own transformative vision and then allied themselves with the Right Hand of God, their initial and most profound impact occurred when they actually believed in the healing potential of a world based on love, generosity, and caring for others, and on aligning oneself with the poor and the powerless and affirming peace and justice.



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The logic of Pharaoh could never make sense of the logic of Moses, the logic of Rome could never make sense of the logic of Jesus, the logic of police sergeant "Bull" Connor could never make sense of the logic of Martin Luther King Jr. The spiritual politics of the Left Hand of God confronts the empires and the social practices of domination with a loving energy that by the criteria of the powerful can seem insubstantial and dismissible, like a bothersome mosquito that makes noise but ultimately can't really do much damage. That loving energy nevertheless has an immense potential to change everything, to the extent that people are able to sustain the position of hope.

Yet social reality is never static, and the moments of hope, no matter how self-validating and wonderful they feel, are often undermined by nagging doubts, the not-yet-cured legacy of past pain, and the impact of social and economic institutions that have not yet been transformed. Fear crouches at the door, ready to leap back in, and does so under the guise of an alleged realism about the best way to create and maintain a world that is safe for hope. In the name of peace, we must make war; in the name of social justice, we must accommodate to the interests of the rich; in the name of building a society that is safe for our religions of peace, we must protect ourselves from those who hate, and the only way to do that is to hate their evil ways! So slowly the energy swings back toward fear.

So how do we move the energy toward hope?

We are continually making choices that tend to reinforce one end of the spectrum or the other, both in ourselves and in those with whom we interact every day. Every time we take a step in a direction that reinforces hope and affirms the possibility of building a world imbued with greater love and kindness and generosity and lack of violence, we contribute to the movement of social energy toward the Left Hand of God. Every action we take has the capacity to increase the love or the anger, the hope or the fear, that are the fundamental building blocks of the world we inhabit. In the smallest acts of our everyday lives, as well as in our larger acts on the stage of politics, we are always involved in choices.

But what if we are stuck in fear or feel that others are stuck? What can we do?

I wish there were a magic bullet or one-size-fits-all solution. But each person and each moment has its unique features that can't be addressed through a general formula.

Some valuable resources and guidelines grow out of the religious and spiritual traditions of the human race and have sustained people in times of darkness, sometimes empowering them to take steps toward hope:

1. Do acts of kindness, love, and generosity every day, even when you are not in the mood.

2. Let go of a commitment to outcomes. Do acts of hopefulness even when there are no rational grounds to believe that it will all turn out okay. This is what the religious miracles are meant to say—that good outcomes can happen even when there is no rational reason to believe they will.

3. Find a friend with whom you can share your vision of the world you want. Develop that friendship so that it is one place where you can always go to share your frustrations and renew your hopes. Make it a regular commitment to see that friend and share your own inner fears and hopes and hear his or her hopes and fears too. (And when you are listening to your friend, pray for the success of that person's vision even if it isn't yours.)

4. Prayer and meditation. It's possible to focus on the source of our fears, to be fully present to them, to experience them, and see that they are often less formidable than we may think. Meditation and prayer can sometimes help us fully accept that we are all going to die and can teach us to let go of the expectation of permanency, decreasing the fear of death and making it less scary to take risks for the sake of our beliefs in what is right and good.

5. Rituals of empowerment. The Passover Seder and the reading of the stories of liberation from Egypt helped keep up the spirits of the Jewish people for two thousand years while they endured oppression, exile, and brutality from others. The spiritual Left ought to have a comparable Seder telling the story of the liberation struggles of the world. Till

we have such, why not create such a ritual for your friends and family? You'd be amazed at how empowering and hope engendering it can be.

6. Join and participate in a spiritual community that weekly celebrates a Sabbath of some sort, a day dedicated to celebrating the grandeur of creation and to remembering the moments in which hope surged forward. Don't stay in a religious community that does no such celebrating. Challenge such a group in the name of the Left Hand of God, and speak with others about the hope-based tradition within your religion, letting them know that you want to hear more of that hopeful vision being articulated. If that doesn't work, leave that group and if necessary build your own spiritual or religious community. Draw upon the rituals and practices of some existing religious or spiritual path, since it's harder to start from scratch than to modify a path that has some history and accumulated wisdom.

Some other resources, not necessarily connected with a religious or spiritual tradition, may also be helpful:

7. Individual therapy, particularly with a therapist who has a hopeful attitude toward the world and is not stuck in some fear-oriented worldview. Be sure that the therapist you pick knows that your current despair is not only a psychological issue but also a reflection of the degree to which the society as a whole moves toward fear—and don't stick with a therapist who tries to reduce the whole thing to childhood problems. But keep in mind that all of us carry remnants of childhood and adult life that can help to undermine our capacities to sustain hope—and they should be dealt with too.

8. Participate only in political activities in which the leaders are psychologically and spiritually sophisticated enough to understand these issues and give as much attention to making sure that their activities foster hope as they do to winning a specific political goal. If you can find no such activities or leaders, you can be the leader and create the activity. If there is no alternative but to take part in an activity in which the leaders are generating fear (for example, the only peace demonstration in town), challenge the speakers and leaders publicly. Don't go along just because they created the activity. Insist on a message of hope. But do it compassionately and respectfully. And when someone comes around asking for your vote or your donation, make sure that a condition is that they start to project a hopeful vision more in accord with your own.

9. Whenever you are giving a talk, recruiting a person to some activity, writing a leaflet or op-ed, or trying to influence others in the public arena, always ask yourself: is this presentation giving enough attention to fostering hope?

10. Invite people to study my new book, *The Left Hand of God*, with you as the first step in creating a group that will focus on books related to spiritual politics. It may give them some hope, and that may give you some hopeful sustenance. Then, join the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and that will give you even more: <http://www.spiritual-progressives.org>.

If you were the only one doing all this, it might seem scary. But guess what? You are not the only one! In fact, hundreds of millions of people want to build a world of greater love, kindness, generosity, awe, and wonder. Our task is to help them find one another so that they will know about you and you will know about them. That's why it's so important to join up, to become part of a movement that articulates your ideals, and to become visible.

We can change this world, and you can be an important part of that process. But we need to be smart about it, correcting mistakes of the past and being unafraid to articulate a visionary and love-filled perspective. ■



When someone comes around asking for your vote or your donation, make sure that a condition is that they start to project a hopeful vision more in accord with your own.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is the editor of Tikkun. This article is excerpted from *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right*. © HarperSanFrancisco, February 2006.

On Torture and Being “Good Americans”

BY FRED BRANFMAN

“Gestapo interrogation methods included: repeated near drownings of a prisoner in a bathtub.”
—www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/triumph/tr-gestapo.htm

“The CIA officers say 9-11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed lasted the longest under water-boarding, two and a half minutes, before beginning to talk, with debatable results.”
—Brian Ross, ABC World News Tonight, November 18, 2005

“When President Bush last week signed the bill outlawing the torture of detainees, he quietly reserved the right to bypass the law under his powers as commander in chief...Bush believes he can waive the restrictions, the White House and legal specialists said.”
—“Bush Could Bypass Torture Ban,” Boston Globe

AS A TEENAGER, I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND how the German people could claim to be “good Germans,” unaware of what the Nazis had done in their names. I could understand if these ordinary German people had said they had known and been horrified, but were afraid to speak up. But they would then be “weak or fearful or indifferent Germans,” not “good Germans.” The idea that only the Nazis were responsible for the Holocaust made no sense. Whatever the Germans as a whole know about the concentration camps, they certainly knew about the systematic mistreatment of Jews that had occurred before their very eyes, and from which so many had profited. And if they were not really “good Germans,” what should or could they have done, given the reality of Nazi tyranny?

The issue became personal for me in the summer of 1961, when I hitchhiked through Europe with a lovely German woman named Inge. Still in love after an idyllic summer, we visited Hyde Park the day before I was to return home. A bearded, middle-aged concentration-camp survivor was angrily attacking the German people for standing by and letting the Jews be slaughtered. I was moved beyond words. Suddenly the woman I loved began yelling angrily at him, screaming that the Germans did not know, that her father had just been a soldier and was not responsible for the Holocaust.

Our relationship essentially ended then and there. I understood intellectually that she was just defending her father and was neither an anti-Semite nor an evil person. But there it was. She on one side. The survivor on the other. A gulf between them. Whatever my head said, my heart knew that the world is divided into evil-doers, their victims, and those like Inge who do not want to know. And that I had no choice but to stand with the victims.

I never dreamed at that moment that I, as an American, would a few years later face this same question as my government committed mass murder of civilians in Indochina in violation of the Nuremberg Principles. Or that more than four decades later I would still be struggling with what it means to be a “good American” after learning that a group of U.S. leaders has unilaterally seized the right to torture anyone it chooses without evidence and in violation of international law, human decency, and the sacrifice of the many Americans who have died fighting autocracy and totalitarianism.

Bush Embraces Torture

TO ASK WHAT IT MEANS to be a “good American” is not to compare Bush to Hitler or Republicans to Nazis. The question does not arise only when leaders engage in mass murder on the scale of a Hitler or Stalin, which Bush has not. It requires only that they engage in actions that are clearly evil, which Bush has.

Every generation or so an evil arises which is so monstrous, so degrading to the human spirit, so morally bankrupt that even to debate it is a sign of moral corruption. Native American genocide, slavery, totalitarianism, and Jim Crow laws are evils so unspeakable that we cannot understand today how anyone with a shred of decency could have once supported them. Today, torture, a practice far more degrading to us than to our victims, represents such an evil.

The issue has become urgent because Bush has chosen to demand the legal right to torture anyone he wishes. When torture was revealed at Abu Ghraib, the administration—falsely and shamelessly—attempted to shift its own responsibility onto foot-soldiers like Lynndie England. Since then, however, leaks have revealed that the CIA has tortured terrorist suspects all around the world, using techniques like “waterboarding.” In response, Senator John McCain proposed an amendment, attached to the 2006 Defense bill, that would ban torture.

Bush’s first response to McCain’s amendment was to threaten to veto the Defense Bill if it passed. When it became clear that McCain’s amendment would pass by an overwhelming majority (it passed in by a 90-9 margin in the end), Bush reversed course and said he would support the amendment. Yet when he actually signed the bill, Bush added something called a “signing statement” in which he reserved the right to do whatever he chooses as Commander-in-Chief to “protect the American people from further terrorist attacks.” In short, even as he signed McCain’s amendment, Bush let it be known that he intends to ignore it as he sees fit.

Bush’s demand is unprecedented. No leader in all human history, not even Hitler, Stalin, or Mao, has publicly demanded the right to torture. All others have behaved as Bush did before the amendment when he secretly tortured on a scale unseen in American history even while saying he wasn’t. Forced into the open by the McCain amendment, however, Bush chose to openly demand the legal right to torture. Most experts assume he will continue to torture.

It is important to understand what this means. Bush justifies his right to torture on the grounds of saving American lives in a global “war on terrorism.” Unlike previous wars, however, this war will never end. On the contrary, Bush’s bungling of the war on terror—including the increased Muslim hatred of the United States that the practice of torture has caused—makes it more likely that there will be another domestic 9/11, leading in turn to more demands to torture. Bush’s assertion of his right to torture, therefore, would make torture a permanent and growing instrument of U.S. state policy.

Also, by opposing the McCain amendment, Bush took direct responsibility for the torture he and his administration have inflicted on countless suspects. As you read these words, people are screaming in agony from Gestapo techniques used in CIA and “allied” torture chambers around the world. Many or even most of the victims are innocent. *The New Republic* has noted that “Pentagon reports have acknowledged that up to 90 percent of the prisoners at Abu Ghraib, many of whom were abused and tortured, were not guilty of anything.... And Abu Ghraib produced a tiny fraction of the number of abuse, torture, and murder cases that have been subsequently revealed.”

Mr. Bush’s statement that “we do not torture,” even as he was threatening to veto the entire Defense bill because it limited his right to torture, is a dramatic example of how



Rows of cells at a prison in Baghdad. The prison was run by the 1st Cavalry Division, the largest division in the U.S. Army.

torture degrades the torturer even more than it does his victims. And it is a disgraceful commentary on our nation that no major church, business, or political leader, nor the fawning media personalities who interview him and his officials, has expressed outrage at this bald-faced lie. And one can barely mention an unspeakable Congress, which ignored his lying about torture after spending two years impeaching his predecessor for lying about sex.

The real question for us, however, is what this says not about President Bush and our other leaders, but about ourselves. What are we, as citizens, as human beings, willing to live with? Are we willing to live with a President, Vice-President, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and Attorney-General who either engage in or rationalize torture in our names, even as they shamelessly deny they are doing so? *(continued on page 64)*

The Politics of Lying

The Assault on Meaning in Bush's America

BY HENRY A. GIROUX

IN THE CURRENT AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, truth is not merely misrepresented; it is overtly mocked. Bush administration officials seem to delight in repeating claims that have been discredited in the public arena, demonstrating a barely disguised contempt for the public.

These lies go beyond the classic political gambit, beyond the Watergate-style cover-up. Democracy is at stake. One characteristic of an authoritarian society is its willingness to distort the truth while simultaneously suppressing dissent. We lose the distinction between fact and fiction, truth-telling and lying. Truth under such a regime is rendered trivial, a collection of mere platitudes, which in turn reinforces moral indifference and political impotence. Under such circumstances, language actually becomes the mechanism for promoting political powerlessness.

Newspeak

MANY PEOPLE HAVE POINTED TO BUSH HIMSELF as a mangler of the English language, but this charge simply asserts the obvious while reducing to a personal twitch the much more important and larger issue of connecting language to power. Bush's discursive ineptness may be fodder for late-night comics such as Jon Stewart and Jay Leno, but such analyses overlook how the Bush administration cleverly manipulates discourse to conceal the most dire consequences of its policies.

For instance, Bush describes himself as a "reformer" and a "compassionate conservative" while he expands corporate welfare, gives huge tax benefits to the rich, dismantles public services, dismantles the country's civic and public infrastructure, and displays an egregious lack of leadership in addressing the massive suffering and hardships endured by thousands of poor and black Americans affected by the catastrophe in New Orleans.

(continued from page 36) If we are willing to live with this evil, the torture will continue. If not, it can be brought to an end. Who are *we*?

Becoming "Good Americans"

WE ARE IN SOME WAYS more morally compromised than the "good Germans" of the 1930s. To begin with, we are far less able to claim we do not know. Our daily newspapers regularly report new revelations of Bush administration torture.

Second, by opposing torture, we face far less severe threats than did Germans who tried to help Jews. Even the strong possibility that we could become targets of illegal spying by this administration for protesting its torture is far less frightening than the death or imprisonment faced by Germans who helped Jews.

And, third, unlike the Germans, we cannot reasonably claim that it is futile to oppose our leaders. Creating or joining an organized effort to prevent torture can succeed because we possess one great advantage that human rights advocates in Germany did not have: the public is with us. Most Americans abhor torture and can understand the argument that it does not protect American lives. This is why the McCain amendment enjoyed 90 percent majorities in the Republican-controlled House and Senate, and why it is possible to bring to power leaders who are not committed to torture.

If we can build a movement to limit and ultimately remove from power those who torture, and thus endanger our lives, we will be achieving other important goals as well.

We will be building support for international law, which is one of humanity's few frail protections against far greater violence. If we can implement international law against torture, perhaps we can extend it to preventing the murder of civilians or aggressive war. We will be reaffirming America's once-strong commitment to building the kind of new international order that is required to reduce international terrorism, and fostering a world in which U.S. leaders would once again be respected as fighters for human decency rather than despised as threats to it.

We will bring the once-powerful but forgotten force of morality and nonviolent action—for civil rights, for peace, for women's rights—back into our politics. A false morality that claims to love Jesus while torturing and killing in his name will be replaced by an authentic morality that seeks to address the root-causes of terrorism and violence.

We will thus also join this renewed moral force with a practical strategy that can actually protect us from terrorism. Torture is only the most dramatic example of how Bush has endangered our lives by bungling the war on terrorism. He has also dangerously neglected homeland security, alienated world opinion, helped Al Qaeda grow in numbers and fervor, wasted vast resources in Iraq in ways that increase terrorist ranks, failed to build an effective democracy in Afghanistan, failed to bring peace to the Middle East, and failed to address the poverty that fuels anti-American terrorism. Ending torture is a necessary precondition to developing an effective strategy that will actually protect rather than endanger Americans.

And we will strengthen democracy at home. Nothing is

more un-American and undemocratic than the idea that a small group of executive branch leaders should be free to torture, kill, and spy at will. This idea is in fact precisely what generations of Americans have died fighting against. Ending Bush's use of torture will be the beginning of restoring an accountable and democratic government to this nation.

Conservative Totalitarianism

ENDING TORTURE WILL HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT beyond torture itself for a simple reason: as slavery was the linchpin to the entire pre-bellum Southern social order, torture has become integral to today's conservative ideology. Conservative ideology was once a coherent set of ideas built around limiting state power over the individual. It has today degenerated into a rationale for expanding executive power over the individual, including not only the right to torture but the right to spy on citizens, wage aggressive war while lying about it, prevent gay people from marrying, deny a woman the right to an abortion, publish disguised government propaganda in the media, and even deny us the right to die in peace if conservatives decree that we must live as vegetables or in unendurable pain.

It is no coincidence that the executive's right to torture was defended not only by Bush and Cheney, but also by conservative ideologues at *The Weekly Standard*, financed by media mogul Rupert Murdoch and edited by William Kristol, who published a cover story by Charles Krauthammer—widely admired in conservative circles—which declared that "we must all be prepared to torture" to save American lives. Or that the *The National Review* opined that "if McCain's amendment becomes law ... we will then be able to apply only methods formulated to deal with conventional soldiers in a different sort of conflict than the one that faces us now. This is folly."

Today's conservative movement has been reduced to a set of impulses, above all a totalitarian impulse to support the expansion of autocratic power it was founded to restrain. Since its ideological blinders prevent it from developing sensible measures to reduce terrorism, it has turned to justifying only those policies that expand executive power and seek to rule through coercion, threats, and violence.

Whatever a movement to abolish torture will achieve for society, it is clear what participating in it means for each of us as individuals. It means above all that our children and grandchildren will not remember us with shame, that they will not one day have to try to justify to our victims our failure to oppose the torture being conducted in our names, and that the term "good Americans" will mean just that, and not become an excuse for fear or indifference.

When we fight to end torture we are not only fighting for human decency, international law, democracy, and freedom. We are fighting for ourselves. ■

Fred Branfman is a writer and long-time political activist. His email address is fredbranfman@aol.com and his website is www.trulyalive.org. He is writing a book entitled Facing Death at Any Age.



While all governments sometimes resort to misrepresentations and lies, the Bush administration's lies and exaggerations make such action central to its maintenance of political power through the manipulation of the media and the public. Language used in this brave new world says one thing, but actually means its opposite.

This type of discourse recalls George Orwell's dystopian world of *1984* where the Ministry of Truth produces lies and the Ministry of Love tortures people. Ruth Rosen, for instance, has pointed out that Bush's "Healthy Forest Initiative allows increased logging of protected wilderness. The 'Clear Skies' initiative permits greater industrial air pollution." The Bush administration not only has reduced regulations for corporate polluters, but also has weakened federal programs for cleaning up dirty waters, eased restrictions on toxic emissions such as mercury, and removed scientific evidence of global warming from government reports. Yet in a speech delivered in Tennessee in April 2005, Bush stated, "We didn't create this earth but we have an obligation to protect it!" Such duplicitous language calls to mind the Orwellian nightmare in which "war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength."

Authority is Democracy

IT IS EASIER TO CONVINCE a misinformed citizenry to support reactionary policies.

Especially since the horrible events of September 11, Americans have been encouraged by the Bush administration and others to identify with a militaristic way of life. The Bush government has been able to extend the concept of war not only to include traditional, defense-oriented objectives but also to embrace an ideology of militarism that pervades civil society, reproducing all aspects of public life in the image of official power. Reducing the critical power of language has been crucial to this effort.

Take, for instance, the now obvious way the Bush administration manipulated intelligence to legitimate a preemptive war with Iraq. The Bush team asserted that Iraq was producing nuclear and biochemical weapons (WMD) and that Saddam Hussein had ties with Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Neither claim proved to be true. In fact, as the now famous Downing Street memo published by the *London Times* on May 1, 2005 has since revealed, the Bush administration had decided to overthrow Hussein in the summer of 2002 and "fixed" the intelligence in order to make the case for weapons of mass destruction.

On the matter of foreign policy, Bush's use of the term "democracy" is truly Orwellian. Look at Iraq. There, he has fashioned a unilateral foreign policy that rejects dialogue and collaboration with other major powers while "promoting" democracy with bombs, a brutal military occupation, and what *New York Times* writer Bob Herbert calls "an exercise in extreme madness, an absurd venture that would have been rich in comic possibilities except for the fact that many thousands of men, women and children have died, and tens of thousands have been crippled, burned or otherwise maimed." In a display of extreme arrogance and hypocrisy, Bush seems undaunted in lecturing President Putin of (continued on page 65)

THE POLITICS OF LYING

(continued from page 37) Russia and the Chinese government on the virtues of democracy, all the while currying favor with some of the most virulent authoritarian regimes in the world, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the hyper-rhetoric of democracy reveals more about its actual absence than its influence in shaping U.S. domestic and foreign policies. The mainstream *New York Times* op-ed writer and economist, Paul Krugman, asserts that “misrepresentation and deception are standard operating procedure for [the Bush] administration, which—to an extent never before seen in U.S. history—systematically and brazenly distorts the facts.” Referring to Bush’s record on the selling of the Iraq war, Krugman asserts that it “is arguably the worst scandal in American political history—worse than Watergate, worse than Iran/Contra. Indeed, the idea that we were deceived into war makes many commentators so uncomfortable that they refuse to admit the possibility.” And, yet, Bush’s disinformation machine is in high-gear again, claiming that the Democrats endorsed faulty intelligence before the war while ignoring its own outrageous claims connecting Saddam to Al Qaeda and arguing that Iraq was about to unleash a nuclear Armageddon.

In what has to rank as one of the most egregious distortions that has emerged from the Bush administration, President Bush, in an interview with *New Yorker* reporter Ken Auletta, claimed, “No president has ever done more for human rights than I have.” Such a statement is extraordinary given that Amnesty International condemned the United States in 2002 for being one of the world leaders in human rights violations. Amnesty International, along with several other organizations such as Human Rights Watch, U.S. Human Rights Network, the ACLU, and the Center for Constitutional Rights, has also accused the Bush administration itself of engaging in various human rights violations. These include: preventing foreign nationals held as prisoners at Guantanamo Bay from gaining access to U.S. courts; executing juvenile offenders; engaging in racial profiling, detention, inhumane treatment, and deportation of Muslim immigrants after September 11; refusing to ratify the American Protocols on Human Rights, the Geneva Protocols, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and numerous other international agreements aimed at protecting human rights.

The Bush administration is exceptionally adept at hiding some of its most flagrant violations of human rights by labelling such horrific acts with names that appear either perfectly legitimate or incomprehensible. For example, a policy that allows people to be kidnapped, put on a plane, and sent to a foreign country to be interrogated and tortured is denoted by the term “extraordinary rendition.” Another euphemism, “The Special Removal Unit,” refers to the pilots and crews who “render” the prisoners to Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan—all countries which have been previously identified by the State Department as practicing torture in their prisons. Military intelligence officials in agreement with the CIA hid certain detainees at Abu Ghraib from international rights organizations by not assigning

them internment numbers and keeping their names off the books, referring to them only as “ghost” prisoners. While the language may seem harmless, these actions violated international law and ignored the most basic precepts of human rights.

And then there is the case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen abducted by the U.S. while changing planes in New York and eventually shipped off to Syria where he was tortured for a year and later freed without any charges lodged against him. Under such circumstances, democracy as either a moral referent or a political ideal appears to have lost any vestige of credibility when it is invoked by the Bush administration. Rather than refer to a system of governance in which the struggle over meaning and power is integral, democracy is reduced to merely a ritual incantation marshalled by the Bush administration as a curative for everything from terrorism to ethnic atrocities.

The Rhetoric of Fear

BEYOND DISINFORMATION and disguise, official newspeak trades in the rhetoric of fear in order to manipulate the public into state of servile political dependency and unquestioning ideological support. Fear and its attendant use of moral panic create not only a rhetorical umbrella to promote right-wing ideological agendas (increased military spending, awarding of no-bid contracts, privatization), but also a sense of helplessness and cynicism throughout the body politic. Hence, the Bush administration’s increased dependence upon issuing terror and security alerts.

Absolute certainty becomes the backdrop against which a politics of lying and a culture of fear and suppression flourish. Bush’s panic-inducing references to 9/11 are almost always framed in Manichean language of absolute good and evil. The administration’s newspeak employs the discourse of Christian fundamentalists, implying that Bush’s “wisdom” comes from his direct communion with God—a position not unlike that of Moses on Mount Sinai, and which, of course, cannot be challenged by mere mortals. Lying now legitimates itself under the rhetoric of moral certainty, eschewing not only debate but the very possibility of criticism.

Government ideologies so undemocratic that they would readily warrant critical examination by the larger public—such as the Pentagon eavesdropping on domestic groups or President Bush’s decision to allow the National Security Agency to spy on American citizens after 9/11 without first securing court-approved warrants—are simply hidden under a veil of secrecy. When such actions are exposed, the Bush administration offers no apologies and simply argues that such illegal activities are necessary as a “vital tool in our war against the terrorists.” When government lies and exaggerations are exposed in the dominant media, either Bush and his cronies blame the media for revealing such information or Bush claims he is above the law, as with his sanctioning of illegal domestic spying. This is another example of the big lie that combines ideological rigidity and patriotic correctness as part of a larger attempt to hide the political motives and interests shaping government policies and justifying the status quo.

Even in the face of events that reveal the enormous gap between the rhetoric and reality of democracy in the U.S., the Bush administration claims to occupy the moral high ground while refusing to acknowledge how its own policies are systematically undermining democracy. For instance, the official government response to *Newsweek's* report that American interrogators had flushed a copy of the Koran down the toilet was to blame the erroneous story for inciting anti-American demonstrations rather than the true and increasingly frequent reports of atrocities—ranging from the merely inflammatory to the deeply inhumane—committed by the American forces. In fact, shortly after *Newsweek* retracted its story, the *New York Times* on May 22, 2005 provided evidence of several legitimate accounts of the Koran being defiled by American interrogators, in addition to revelations regarding numerous abuses and Muslim-baiting practices such as “depriving prisoners of published religious items or materials and forcing the removal of beards and clothing.”

In May 2005, Amnesty International issued a report, “Guantanamo and Beyond: The Continuing Pursuit of Unchecked Executive Power,” which compared the U.S. detention centers in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other secret locations to new forms of Soviet-style “Gulag” labor camps. In top Orwellian fashion, President Bush and other high-level members of government responded to the report by suggesting that its contents were simply lies peddled by former detainees. Torture advocate Vice President Cheney, appearing on the May 31, 2005 *Larry King Live* show, attempted to substantiate the government position by claiming, without irony, that the detainees “have been well treated, treated humanely and decently.” The Bush administration’s ongoing policy of abuse, torture, secrecy, and distortion bankrupts any attempt on the part of Bush and his cohorts to use the rhetoric of democracy to characterize American domestic and foreign policy.

Forms of Resistance

EVEN AS EVIDENCE EMERGES that the Bush administration has engaged in illegal abductions, acts of torture conducted in secret prisons abroad, and government-sanctioned secret surveillance policies aimed at political dissenters, there has been neither significant resistance to these incidents from the mainstream press nor widespread public outcry. Few voices were heard, for example, when FBI agents recently arrested a sixteen-year-old girl at a high school in East Harlem, placed her in an immigration detention center in Pennsylvania, and justified such actions with the claim that she posed a threat to the United States as a “would-be suicide bomber.” The lack of criticism surrounding government actions is more than shameful; it is an utter capitulation to an Orwellian rhetoric that only thinly veils an egregious form of authoritarianism and racism.

In the face of such events, we must develop the potential power of a critical discourse to address the gap between rhetoric and deeds in Bush’s government. Critical consciousness and autonomy are, after all, not merely the stuff of political awareness, but what makes democratic accountability possible in the first place. Democracy is fragile and its fate is always

uncertain, but as Hannah Arendt has argued, debate is central to a democratic politics, which requires a public space in which individuals can argue, exercise critical judgment, and clarify their relationship to democratic values and public commitments. The Bush administration exhibits an utter disregard for critical debate and turns the ethos of dialogue and persuasion into its opposite: dogmatism and propaganda. In doing so, the Bush administration combines the discourse of fear and war with a politics of lying that undermines any viable vestige of a democratic ethos. Put simply, Bush and his cronies not only wage a war against the truth, but also seek to render human beings less than fully human by taking away their desire for justice, spiritual meaning, freedom, and individuality.

Politics must become more attentive to those everyday conditions that have allowed the American public to remain complicit in the barbaric policies of the Bush regime even though the rationales buttressing such policies have been shown to be willful lies serving the rich and the powerful. Pointing to these issues is both a political and a pedagogical task which demands that people speak out, break through the haze of official discourse and memory, and take seriously a cultural politics that connects critical knowledge and understanding to the possibility of social engagement, collective resistance, and transformation.

The politics of lying at the current historical moment offers up the specter of totalitarianism as it seeks to eliminate intelligent deliberation, informed public discussion, engaged criticism, and the very possibility of freedom and a vital democratic politics. The spirit of critique must be supplemented with public debate, and a positive sense of individual and social agency capable of becoming both a witness to injustice and a force for transforming those conditions that impose silence and perpetuate human suffering. The distortions, misrepresentations, and lies that have become an integral part of the Bush administration present a serious threat to democracy because they further what John Dewey called the “eclipse of the public” as they undermine public deliberation and lead to corrupt politics.

If democracy in its most substantive and inclusive forms is to become a rallying cry at a moment of incipient authoritarianism, engaged citizens must struggle to overcome the disconnection between language and social responsibility, politics and critical education, market interests and democratic values, privately felt pain and joys and larger public considerations. We need to generate a politics of meaning and struggle based on a language of critique, compassion, and transformation—all of which are fundamental to mobilizing the energies, social relations, and public pedagogies necessary to create alternative public spheres, social movements, and multiple networks of alliances capable of making the promise of global democracy more than an instance of failed dreams. ■

Henry A. Giroux is the Global Television Network Chair at McMaster University. He is the author of many books, including the recent Take Back Higher Education (co-authored with Susan Searls Giroux, 2006) and Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism (2006).

Corporate Complicity in Congo's War

BY KATHLEEN KERN

GOMA'S HOSPITAL COMPOUND HAS A TENT for rape victims awaiting surgery and one for women recovering from surgery. In the pre-op area, I held a month-old girl who was fascinated by the dim electric light hanging from the ridgepole. She arched her back and waved her arms, straining to encounter her exciting new world and oblivious of the atrocity that had created her life.

The mother told me her baby's name was Esther. Claspings her breasts, she said she had no milk. She did not tell me what operation she was waiting for. Perhaps her rapist(s) had caused a fistula, penetrating the wall between her rectum and vagina with penises, guns, or machetes. Hundreds of other injuries are possible. We had seen pictures of women shot in the vagina, who had had salt rubbed in their eyes until they were blind (and thus could not identify their assailants), who had been burned, or had limbs amputated after their rapes.

Since 1996, nearly four million people have died in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from a conflict that has involved several rebel armies, the militaries of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Namibia, Angola, and their proxy militias. These armed groups and the official Congolese army have shifted alliances, split apart and regrouped under other names, but they all have important aspects in common: they target civilians and they all use rape as a weapon of war.

Rape as a Weapon of War

FOR MANY CONGOLESE WOMEN, rape is only the beginning of their trauma. A quarter to a third of the women contract HIV from their assailants, and they are often raped in front of their husbands and children. The husbands or husbands' families then view the women as "contaminated," even when they do not contract a disease, and drive them and their children out of the village. Sometimes they tell the women that they may stay if they kill children born as a result of the rape. Those not killed often become street children (a phenomenon unknown before 1996, several Congolese told us).

Deprived of their social supports, women become prostitutes or burden-bearers to feed themselves and their children. In every community we visited, we saw women bent double, carrying loads of produce or building materials supported by straps that cut deep grooves into their foreheads.

Congolese churches and civic groups have attempted to provide medical care, counseling, and job training for the rape survivors, but they are overwhelmed by the staggering numbers of raped and displaced women. The UN Fund for Women and human rights groups estimate that hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped since 1998, although because of the social stigma, the vast majority of rapes go unreported. The head of a women's organization in Bukavu told us that in 2004 a small grant from the Danish Lutheran church had enabled her to help 1,200 women who had

been raped in the area. She had to stop the program when funds ran out, and now lacks the means even to document the rapes.

The use of rape as a weapon of war has had broader ramifications for the people of eastern Congo. Since armed groups often attack women when they are working in the fields, many women are afraid to leave their homes. Thus, in fertile lands with a year-round growing season, people in the country are beginning to go hungry.

Growing Civilian Violence

VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY ARMED GROUPS has also led to an increase in violence among the civilian population. "Something in our society is unhinging," Jeanne, the head of the Protestant Women's Society of North Kivu told us. Her organization documents stories of rape and sexual assault of a ferocity and frequency unheard of before the war(s). She told us of girls—some as young as eighteen months—raped by neighbors, brothers, taxi drivers, and teachers. Her organization has responded by training 36,000 children to resist rapes and teaching parents never to let their daughters go anywhere alone or be alone with a man, even a teacher.

Some stories haunt her. One young woman delivered a stillborn baby the day after her three-year-old child had died. She was too weak to move when five armed men entered the house and her husband fled. They gang-raped her with the cadaver of the stillborn in the room. She needed five operations and will never have children. The husband married someone else.

Then there was the girl raped by two brothers and their father. When her mother saw she was pregnant, she sent her daughter to the men who had raped her, saying it was their job to take care of her. "She is mentally ill now and cannot stand to be touched," Jeanne told us. "We can't bring a case against the rapists because she has stopped speaking. She is in a deplorable state."

After relating these stories, Jeanne paused and said, "You can get sick yourself."

The West's Role

TELLING STORIES LIKE THESE CAN DO DAMAGE. For too long, people in the One-Third world have known about Africa chiefly through "famine pornography" and atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide. As a result, Westerners have stereotyped Africa as a continent of savages. The story that Westerners need to hear, however, is that the atrocities committed in Congo are being funded, at least indirectly, by large Western corporations. There is a direct relationship between the suffering of women in Congo and the prices we pay for cell phones and laptops here in the United States.

The director of a woman's organization in Goma told us that if we wanted Westerners to understand the roots of violence in Congo, we ought to publicize how Western countries are facilitating and profiting from Congo's misery by dumping weapons into the country. "We are treated like the wastebasket of the world," she said. A representative of the human rights organization COHDO spoke to our delegation of an "Anglophone conspiracy" by the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa to keep distributing arms to militias and armies. By doing so, he said, they keep the region destabilized, and thus open to the exploitation of its resources.

According to most of the people we spoke to, these resources are perhaps the key ingredient to understanding Congo's misery. The country has rich deposits of diamonds, gold, cobalt, timber, and other natural resources. It also contains 85 percent of the



A Congolese woman is seen at a clinic for rape victims and sexually transmitted diseases run by Médecins Sans Frontières in Irumu, eastern Congo.

world's coltan ore. Tantalum, an element derived from this ore, is essential to the manufacture of laptop computers and cell phones.

If the Congo were at peace and able to hold democratic elections, its citizens might gain control over its resources, either by claiming national ownership (as Iran and Venezuela do with their oil) or by regulating the multinational companies that seek to profit from those resources. The violent atmosphere, however, makes it impossible for the Congolese government to challenge corruption within or to exert any authority over multinationals seeking profits. It is thus in the interest of the multinational companies to keep the Congo at war.

Intentional Destabilization

AND THIS INTENTIONAL DESTABILIZATION is precisely what has been happening. A panel of experts set up by the UN Security Council in 2000 issued a series of reports over the next few years describing how networks of high-level politicians from Congo and neighboring countries, military officers, and business people collaborated with various rebel groups to fuel violence in order to gain control over Congo's resources. For example, in 2002 the UN panel noted that as much as 60 to 70 percent of coltan in eastern Congo was mined under the surveillance of the Rwandan military, using the forced labor of Rwandan prisoners.

A 2003 follow-up report by the panel listed eighty-five multinational companies that had profited from the war in Congo, including six U.S.-owned companies: Cabot Corporation, Eagle Wings Resources International (a subsidiary of Trinitech International), Kemet Electronics Corporation, OM Group, and Vishay Sprague. With the exception of Belgium, few governments in countries where these corporations are based have made an attempt to hold these corporations accountable for the contributions they made to the violence in Congo.

For example, after the UN panel of experts reported on corporations pillaging Congo's resources in October 2002, Ambassador Richard S. Williamson (U.S. Alternative Representative for Special Political Affairs to the UN) told the UN Security Council

that the "United States Government will look into the allegations against these [American] companies and take appropriate measures." However, Friends of the Earth (FOE), which had been following up on the panel's allegations against the American companies, noted in October 2003 that "to date, the Bush administration has placed a greater emphasis on exonerating U.S. companies than on undertaking a meaningful examination into how U.S. companies might have contributed to the conflict in [Democratic Republic of Congo] via supply chains."

The panel of experts' final report in October 2003 said that no further investigation was required into the activities of Cabot, Eagle Wings, and the OM Group, who had protested their appearance on the list of eighty-five corporations. However, the report clearly stated that the resolution of this issue should not be interpreted as absolution. The panel's earlier findings about the contribution that these corporations had made to violence in Congo stood.

Because of the inaction of the American government regarding (continued on page 67)

Copies of the UN reports and letters that FOE and RAID have sent government officials are available at www.foe.org/new/releases/84drcomplaint.html. I contacted the U.S. companies mentioned in the third UN report. Two of them, Cabot and Kemet, supplied links to web pages that responded to the charges they had profited from illegally-obtained coltan:

<http://www.kemet.com/kemet/web/homepage/kechome.nsf/weben/KEMET%20Supports%20Avoiding%20Tantalum%20Mined%20in%20Restricted%20Areas%20of%20Congo>

<http://www.cabotcorp.com/cws/businesses.nsf/CWSID/cwsBUS200406141601PM146?OpenDocument>

Cabot's page has a link to a PDF file stating that "Cabot will not purchase any tantalum supplies from any unlawful source in any part of the world." However, a Belgian Senate investigation into multinational war-profiteering in Congo affirmed that Eagle Wings Resources International had a long-term contract to supply Cabot with coltan. The current Secretary of Energy, Samuel Bodman, was CEO and Chairman of Cabot from 1997–2001, when large quantities of illicit coltan from Congolese mines hit the market and were allegedly purchased by Cabot.

Righteous Indignation

AN
INTERVIEW
WITH

William Sloane Coffin

By Or N. Rose



THE REVEREND WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN has been a force for progressive religion and social responsibility in the United States for more than fifty years. He marched alongside Martin Luther King Jr., was jailed as a Freedom Rider, and became one of the most outspoken Christian voices in the Civil Rights movement. Coffin was a founder of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam and was indicted by the U.S. government in the Benjamin Spock conspiracy trial. He was the first president of SANE/FREEZE: Campaign for Global Security, lobbying for nuclear disarmament. As chaplain at Yale University and as spiritual leader of the Riverside Church in New York City, Coffin ministered directly to thousands of students and congregants.

Personally, I think that God is not too hard to believe in, simply too good to believe in, we being strangers to such goodness.

TIKKUN: How did you decide to become a Christian minister?

WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN: I lost the battle to stay out!

More seriously, I suspect my reasons for going into the ministry date back to World War II: four years of military service made short shrift of my boyhood idealism. At the same time, this experience raised a question that has never since been far from my mind: Why is inhumanity all too human? I found the most satisfactory answers among the theologians—St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and Reinhold Niebuhr. They all speak openly about the stubbornness of evil, calling us to name it and to recognize our own complicity in it.

TIKKUN: What is your understanding of the relationship between God and humankind?

WSC: God is the ultimate mystery. As St. Paul said, “Who has known the mind of God?” Like the truths of music and art, religious truths are apprehended at a deeper level than they are comprehended. Feelings being treacherous, the mind must play a critical role in the religious life, but the mind alone cannot discover God.

Personally, I think that God is not too hard to believe in, simply too good to believe in, we being strangers to such goodness.

TIKKUN: What about evil?

WSC: When it comes to evil there are certainly questions I intend on addressing to God one day! But when it comes to war and violence, to the countless ways in which we hurt one another, that is our fault, not God’s. In fact, when we raise our eyes to heaven and ask, “How could you let this happen?” God is addressing the exact same question to us. In other words, evil is generally the abuse of the freedom God has graciously given us.

TIKKUN: What do you think of President Bush’s Christianity?

WSC: I think that President Bush’s God is too violent, hardly the God to whom Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel prayed. I also think that the president’s God is too small. It is my fundamental religious conviction that we all belong one to another, every one of us on this planet. Religious people have to open their hearts to all people, from the Pope to the loneliest wino on earth. It is ridiculous for the president to describe Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as “the axis of evil” when all of humanity suffers infinitely more from environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons.

Further, President Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” seems reserved primarily for the rich and for the unborn; he appears to be much less interested in poor mothers. Jesus put first those whom society counted least and put last. Our president may have experienced a religious conversion, but he doesn’t seem to realize that there is no personal conversion without a change in social attitudes.

TIKKUN: Having raised the issue of “compassionate conservatism” as it relates to women and children, what are your thoughts on the current round of abortion debates?

WSC: This is a complicated question because there is morality on both sides. We must understand that while science can help us with biological and other factual definitions, questions of when life begins and ends are moral mysteries, and as such cannot be proven or disproven. For every religious person who holds that an unborn child is from the very first a child, there are other equally serious religious people who disagree. No less a figure than Thomas Aquinas believed that a fetus has to be “ensouled” before it is considered a human being.

An important question is this: How in a democratic society can you call a crime that which many people do not even consider a sin? It might be emotionally satisfying, but hardly morally satisfying.

Further, to outlaw abortion would only reduce the number of legal abortions, not the total number of abortions. And it is the poor who would be forced to seek out more

dangerous alternatives. The two countries with the lowest abortion rates in the world are Belgium and the Netherlands, where abortion is totally legal, but where society takes seriously its support for the poor. In short, on this painful issue I remain pro-choice, pro-women's choice.

TIKKUN : Given your last comment I find it surprising that you refer to yourself in your writings as a "recovering chauvinist." What do you mean by this term?

WSC: When I was young, women taught in grammar school and in high school, but rarely in universities. They were nurses yet hardly ever doctors. They were secretaries but seldom law partners; even fewer were clergy. In short, the world of my youth was extremely sexist. As I grew older, I loved women, was charmed by them, and even managed to charm a few myself, but rarely did I consider women's lives as important as those of men. I must have been middle-aged before I came to see a feminist as a woman who refused to be a masochist. Since then, I've considered myself at best a recovering chauvinist; like a river, I still carry some of the silt of my past.

TIKKUN : One of the most hotly contested issues relating to religion, gender, and sexuality today is homosexuality. As a religious leader, what is your position on this matter?

WSC: The short answer is that not everything biblical is Christlike. That is to say, there are texts in our canon that defy my understanding of what it means to be a loving, caring human being. For me, the problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with scriptural passages that condemn it, but how to reconcile rejection and punishment of homosexuals with the love of Christ. If people can show the tenderness and constancy in caring that honors Christ's love, what matter their sexual orientation? A relationship should be judged by its inner worth rather than by its outer appearance. I am a strong believer in tradition, but Church doctrines are not immune to error; tradition is no oracle. We have always both to recover tradition and to recover *from* it.

TIKKUN : During the Cold War era you were among the most vocal advocates for nuclear disarmament. Where do you stand on this issue today?

WSC: There are presently 30,000 nuclear arms around the world. Nuclear powers must do more than simply condemn non-nuclear states for attempting to acquire or develop weapons of mass destruction; they must themselves disarm. As Gandhi once said, a fat person cannot talk persuasively to a skinny person about the virtues of not overeating. We must work at changing the American imagination, shedding our self-righteousness, ridding ourselves of our macho love of weapons inherited from our macho frontier past. The United States has to give up on being the world's military superpower and join humanity in creating strategies for global safety.

TIKKUN : In your new book, *Letters to a Young Doubter*, you share a lifetime of wisdom with a fictional college student. What advice do you have to offer young spiritual activists?

WSC: If you love the good, you must hate evil; or else you are sentimental. But if you hate evil more than you love the good, you become a damn good hater! And the world has enough of that kind of activist.

I also wish to pass on the words of the Frenchman, Albert Camus: "There is in this world both beauty and the humiliated...and we must strive to be unfaithful neither to the one nor to the other." We desperately need people who share this view of life. To make a crabby remark, the world has far too many "old turks" and "young fogies." But God bless all those young activists who see that they must care for the world as they care for their friends and family. ■

Or N. Rose, a regular contributor to Tikkun, teaches at the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College in Newton, MA. He recently served as a scholar-in-residence for the AJWS rabbinical student delegation to El Salvador.

Freedom of the Pulpit

The IRS Targets a California Church

BY PETER LAARMAN

SEVERAL THOUSAND RELIGIOUS LEADERS from across the nation and from every faith have now signed a statement that questions the Internal Revenue Service for its investigation of the tax-exempt status of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California. The statement asks the IRS to drop the investigation and clarify its criteria for launching such investigations.

The well-known progressive church decided to make the IRS challenge public after it declined to admit to wrongdoing, which the IRS had requested as a condition for dropping its investigation. Rector Ed Bacon told the media that All Saints has a decades-long history of contesting the morality of government policies, and that the sermon provoking IRS action, which was given by his predecessor George Regas on the eve of the 2004 election, fell squarely within that precedent. Bacon said that the church could not and would not surrender its "core values" or the freedom of its pulpit.

In his sermon, Reverend Regas spun out an imaginary conversation between Jesus, John Kerry, and George W. Bush. He was careful to say that people of good faith and good conscience could vote for either presidential candidate, but he added that Jesus would surely be heartbroken by the Bush policies of pre-emptive war and neglect of the poor and most vulnerable. The sermon was reported in *The Los Angeles Times*, after which an IRS field office opened the investigation.

After the controversy broke in December, Reverend Regas and All Saints were immediately approached with offers of support from the National Association of Evangelicals and from Congressman Walter Jones (R-N.C.), the author of a House bill that would completely remove any restrictions on open electioneering by houses of worship. The church and its supporters, including the Interfaith Alliance, the National Council of Churches, and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, have made it clear that they want no part of this dangerous legislation, which would not only violate the Constitution but also undoubtedly turn many conservative churches into money-laundering adjuncts of political action committees.

The need for IRS clarification of its criteria for bringing challenges has become painfully apparent in recent years as reports of its unfocused work have proliferated. Many have wondered, for example, why a Roman Catholic bishop in Colorado who said he would deny John Kerry communion based on Kerry's pro-choice stance was *not* investigated. That prelate could not have been clearer in suggesting to the members of his diocese that no good Catholic should vote for Kerry.

Other observers question the suggestion made by IRS officials, and also by some Church-State separation purists, that preachers should pull back from prophetic preaching during election season—to avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing. These observers say that election season is precisely the time when preachers should be vigorously denouncing the oppressors of the poor and leaders who rule deceitfully. And in times like these, they add, when so many Bush administration policies demand criticism and condemnation, how can prophetic preaching *avoid* doing what the IRS says is prohibited—i.e., opposing “by implication” the election of one set of candidates?

Everyone agrees that preachers should avoid saying “vote for Candidate Smith” from the pulpit. But must they avoid telling the truth about the specific policies of Candidate Jones simply because doing so gives Smith an implied boost on the eve of an election? That’s what the IRS seems to suggest with regulations that draw the line not just at *direct* candidate endorsement but at *implied* endorsement.

The IRS offers little useful guidance for verbiage that permits discussion of government policies and programs inside of tax-exempt houses of worship while forbidding discussion of the policies of *candidates* in ways that might end up influencing voting behavior.

With luck and persistence, the national leaders who have lent their support to All Saints Church may be able to force a long-overdue clarification that preserves the freedom to preach with integrity, but continues to outlaw open electioneering. ■

Peter Laarman is the executive director of Progressive Christians Uniting and editor of Getting on Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel (forthcoming from Beacon Press).

The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace

BY SHARON D. WELCH

WE ARE, AT LONG LAST, in the midst of a vigorous and comprehensive critique of the U.S. war in Iraq. People throughout the world decry the horrendous loss of lives, both civilian and military, and are critical of the arrogance and poor planning in this administration’s attempt at “regime change” in Iraq.

It is vital that we in the peace movement continue our criticism of this war and its enormous costs. It is equally important that we realize that criticism alone is not enough. A strong sense of the folly and cost of *this* war and *this* imperial misadventure will not necessarily translate into opposition either to war per se or to American imperialism. We need instead to find a way to talk about alternatives to war in a language that will inspire and mobilize our fellow Americans.



Recognizing A New Vietnam

WHILE MANY IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY are now critical of the war in Iraq, they do not necessarily renounce either military force or American imperialism. Robin Toner of the *New York Times*, in her article "Democrats Are Advised to Broaden Appeal" discusses a report prepared for the Third Way, a political and policy group for centrist Democrats. The authors of the report, William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, call for a foreign policy that "emphasize[s] the importance of the American military as a potential force for good in the world, and in so doing [engages] 'Michael Moore Democrats' who instinctively view American power as suspect."

I am a member of a research team at the University of Missouri affiliated with Global Action to Prevent War, an international coalition-building effort to implement non-violent alternatives to war and internal armed conflict. We have found that the failure of political strategists to imagine a non-militaristic foreign policy resonates with our work with conservative and moderate students.

In the spring of 2003, as the war in Iraq was getting underway, we found an unsettling juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory ideas. While most of our students thought that the war in Iraq was just, most also believed that the war in Vietnam was a clear example of an unjust war. All, Republican and Democrat alike, could recite the same critique of America's folly in Vietnam: our government lied to us, there was no just cause for the war, and there were too many U.S. casualties. This substantial critique of the war in Vietnam did not translate, however, into a critique of either the justifications for, nor the execution of, the war in Iraq.

Why is it that wars begin like World War II and end like Vietnam? Author and media critic Norman Solomon describes two common themes in presidential justifications for war: the "benign and even noble intent" of the U.S. government, and the confident assertion that "the latest war is as good as a war can be—necessary, justified, righteous and worth any sorrows to be left in its wake."

How Moral Clarity Can Lead to Violence

HOW DO WE ADDRESS POWERFULLY and clearly the illusions of beneficence and inevitability that justify war? How do we learn to see both the costs of war and our culpability as a nation in excessive and gratuitous violence?

Social psychologist Albert Bandura has described how easy it is for moral clarity and absolutism to lead to cruelty and violence. Bandura describes several dimensions of moral disengagement, the process by which decent human beings commit and justify behaviors that they would otherwise recognize as morally abhorrent.

Bandura has identified five elements that are especially pertinent in the current situation. The first factor is being convinced that one is the bearer of a just cause, and that coercion is required to protect and advance that cause. A second dimension is avoiding the negative consequences of one's behavior through the use of euphemistic language, for example using the term "collateral damage" for the death and injuries caused to civilians, or the terms "professional interrogation techniques," or "softening up" prisoners for interrogation to refer to physical and psychological torture. Third, when the severity of the consequences can no longer be avoided, one dehumanizes and/or demonizes the victim: the victims somehow deserve the negative consequences because they are all "terrorists" or are motivated by an irrational hatred of us. The fourth step is disadvantageous comparison: our violence pales in comparison to theirs. Recall Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' response when challenged by Senator Lindsay Graham to decisively condemn the use of torture by U.S. personnel: "While we are struggling to try to find out [what happened] at Abu Ghraib, they're beheading people like Danny Pearl and Nick Berg. We are nothing like our enemy." The fifth step is a diffusion of responsibility: one was only following orders or acting as can only be expected in "the chaos and fog of war."

How do we learn to see moral disengagement when we are enmeshed in this process of rationalization and justification? We who are progressives can easily craft arguments exposing this Orwellian logic in ways that *we* find persuasive. That is not the problem. How do we find the logic, the examples, the metaphors, and the stories that can engage in self-critical reflection those who do not agree with us while affirming, not denying, their capacities as moral agents?

Alternatives to War

A SECOND CHALLENGE FACING THE PEACE MOVEMENT is that of conveying the plausibility and feasibility of alternatives to war. In his forthcoming book, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Our Country Back from the Religious Right*, Michael Lerner describes a strategy of generosity, a vision of military and economic policy that begins with an acknowledgement of two factors: our "mutual interdependence" as human beings, and the tragic and self-defeating costs of military and economic domination.

People throughout the world share these convictions and are working in numerous ways, large and small, to implement nonviolent alternatives to war. There are, for example, three promising developments at the United Nations: the ratification of the International Criminal Court; the implementation of a Post-conflict Peacebuilding Commission; and planning for an emergency peace service.

Furthermore, as described by Camille Pampell Conoway and Anjalina Sen in a document prepared for Global Action to Prevent War, people throughout the world are involved in traditionally defined conflict prevention measures (early warning and early responses to escalating instability) and in structural prevention, which aims to establish the institutional and cultural building blocks of sustainable peace (such as "negotiating and maintaining peace agreements, promoting human rights and good governance, enhancing justice and reconciliation and facilitating sustainable socio-economic development").

While there are many practical alternatives to war, we have encountered a threefold challenge to engaging people in critical involvement in these measures. First, although

In the face of grave threats, nonviolent action is seen quite baldly as "doing nothing."

we provide ample information about forms of nonviolent action and conflict resolution, many of our students and many people in our community do not find these strategies either credible or satisfying. For many people in the United States, “real” power, whether human or divine, is expressed in the decisive defeat of enemies, not in mutual transformation, healing, and reconciliation.

In the face of grave threats, war, with all of its costs, is still the preferred option, and forms of nonviolent action and conflict resolution and prevention are seen quite baldly as “doing nothing” or as appeasing dangerous enemies. The successes of the Civil Rights movement and Gandhi’s nonviolent campaigns are thought to be unique, dependent on the beneficence of the British and U.S. citizenry, and not indicative of the response to be expected from implacable enemies.

A second challenge to persuasively conveying alternatives to war concerns our own actions and behaviors. Just as many of our students suspect that we underestimate the perfidy and resolve of those perceived as enemies, so they suppose that we overestimate the virtue and competence of peace activists and peacekeepers.

How do we hold together hopes for a world without war with a recognition of the ongoing tendencies, even among peacemakers and peacekeepers, toward error, domination, and violence? As the sexual abuse of women and girls by UN peacekeepers has demonstrated, the peacekeepers must also be carefully trained and policed!

Those of us who are working for peace are not a righteous vanguard; we are as flawed and partial as any human being. We can, and will, abuse cooperative power and need our own Trickster stories to remind us of our flaws and excesses. There is no multitude, no group any less likely than others to abuse power—as Fanon knew well and as revolutionaries of all sorts forget to their peril. Wisdom, ongoing self-critique, and accountability are required of all of us, not just the imperial others, in the exercise of social, cultural, economic, and political power.

Finally, how do we actively encourage the nonviolent actions of others? Along with providing alternative information, we are trying to find the right language with which to frame our arguments and aspirations. The metaphors that we use for our visions of peace and justice may not resonate with the deepest longings and hopes of large numbers of people. We have yet to find a language that challenges the status quo and evokes commitment to a different form of world order.

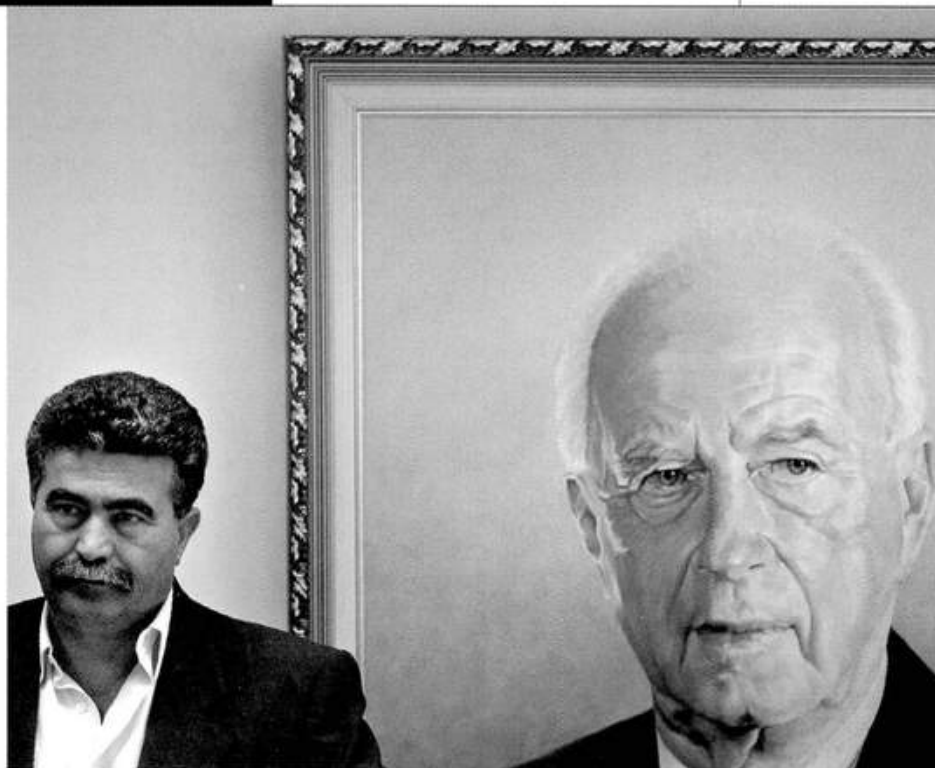
Finding a Language for Peace

WHAT WORDS DO WE USE FOR OUR WORK as finite and fallible peacemakers: “the abolition of war,” “the prevention of war,” “human security,” “global security,” “conflict resolution,” “conflict prevention,” “enduring peace,” “sustainable peace”? What are evocative metaphors for compassionate, self-critical, and creative engagement? Our goal is neither the ultimate defeat of evil nor fundamental and permanent social change. It is simply (but significantly?) a less destructive way of playing who and what we are.

We have in the past found metaphors for working toward justice, that, although partial, were evocative: “sisterhood is powerful,” “workers of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains,” “a dream deferred is a dream denied,” “let justice roll like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

How do we express most vividly our appeals *now*, not just to sisterhood or to workers, but to all humanity for sustainable peace, for justice attained without violence, for global security, and for nurtured dreams? I do not know the answer, but conclude with a metaphor for the task that is ours: let us be artisans of hope and of wonder, working with the clay of human striving; of our capacities for exclusion, vengeance, and fear, as well as our capacities for generosity, courage, forgiveness, and resilience; crafting together flourishing communities of honesty, inclusion, self-critique, and hope. ■

Sharon D. Welch is professor of religious studies at the University of Missouri at Columbia and the author of After Empire: the Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).



It's the Economy, Stupid...Or Is It?

By Shlomo Swirski

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE the start of the first intifada in 1987, one of Israel's two major political parties is running on a ticket that puts social and economic issues at the top of its agenda. It is the Labor party, led by Amir Peretz. As if by sublime orchestration, it is also the first time that a major right-wing party is running on a ticket of "Two States for Two People," a slogan that for many years was the standard chant at peace rallies organized by Hadash, the Israeli communist party. Surprisingly enough, that right-wing party, Kadima, is the one founded by Ariel Sharon, "the father of the settlements."

Israel's political elite seems to have arrived at a crossroads. Ariel Sharon, who headed opposition to the Oslo accords with

Israeli Labor Party leader Amir Peretz stands in front of a painting showing the late Prime Minister and Labor leader Yitzhak Rabin.

the Palestinians, was in the summer of 2005 forced to take a taste of his own medicine when the right wing of the Likud, the party that Sharon founded in 1973, nearly paralyzed his government in protest over the Disengagement. With Labor ministers resigning from his cabinet and conservative members of his own party challenging him on nearly every issue, Sharon's proposed budget for 2006 stood no chance of being approved. Having committed himself to a still rather vague plan to end Israel's open control of most but not all of the Palestinian territories, Sharon decided to go for what is referred to as the "big bang" of Israeli politics—that is, the creation of a centrist grand coalition party that would enable him to put an end to the deadlock on the Palestinian question.

This was not the first time that an Israeli prime minister found that his moves on the Palestinian front undermined his ability to get a budget approved—that is, his ability to govern. In 1998, Benjamin Netanyahu had his proposed budget for 1999 torpedoed by right-wing members of his coalition, who protested his signing of the Wye River agreement with the Palestinians. In 2000, Ehud Barak could not get his budget proposal for 2001 approved by the Knesset, following the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations with the Palestinians. In 2004, Ariel Sharon's budget proposal for 2005 got stuck in the Knesset, as a result of right-wing opposition to his intention to unilaterally disengage from Gaza and northern Samaria.

As for the 2006 budget itself, it embodies the connection between the cost of the Occupation of the Palestinian territories and its impact on Israel's society and economy. Since the first intifada, the Israeli economy has been on a roller coaster ride, with periods of contraction, such as that which occurred during the late 1980s, interspersed with periods of expansion, like the one that began with the mass immigration of Russians and the signing of the peace accords with the Palestinians and Jordan in the early 1990s, or the one that resulted from the growth of the hi-tech bubble in 2000. The second Intifada brought with it the most severe contraction: it led, among other things, to deep budget cuts, hitting Israel's social security system as well as its public health, education, and welfare systems. These cuts led to increased unemployment and lower salaries and pensions, and raised the costs of housing, education, and medical treatment. Hardest hit were middle- and low-income Israelis. Their losses were soon made doubly painful by the Sharon government's decision to secure the allegiance of the upper middle class by providing it with tax cuts giving high salaried employees monthly cash additions equivalent to the monthly wages of many low-income Israelis.

During the Al-Aksa intifada, social unease became widespread, but the extant political map acted as a lid on the boiling pot: many of those hardest hit by the economic policy were Mizrahi Jews (who had become staunch Likud supporters in the 1970s protesting their proletarianization upon migration to Israel, at a time when Labor was enjoying thirty years in power). Labor could not take advantage of the changing circumstances, both because it had joined Sharon's coalition government and because it was paralyzed by its own traditional adherence to a "security first" policy. It thus lacked the public legitimacy to come out openly saying, "It's the economy, stupid." This had to wait until Amir Peretz assumed the party's leadership in November 2005. The fact that the economy is now gaining prominence as a political issue is best exemplified by the fact that, mimicking Peretz's Labor party, other Israeli political parties are now emphasizing "social concerns," with Sharon, prior to his debilitating stroke, leading the pack with a promised "war on poverty."

Poverty has indeed reached unprecedented proportions in Israel. In 2005, 20.5 percent of Israeli families had incomes below the poverty line (defined in Israel as 50 percent of the median income, after tax and social security payments). Thirty-four percent of Israeli children are poor. The figures are especially high among Israeli Palestinians (41 percent) and families with at least four children, most of whom are either Orthodox Jews or Israeli Palestinians (43 percent).

Sharon's former minister of finance, Benjamin Netanyahu, liked to attribute poverty

to a propensity among the poor to live off social security instead of going to work. This is belied by the figures: over one third of Israeli poor are working people.

The Israeli labor market, in fact, has undergone a deep transformation, along lines familiar enough to American readers. While the incomes of those occupying jobs requiring college degrees have gone up, those of people in unskilled jobs have gone down, in relative terms. The middle class, defined as households with incomes of between 75 percent and 125 percent of the median household income, has contracted from 33 percent in 1988 to 28 percent in 2002. The middle class's income has also shrunk: in 1988 it received 28 percent of all household income, while by 2002 that figure had eroded to 21 percent. The share of the lower class remained stable at around 13 percent.

The most dramatic development has been the growth of wealth at the upper end of the scale. Between 1988 and 2002, the upper class' share of all household income increased from 58 percent to 66 percent. The rise is due, among other things, to the adoption of "American" standards of executive remuneration: In 2004, the salary bill of executives at companies traded on the Tel Aviv stock exchange was, on average, NIS 121,000 per month—thirty-six times the Israeli minimum wage and seventeen times the average wage.

Growing income inequality has had rapid knock-on effects. Perhaps most prominent among them is education. For almost two decades now, the once-free school system has been invaded by private money. Reacting to cuts in school budgets in the 1980s, parents in affluent neighborhoods began adding out-of-pocket monies to pay for both regular and enrichment classes. That money soon became a de facto barrier to the entrance of children of lower income families. In other words, those out-of-pocket monies created what are in effect private schools within the formally fully public Israeli school system. While many schools now ask parents for out of pocket payments, it is estimated that about one third of Israel's secondary schools ask for significant sums of money, with some asking for very substantial amounts. Israelis whose incomes have shot up are willing to pay, since they thus guarantee their children a relatively cheap private education; cheap, because such payments are only additions to the state funds that still cover the bulk of those schools' budgets. Israelis whose income has gone down—and that includes the shrinking middle class—are losing the race; in fact, most do not even try to catch up.

The Israeli school system was never egalitarian: Arabs have always gone to separate and less endowed schools, and they still do. Mizrahi youth were historically tracked to vocational schools, and many still are. Now, on top of that, we have family earnings determining children's schooling chances.

The chances are not great to begin with. Figures for 2004 show that only 29 percent of Israeli high school graduates enter colleges or universities within six years of graduation. The figure for students from the most affluent communities is 45 percent, while that for the least affluent communities is 13 percent. These figures are indeed low and make one wonder about the advantages of national sovereignty: if we look for one moment only at Israeli Jews, the 2003 figure for high school graduates entering colleges or universities within 6 years of graduation—29.5 percent—is probably the



The second intifada brought with it deep budget cuts, hitting Israel's social security system, as well as its public health, education, and welfare systems.

lowest for any large Jewish community in the world. Much the same can be said for Israeli Palestinians—the figure for them was 13.5 percent—when compared to their co-nationals in diasporic communities.

The figures will not improve in the coming years. In fact, the budget proposal for 2006 is the first of five annual budgets which, following a Cabinet decision, will see a yearly increase of no more than 1 percent in government expenditures; given that the population has been increasing at 1.7 percent per annum, per-capita expenditures are sure to decrease, including expenditures on education, health, and welfare.

It is difficult to foresee whether or not the spring 2006 elections will live up to their abundant promises. What is clear, though, is that what Israel needs is not a politically expedient “war on poverty,” but rather a new dream for Israeli society to replace the thirty-eight-year-old chimera of regional empire. ■

Shlomo Swirski is the academic director of the Adva Center. A sociologist and activist, he has written extensively on inequality in Israel. Swirski organized low-income parents for school improvement and is one of the founders of the alternative Kedma schools.

Replacing the Roadmap

BY BEN LYNFIELD

TO THE END OF HIS POLITICAL LIFE, Ariel Sharon sought to foster the idea that he was committed to the roadmap. In his last interview before being felled by a brain hemorrhage in January, Sharon told Japanese journalists that his policy toward the Palestinians was based on it.

I had heard him say this many times before. But it was only some two months before his stroke that I fully came to understand how disingenuous Sharon was being. Indeed, for two and a half years, Sharon, his aides, and his ministers had their own roadmap. They authored it. They were enthusiastically pursuing it. But it had nothing in common with the peace plan except the name.

On November 22, 2005, wearing a casual blue-and-white-striped sweater, Sharon's strategic adviser, Eyal Arad, showed up at a press conference to explain the prime minister's position on the roadmap in the run-up to the Israeli elections.

The night before, in announcing he was breaking with Likud and forming a new party, Sharon had seemingly placed the internationally endorsed plan for ending the Israel/Palestine conflict at the heart of his reelection campaign. Asked whether if reelected he would carry out further unilateral withdrawals such as the one from Gaza and northern Samaria completed in September, Sharon said: “There is no additional disengagement plan. There is the roadmap.” A few days later, Sharon's newly-named Kadima party, the favorite to win the March 28 election, announced that the roadmap would be its diplomatic plan.



But Mr. Arad's remarks in elaborating on Sharon's views about the roadmap raised questions. He said startlingly that the roadmap breaks with the "territories for peace" formula that has underpinned Middle East peace efforts since 1967.

"Territories for peace," he explained, had proven "false philosophically and naive politically" because of Palestinian attacks after the Oslo Agreement and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's rejection of terms offered by Israel at the Camp David summit in 2000.

"What is essential in the roadmap is that it replaced the basic assumption of how to resolve the conflict," he said. The roadmap, he added, recognized the "falsehood of the territories-for-peace formula and replaced it with a much more realistic formula: security for independence."

Since land for peace is one of the roadmap's stated foundations (see its third paragraph) I at first thought this was an instance of campaign spin, perhaps to appeal to right-wingers who might vote for Likud. It was only when I reread the roadmap, and (very belatedly) compared it to the Sharon government's official reaction to it that I realized that Arad's remarks hinted at something highly significant.

Roadmap rewriting by Ariel Sharon began in earnest on May 25, 2003. That was when Israel, under the guise of making "comments" on the roadmap and having "reservations" about it, actually replaced the peace plan with its own competing vision of how to handle relations with the Palestinians. The international peace blueprint known as

It was “painful,”
Arad said, to discard
“used” ideas such as
territory for peace,
but it had to be done
and the roadmap
had done that.

the roadmap was drafted by the United States, European Union, Russia, and United Nations and released on April 30, 2003.

Arad, almost as an aside, said that by “roadmap” what is meant is “the roadmap as approved by the [Israeli] cabinet, including the fourteen points, none of which touch on the essentials.”

Actually the fourteen points that comprise the comments negate all the essentials.

The “Israeli Cabinet Statement on Road Map and Fourteen Reservations” is a document of historic significance. It should not be seen as a footnote to the roadmap. It was through these fourteen comments that Israel made the rejection of negotiations towards a permanent status settlement with the Palestinians its official policy. Before the cabinet voted on the “comments,” Washington agreed to “fully and seriously” address them during implementation of the roadmap. The U.S. role in facilitating Sharon’s replacement of the roadmap is something that will—or at least should—preoccupy scholars of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for years to come.

The real roadmap’s stated destination (paragraph one) was a “final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005.” This is restated in the outline for Phase III of the roadmap. Indeed, the whole point of the roadmap is to take steps leading to final status negotiations on borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, and other issues that result in “the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors.”

But Sharon never agreed to this as a goal, even formally. Comment Nine negates the *raison d’être* of the roadmap. It says: “There will be no involvement with issues pertaining to the final status settlement. Among issues not to be discussed: settlement in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (excluding a settlement freeze and illegal outposts); the status of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions in Jerusalem; and all other matters whose substance relates to the final settlement.”

Based on this “comment” alone, it becomes inaccurate to say that the Sharon government accepted the roadmap with reservations. Even in the most limited textual sense, Sharon’s Israel was never on board.

Among the other major discrepancies are that the roadmap does not require the Palestinians in Phase I to “complete the dismantling of terrorist organizations” as do the fourteen comments. The roadmap requires that the Palestinian Authority begin “sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.”

The roadmap calls for an Israeli withdrawal “from Palestinian areas occupied” since the start of the fighting on September 28, 2000. The comments reject this, saying “Emphasis will be placed on the division of responsibilities and civilian authority as in September 2000 and not on the position of forces on the ground at that time.”

The rejection is in keeping with ruling out territorial concessions that are part of an agreement. Arad explained that there was a basic difference between dealing with the Palestinians and dealing with Egypt at the time of the 1979 peace treaty under which Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula in accordance with the territories-for-peace principle. “With Egypt we were dealing with a sovereign state whose fact of existence was never in doubt,” he said. “But it never worked with the Palestinians because their situation was so different. So we needed a different way and that was the roadmap.”

Arad said that from the failure of the Oslo process and the Palestinian rejection of the Camp David proposals, it became clear that what the Palestinians were really after was independence and what the Israelis were after was security. He stated that “Israelis said peace, but they didn’t mean a formal treaty. What they really wanted was quietness, to live life without the threat of terrorism.” Of the Palestinians, he said: “The idea of semi-autonomy is wrong. What they need is the ability to be a national home over territory.”

It was “painful” Arad said, to discard “used” ideas such as territory for peace, but it had to be done and the roadmap had done that.

Israeli Labor party candidate Amir Peretz has not, at least during the early days of the campaign, been stressing the term “roadmap.” Mr. Peretz promised in his victory speech after winning the party leadership to remain true to the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin, the slain prime minister, and make peace with the Palestinians. But in a press conference outlining Peretz’s campaign strategy, Knesset member Yuli Tamir said that when it comes to the Palestinians, there was little difference between Peretz and Sharon. Both men, she said, will complete Israel’s West Bank security barrier, remove more settlements, and attempt to open dialogue with the Palestinians. In a subsequent interview published in Arabic in the *Kul al-Arab* newspaper, Peretz pledged to pursue final status negotiations with the Palestinians and said he opposes unilateral disengagement. “The fundamental mission I will face during my term if elected is to reach a final agreement with the Palestinians,” he said. But he also said his position is that Jerusalem should remain “united under Israeli sovereignty” and ruled out a return of Palestinian refugees inside Israel.

Where do the fourteen comments and “independence for security” in place of “territories for peace” lead? If Sharon’s successors in Kadima adhere to them, they are a roadmap to avoiding final status negotiations, to perpetuating the status quo, to a long-term interim solution with a non-viable, partially sovereign Palestinian “state,” to further unilateral Israeli actions such as the Gaza withdrawal, or to a combination of these. If the term “independence” is used as disingenuously by Kadima as the term “roadmap” was used by Sharon, then under “independence for security,” Palestinian independence could presumably be declared in Israeli defense ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv.

The pursuit of the above outcomes has often been depicted as a kind of hidden agenda that can be inferred from the ongoing fragmentation of the Palestinian areas, settlement expansion, barrier construction deep inside the West Bank, and other actions that contravene the roadmap. But the plan is in black and white, it was written nearly three years ago, and it was still being followed at the time of Sharon’s massive stroke. As long as the fourteen comments remain Israeli policy, the roadmap will be merely a label that Sharon and his heirs have appropriated for their own ends.

Sharon demonstrated an ability to reverse positions, such as his long-standing view that holding certain Gaza settlements was essential to Israel’s security. But the Gaza withdrawal did not in any sense mark a shift away from the fourteen comments. Most likely, a reelected Sharon would have tried to continue what has thus far been a successful strategy of replacing the roadmap.

The fourteen comments leave open the possibility of withdrawing from territory to advance Israeli demographic and other interests, but not with a partner, not as part of an exchange, not for peace, and not in accord with the interests of the Palestinians as determined by the Palestinians. An interim solution cannot be imposed now because there is no Palestinian willing to sign. If Sharon’s strategy is maintained, the objective will be further understandings with Washington that determine the Palestinians’ future without a Palestinian voice.

Continued Palestinian security disorder and inability or unwillingness to begin actions against those perpetrating terrorist attacks would augur well for the continued success of Sharon’s strategy.

There has been no pressure to reverse this strategy within Israel. The cost in Israel’s relations with the United States has been zero. The harm to Israel’s relations with the European Union has thus far been small.

If Sharon’s political legacy is to be upheld, then new buzzwords like “independence for security” could take on heightened importance for packaging an Israeli-imposed solution that replaces the bilateralism of the ill-fated roadmap. ■

Ben Lynfield is a Jerusalem-based journalist who writes on the Middle East for American and British publications.

An Unusable Past?

Martin Buber's Religious Zionism

BY DAVID B. STARR

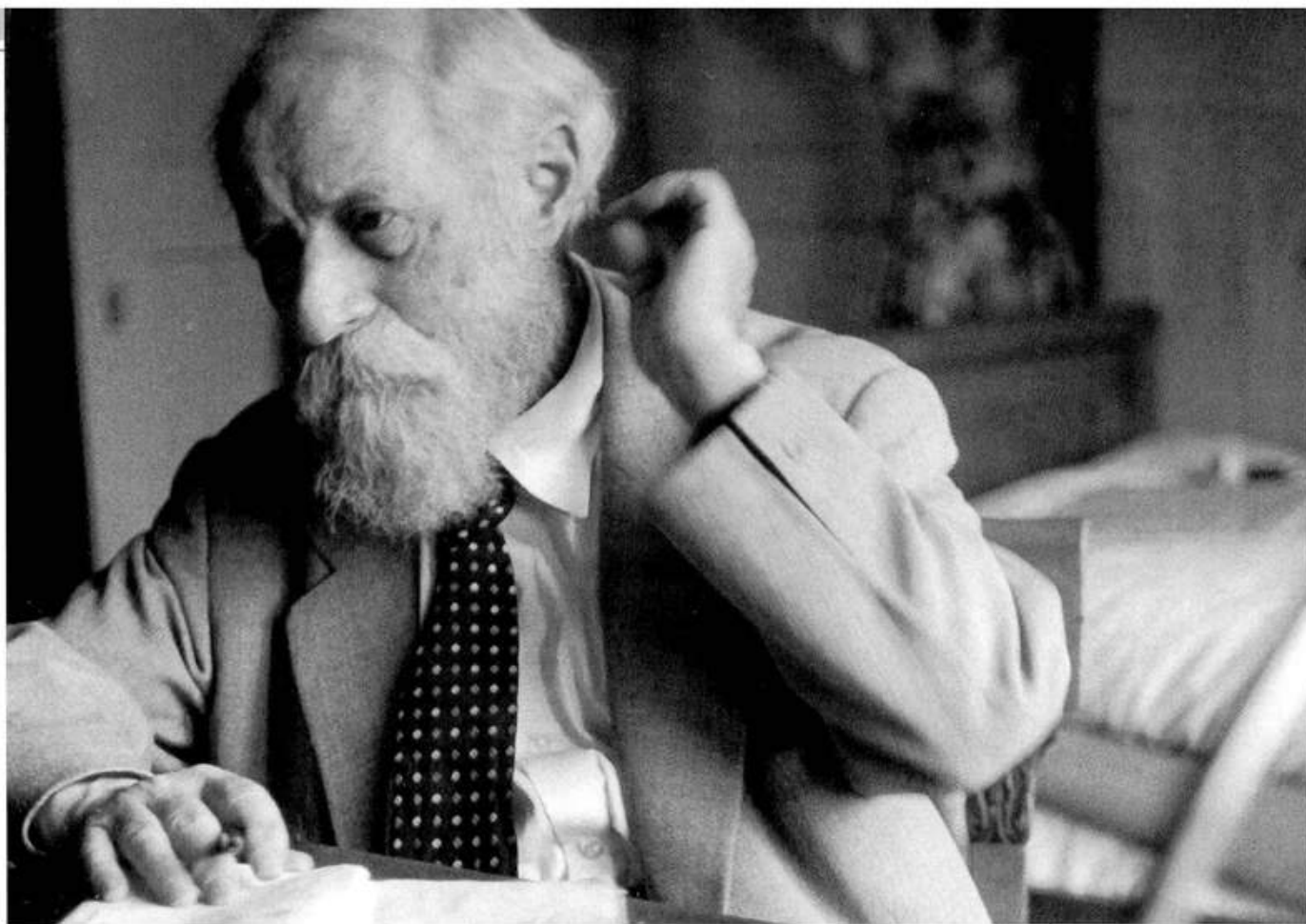
TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ZIONIST MOVEMENT is both more extremist and more dynamic than ever. Since the Six Day War, under the inspiration of Zvi Yehudah Kook, son of Israel's first Ashkenazi chief rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook, Religious Zionism has become more politicized, more hawkish in its approach to Israel's security, and more messianic in its apocalyptic reading of the state's religious significance. Given the enthusiasm and commitment of such social forces, what are the potentialities of other spiritual approaches in twenty-first century Israel? Martin Buber (1878-1965), a religious thinker and a Zionist (but never a religious Zionist in the partisan sense of that term) was tantalizingly and frustratingly heterodox in his spiritual aspirations for Zionism as the solution to the problems of Jewish social and cultural life. Reconsidering his legacy might be a way of reclaiming Israel's original faith in a deeper set of principles and our commitment to a broad vision of Zionism as a key component of contemporary Jewish life.

Many divide Buber's long and productive career into two components: his intellectual/theological activity, which began with a focus on mysticism and Hasidism and later evolved into his famous *I-Thou* philosophy; and his Zionist activities, specifically his advocacy for a bi-national state and ongoing partnership between Jews and Arabs. Buber viewed these two streams as one, seeing the cultivation of meaningful and spiritually enriching interpersonal relationships as the basis for a just and vibrant Jewish culture. He also insisted that Zionism work to unify Jews and Judaism throughout the world, and that Israel participate in the healing of the world as a whole. Zionist historiographers have largely forgotten Buber, dismissing him as a historical "loser" who was bypassed by the two-state solution proffered by the UN in 1947. But his approach to Zionist spirituality is worth reconsideration.

"Zionism is not a matter of party politics, but a *Weltanschauung* [worldview]," argued Buber,

The construction of this *Weltanschauung* is the duty of inner agitation. Those who join the movement by virtue of external agitation [i.e., anti-Semitism] are, in fact, not at all Zionists. To become a Zionist is not similar to the process by which one becomes a conservative or a liberal, rather it is similar to the process by which one becomes an artist or a human being. The process therefore must come about through inner agitation, through the cultivation of Jewish culture.

This notion of Jewish Renaissance led to Buber's lifelong interest in Hasidism. Buber viewed the Hasidic movement as a resource for a German Jewry rapidly losing its connection to a spiritual Jewish folk culture. Buber felt no attraction for the orthodoxy of the Hasidim, but sought to glean from them a vision of an integral community



appropriate for modern Jewish life in the land of Israel. For Buber, the Jewish community not only shared a common history and destiny, but a tie of blood that formed “the deepest, most potent stratum of our being.” In a response to the great German Jewish philosopher and anti-Zionist Hermann Cohen (d. 1918), Buber viewed Palestine as “the firm sod in which alone the seed of the new unity can sprout.”

Buber found in the Bible what he believed to be the antecedent to an ethical socialism filled with political implications for the present.:

The men of the Bible are sinners like ourselves, but there is one sin they do not commit, our arch-sin; they do not dare confine God to a circumscribed space or division of life, to ‘religion.’ They have not the insolence to draw boundaries around God’s commandments and say to Him: ‘Up to this point, you are sovereign, but beyond these bounds begin the sovereignty of science or society or the state.’

Buber believed that Zionism could heal polarities like ethics and politics because he felt it to be imbued with what he called the “Hebrew humanism” of the biblical prophets. Concerned about the overreaching of the state, Buber contended that it should not take responsibility for that which is the province of communities and the peoples that constituted them.

Buber’s political thought reflected larger trends dating back to the French Revolution. The sociology of nationalism involved a new self-awareness tied to the need for territorial integrity. That materialist concern reflected a new psychology of self and nation that, like Enlightenment anticlericalism, was critical of traditional religious values and institutions. Buber expressed this sentiment by his antipathy for “religion” as opposed to “religiosity.” By viewing his work in this light, one begins to discern Buber’s own place on the spectrum of Jewish and Zionist thinkers. He affirmed both faith and peoplehood, the latter contra Reform thought, the former contra the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha’am. But Buber’s heterodoxy, what would come to be viewed as Jewish existentialism, distinguished him from Orthodoxy as well, of either the Zionist or anti-Zionist stripe. This became the primary focus of Buber’s ethical and political activity.

Buber preached the importance of cultivating relations with Arab workers in the spirit of socialism by creating common projects between Jews and Arabs that would breed trust and understanding.

As early as 1920 Buber looked upon the “Arab problem” as an opportunity for creating a Zionist ethical socialism. He argued that the yishuv ought not to depend on the British, whom he viewed as self-serving imperialists. Not only would the Jews be deceived by the British, but by collaborating with the British, Zionism would appear as yet another form of European colonialism. Buber feared that Zionism would degenerate into merely the “power hysteria” typical of modern nationalism. “To forget one’s own peculiar character, and accept the slogans and paroles of a nationalism that has nothing to do with the category of faith, means national assimilation.” As early as 1921, Buber lamented the normalization of Jewish nationalism, which in his view had become excessively preoccupied with being “like unto all the nations.” Instead, he preached the practical

and philosophical importance of cultivating relations with Arab workers in the spirit of socialism. This needed to take root, Buber argued, by creating common projects between Jews and Arabs that would breed trust, understanding, and a mutuality of interests.

Concerned about the potential tragedy of the conflict between Jews and Arabs, Buber acknowledged—and resisted—the possibility that one side would eventually triumph at the expense of the other. “The fact that there is no living creature which can live and thrive without destroying another existing organism,” he wrote, “has a symbolic significance as regards to our human life. But the *human* aspect of life begins the moment we say to ourselves we do not want to do more injustice to others than we are forced to do in order to exist.” Remarkably, Buber wrote this in the wake of the Arab riots of 1929; he continued to insist that the moral course was the practical course, and that *Realpolitik* would be the height of folly for the cause of Zionism.

But such visions paled before the reality of the larger issue. What would be the course of Jewish efforts to increase the Jewish population of the *yishuv* (The Jewish community in Palestine prior to the declaration of the state of Israel), and what response would emerge from the Arab community? In the years between the Balfour declaration in 1917 and the creation of Israel in 1948, Buber, along with fellow intellectuals and academics, formed a series of groups committed to this larger vision of inter-group accommodation and harmony. Their position occupied what to present readers seems like an anomalous, if not downright contradictory place, advocating a seemingly precarious equality of opportunity for both communities, with neither controlling the other.

In 1942, Buber signed on to a document that read, “The principle of the return of the Jews to their historic homeland in order to constitute their autonomous national life is a matter of elementary right, and as such is not open to discussion.” Jews “have the right to immigrate to and settle in Palestine in accordance with the full economic absorptive capacity of the country and to an extent that shall assure the growth and development of the *yishuv* towards a complete and autonomous economic, cultural, social and political life in cooperation with the Arab people.” Yet here too ambiguity emerges, since “agreed upon immigration quotas for periods of years” remained a possibility, though Buber and his colleagues remained “opposed to any tendency to crystallize the *yishuv* as a minority in Palestine,” even as they opposed the increasing resolve of Ben Gurion and the yishuv to press for a Jewish state in some sort of partition arrangement.

In his famous 1938 response to Mahatma Gandhi’s opposition to Zionism, Buber encapsulated his view of history and philosophy as grounds for Zionism. Dispersion meant heartbreak and the creation of artificial distinctions between the social and cultural life of Jews. Self-determination enabled justice to take root not only between people, but also between peoples. Nationalism, however in danger of chauvinism, presented the opportunity for creating one’s nation’s uniqueness. While acknowledging Arab claims to Gandhi, Buber pressed the case for Jewish ones too. “We cannot renounce the Jewish claim—something higher than the life of our people is bound up with this land, namely... its divine mission.” This required each group to acknowledge the (continued on page 67)



JEWISH RENEWAL
AND THE HOLOCAUST

A Theological Response

By Shaul Magid

ONE COULD ARGUE THAT all post-war Jewish theology is post-Holocaust theology. Without taking a stand on the historical debate as to whether or not the Holocaust is a unique event in general or in Jewish history, the existential impact of this catastrophe was such that Jewish thinking after the war was by necessity thinking through the war. Elie Weisel once said that he understood how someone who was a believer before the Holocaust could become an atheist afterward, and how someone who was an atheist before the Holocaust could later become a believer. What was incomprehensible to him was someone whose theological worldview was the same before *and* after the Holocaust.

Understanding Jewish Renewal as a post-Holocaust phenomenon requires us to understand the role the Holocaust played in its development.

The Holocaust becomes a kind of covenantal opportunity—not to recover what was lost and rebuild what once was, but to construct something that has never been.

Turning toward the Holocaust

JEWISH RENEWAL'S FOUNDER AND ARCHITECT, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (b. 1924), was born into a Hasidic but semi-enlightened family. A refugee of internment camps in France who immigrated to the United States after the war, he became a disciple of the sixth and then seventh Lubavitcher Rebbes and later forged his own spiritual alternative, known today as Jewish Renewal. Surprisingly, Reb Zalman wrote little about the Holocaust. However, there are references (though sometimes oblique ones) to the Holocaust and its impact on Jewish Renewal throughout his writings.

As a spiritualist (not identical to a theologian) Reb Zalman seems to have little interest in dwelling on the anti-Semitism that fueled the Holocaust, although he surely acknowledges the centrality of that anti-Semitism in coming to terms with the Holocaust. His approach, and that of Jewish Renewal more generally, seem to be more forward looking—not dwelling on the hurt caused by the Holocaust or the culpability of its perpetrators as much as on the opportunity it presents for the future of the Jewish people and humanity. This model is, to some extent, aligned with the prophetic approach to Jewish disaster—the prophetic call to respond to tragedy by looking inward and forward in a practice called *teshuvah*. This word is often translated as “repentance,” but literally means turning inward, or an act of introspection. For the prophets, Jews are called to turn inward because any disaster, and according to Reb Zalman *even* the Holocaust, must be understood within God’s covenantal relationship to the Jews. One could argue that in a spiritual sense—and *only* in a spiritual sense—if the Jews are blameless for any disaster that befalls them, then the covenant is broken.

For many traditional Jews, the Holocaust did present the terrifying possibility that either Jews had broken the covenant or God had. For example, the late Satmar Rebbe (Grand Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum), invoking the liturgical formula “for our sins we are punished,” argued that the Jews, and particularly the secular Zionists, were to blame for the Holocaust due to their unabashed sacrilege. Others argued that the Holocaust was an illustration of an act of divine concealment (*hester panim*), a temporary effacement of covenantal reciprocity (Eliezer Berkovitz), or worse, that God had left us entirely (as Richard Rubenstein argued in his “Death of God” post-Holocaust theology).

Reb Zalman and Jewish Renewal, however, posit what may be a more radical answer, one that holds the possibility of a constructive, and covenantal, response. Perhaps the covenant was not irrevocably broken, but rather a part of it was destroyed, resulting in a seismic shift. Others have experimented with a theology along these lines. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, for example, has argued that what has shifted is Israel’s attitude toward the covenant or the nature of covenantal obligation. For Reb Zalman, however, the shift was on a grander scale. The entire world has shifted and the Jews are situated on the fault line. This view suggests a drastic altering of the world’s spiritual terrain. It means that for the covenant to survive, the Torah must be renewed, if not radically altered, in order to remain a banner for Israel’s universal purpose.

Holocaust as Covenantal Opportunity

I ONCE HEARD ANOTHER INFORMAL FOUNDER of Jewish Renewal, Reb Shlomo Carlebach, frame the Jewish Renewal attitude to the Holocaust. Very close to his untimely death, Shlomo was teaching in Boston. As it was late summer, after Tisha B’Av, his words turned to the destruction of the Second Temple and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai’s courageous (yet problematic) decision to abandon the Temple and take his disciples to Yavneh to build an institute of Torah that would become the backbone of rabbinic Judaism, a new direction for Judaism that is

Note: I use the term Holocaust instead of the Hebrew equivalent Shoah throughout. My reason is that the term Shoah implies a uniquely Jewish event. I think Jewish Renewal and Reb Zalman in particular stress the *global* and not merely Jewish implications here. The Holocaust is an event that happened to the Jews but not only to the Jews. This is not to agree with Hanna Arendt that the Jews were a marginal part of a global phenomenon but rather that the ramifications of the event extend beyond the sphere of the Jewish people.

arguably what saved the Jewish people from obscurity. It is significant that the context of this discourse revolved around Shlomo's soulful rendition of the verse in Psalms "Sing to God a new song." "How could it be," Shlomo asked, "that with all the Torah that was being studied and all the great luminaries in Europe, this tragic event [the Holocaust] could have occurred?" After a long pause, he answered his own question softly, as if to himself. "Perhaps," he said, "the Torah being studied there was not good enough, perhaps we need a new Torah." He then launched into "Sing to God a new song."

It was the Torah itself and not the Jewish people, implied Shlomo, that could not avert the harsh decree. Reb Zalman extends this point to argue that in some sense the pre-war Torah needed to be effaced to make way for something new, just as the Temple had to be destroyed to pave the way for the rabbinic interpretation of the Torah. Reb Zalman believed that the pre-war Torah was a product of arrested development that stunted the necessary growth of the Jewish people and prevented the Torah's universal message from contributing to a new world. The project of Jewish Renewal is thus about constructing a radically new Torah emerging out of, but not confined by, the old. Disaster is therefore not a result of sin or unfettered evil, but a purging of something that no longer serves its intended purpose. In this sense, the Holocaust becomes a kind of covenantal opportunity—not to recover what was lost and rebuild what once was, but to construct something that has never been. I want to be clear that this theological hypothesis does not at all address the *cause* of the Holocaust. Rather, we are talking about making sense of it, making it "usable," to look at how such an event could be viewed as changing the Jews, the Torah, the world, and the Jewish mission. Reb Shlomo and Reb Zalman's comments are not philosophical interpretations, nor are they logical or metaphysical claims. They are theological speculations uttered within a particular posture of faith—a position which holds that the Jews *qua* individuals, whatever they may have

JEWISH FUNDS FOR JUSTICE

As the only national Jewish organization dedicated solely to fighting poverty, the Jewish Fund for Justice (JFJ) has been a leader in the Jewish tradition of tzedakah since 1984. But their recent merger with The Shefa Fund, another prominent Jewish philanthropy organization, promises to inject new life into the fight against poverty and broaden Jewish involvement in giving. The new organization is to be called the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ).

Even before the merger took place, the two organizations teamed up to create the Hurricane Katrina Relief and Redevelopment Project, a Jewish response to the suffering of low-income victims of the storm. JFJ executive director Simon Greer said the project addressed the fact that low-income communities were hit harder by Katrina than their better-off neighbors, and that it was designed to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of those affected.

The benefits of the merger extend far beyond Katrina victims. Complementary expertise and experience will

allow the merged organization, JFSJ, to combat poverty more forcefully and effectively. JFJ focuses on anti-poverty organization at the grassroots level, provides grants, and supports education. The Shefa Fund advances redevelopment in low-income communities, promotes corporate responsibility, and supports grantmaking for progressive Jewish donors.

JFJ will continue with its preexisting projects, now equipped with more tools in the ongoing pursuit of economic justice, investment in youth, community building, and Jewish engagement in social justice. While the organization hopes to reach out particularly to younger Jews, it will also continue to collaborate with other faith-based and non-Jewish organizations. —LINDSAY ALLISON MEISEL



Each issue of Tikkun will feature a Jewish organization pursuing the value of tikkun olam, the healing of the world. Please tell us about any organizations you know that fit the bill. Email us at joellen@tikkun.org.

The destruction wrought by the Holocaust calls for a new Torah, because the old Torah, in a sense, was also its victim.

done, are not to blame for the Holocaust and that the Torah as the constitution that binds the Jews to God can remain intact even as it is radically altered.

One "lesson of the Holocaust" (and in *Paradigm Shift*, Reb Zalman, in opposition to many others, explicitly argues that the Holocaust can and must teach "lessons" to Jews and the world) is implied in Shlomo's teaching: perhaps the Holocaust wasn't averted because the Torah being studied and lived by Jews simply wasn't good enough. This suggests that the destruction wrought by the Holocaust calls for a new Torah, because the old Torah, in a sense, was also its victim. This shift of emphasis, while morally problematic to some, may bear some constructive fruit. If a transformation of Torah was required, those studying that Torah were its innocent victims, just as the practitioners of the cultic rites were innocent victims of the Temple's destruction. If this is so, according to Jewish Renewal, the only theologically correct way for Judaism to recover from the Holocaust is to attempt to produce a new Yavneh, a goal Reb Zalman makes explicit in his writings (for example in *Paradigm Shift*). Yavneh here is not viewed as a compromise in the face of loss but as a progressive extension of God's covenantal program. Yavneh was *necessary* and the destruction was the prerequisite of its existence.

As audacious as this sounds (isn't audacity required to make any sense of the Holocaust?) this theology implies that the Holocaust was God's way of liquidating one Torah to make room for another. In true apostolic fashion, Reb Zalman argues that this *new* Torah is one that always existed, it is the one that *first* existed but was buried beneath centuries of pain and anguish that produced a xenophobic Torah espoused by so many righteous followers. The argument is that this *new* Torah, this Torah of Renewal, is simultaneously new and ancient, a turn of phrase used by Jews from the Zohar ("new-ancient words") to Herzl (in the title of his book *Old New Land, Altneuland*).

Like Kabbalah and Zionism, Jewish Renewal is an openly non-normative approach to Jewish tradition, arguing that its deviance and its innovation have their own genealogy.

The Torah of the Non-Jew

THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO QUESTIONS that need to be addressed in order to better understand Jewish Renewal's relationship to the Holocaust. First, what was the deficiency of the pre-war Torah that did not *cause* the Holocaust but, in a spiritualist sense, could not *avert* it? Second, what lessons are to be learned by Jews *from* the Holocaust? That is, in what ways has the Holocaust changed the ways Jews should relate to the world? In 1968, just as post-Holocaust theology was taking root in America, Reb Zalman wrote the following in "Holocaust and Homeland":

There has been much refinement in Jewish law. Prior to the Holocaust, the Torah of the Jew had proliferated into the most minute levels of life. But the Jewish Torah of goy, by and large, did not have any specific action directives. We who were charged with the responsibility of reproving our neighbor when we saw him involved in a sinful act had excluded the goy from our reproach. The goy was given the same consideration as the compulsive beast; no amount of rational reeducation could possibly help him. At best we sought only the application of subtle pressure: "You are such a nice minister of the interior; please stop the pogrom...." Our theology will continue to fail us as long as our *halakha*...has not come to grips with our relations with goyim.... *So I say they are a people of a confused heart* (Psalm 95).

According to this, the Holocaust revealed that the Jews were too inward looking, too parochial. The problem with the (traditional rendering of the) Torah of the pre-Holocaust world was that it could not be a vehicle for universal salvation because it had abandoned the world—it offered nothing to the non-Jew, the "goy"—and thus could not be a vehicle for salvation. A corollary was that the Holocaust should not be a tool to confirm that Jews are the most victimized victims; it should not be a justification for distancing oneself from the world, or even a justification for the State of Israel. (In *Paradigm Shift*, Reb Zalman called for the internationalization of Jerusalem in 1967 immediately after the six-day war.) This turns one traditional argument on its head. Some traditionalists argue that (continued on page 68)

AN UNUSABLE PAST?

cherished notion of dialogue, Buber's politics remain tragically impractical. But his cultural outlook reminds us of what Israel had that it now seems to lack. His view of Israel as a community necessarily grounded in relationships both interpersonal and social speaks to the current craze regarding both politics and society. Israel's extreme Left and extreme Right want the same thing—one state, though they picture it differently. The Left wants a state for all its citizens, a post-Zionist paradise. The Right wants a state dominated by Jews and Judaism, demographics and democracy be damned.

Gone but thankfully not forgotten is the historic middle-ground of Israeli social thought, the vision of a state built upon values of mutual responsibility and solidarity, a community-driven view of what a society can be. This view owes a great deal to the likes of Buber and his urgings for mutuality, for seeing all of reality through the prism of the possibility and the necessity of relationship. Secular and religious, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, rich and poor, Jew and Arab, all could use a dose of that Buber bromide. ■

The University of Chicago Press reissued Martin Buber's A Land of Two Peoples in 2005. David B. Starr teaches history at Hebrew College, where he serves as Dean of the Me'ah program. He is currently writing a biography of Solomon Schechter.

JEWISH RENEWAL AND THE HOLOCAUST

(continued from page 62) the liberalization of Judaism—its universalization or modernization—was the root-cause of the Holocaust. Reb Zalman argues that it was precisely the Torah of the “old” paradigm that needed to be replaced. The pre-war move toward a Jewish humanism represented the birth-pangs of a new era that fully emerged through this tragic purge. He suggests that the Holocaust is, in retrospect, an opportunity, if not an obligation, for Jews to be emissaries against oppression and injustice. As the “most victimized victims,” Jews now have the covenantal responsibility to speak to the rest of the world for all victims.

In this reading, Jewish Renewal's response to the Holocaust is the inverse of that of American Jewry. To some degree, American Jews integrate the Holocaust by *inwardly* focusing on Jewish identity and continuity as the lesson Jews need to learn and *outwardly* focusing on anti-Semitism as the lesson the world needs to learn. Reb Zalman inverts this equation. He looks *inward* by trying to identify and correct the deficiency of Jews living inside Torah before the Holocaust and *outward* by understanding the Holocaust as a call toward renewing Judaism's universal mission for the future.

Understanding introversion and parochialism as a lack of maturity of Torah was not only a lesson learned from the Holocaust. In his recent study of Hasidic masters, Reb Zalman suggests that the recognition of this parochialism was noted by some ultra-traditional Jews even before the Holocaust, specifically by one its victims. In a short essay about Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1929) that appeared in *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, Reb Zalman acknowledges that Zeitlin was an important resource

for his conceptualization of Jewish Renewal. Zeitlin was part of a small cadre of ultra-traditional free-thinking Jews in Warsaw in the inter-war period. Taken by the passion and mysticism of Hasidism, yet deeply immersed in secular life and thought, Zeitlin and his circle may be the true European precursors to Jewish Renewal in America. Zeitlin did not write much but was a charismatic presence in Jewish Warsaw, as attested to by the young Abraham Joshua Heschel, who recounts meeting him when Heschel was an impressionable teenager. Zeitlin was bothered by the parochial nature of the Jews in Poland and explored the pathways of Judaism to find a new paradigm, to construct a new Yavneh, including the reinstitution of Jewish universalism. In *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, Reb Zalman writes:

Well, between the two world wars, Reb Hillel Zeitlin was trying to say something to people who had sanctified the high degree of surface tension between us and non-Jews. In so many stories on both sides of the divide, the other people were expendable. For non-Jews, for Christians, Jews were expendable. For Jews, Christians were expendable. Often they were seen only as useful expedients, as Shabbos Goyim, and the rest were superfluous. That was the attitude that they took. We are finally emerging from that attitude. But there he was in his time, and how was he going to say that? ... Zeitlin reached into what people have called Second Isaiah and that universal vision, and he realized that nobody can become fully aware of that without everybody else being redeemed. When a person becomes aware of that, he ushers in a new way of thinking... But the time wasn't quite ripe. Zeitlin's visions were daring and profound; unfortunately they were also ahead of their time.

The time was surely not ripe. On September 2, 1942 wrapped in his prayer shawl and tefillin, Zeitlin was killed by the Nazis on his way to Treblinka, murdered on his way to being murdered. But his dream of a new Yavneh, of a traditional Judaism that was unafraid, impassioned, and open to the world lived on in the work of Reb Zalman and later Jewish Renewal. After the war, Reb Zalman took that message to America, a stable and open society changed by the war, and began to incorporate Zeitlin's dream of a new Yavneh in the early institutions of Jewish Renewal, particularly Bnei, later Pnei, Or in Philadelphia, Havurat Shalom in Boston, and the Aquarian Minyan in Berkeley.

This new program required much more than institution building; it required a radical re-visioning of Jewish theological thinking and activism. In the next segment I will explore post-monotheistic (Jewish) theology as a template for how Reb Zalman believed Judaism can become an integral part of a global spirituality renaissance. ■

Shaul Magid is the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Professor of Jewish Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington. He is the author of Hasidism on the Margin (2004), and editor of God's Voice from the Void (2002). NOTE: This essay is the second in a three-part series exploring Jewish Renewal and American Judaism.

How to Live in the Wilderness

BY SHARON KLEINBAUM

THE IMAGES THAT FLASH AT US from our screens every day emphasize what a wilderness we live in. Darfour, Katrina, Gaza, the Patriot Act, Guantanamo Bay, anti-gay legislation: the world in which we live can seem very bleak. It is hard, living in this wilderness, to imagine the possibility of real and substantial change.

The Jewish holiday of Passover, which comes every spring, has something important to teach us about the bleak landscape that looms on seemingly every horizon. At this time of year, Jews read that our ancestors spent forty years—a whole generation—in the wilderness. They did not have any personal, first-hand knowledge of a promised land. They could not know for sure that tomorrow would be different from today.

When faced with the rigors of the wilderness and the uncertain promise of the Land, the longing to return to the comforts of Egypt—even though it means knowingly accepting oppression—is intense. A world of terror is frightening; the Egypt that the Patriot Act offers is security, even if it comes at the price of personal oppression. Famine and civil war abroad threaten our own humanity; how much easier it is to pretend they don't exist and to accept the Egypt of comfortable selfishness. For gays and lesbians, the struggle out of Egypt into the wilderness includes the perils of self-revelation and consequent horrific risks. The invisibility offered by Egypt, while it crushes the soul, provides some measure of protection. At least in Egypt, your job might be safe. Your children might not be taken from you. At least in Egypt you don't get beaten on the street, or told you deserve AIDS.

One of the great paradoxes of the experience of the wilderness is the tension between the impulse to go toward the Land and the pull to return to Egypt. What we learn is that it is better to be out of Egypt even if we are not yet in the Land. Life is not lived only in Egypt or in the Land. Life, and human beings, are more complex than that. The kind of either/or vision that suggests we must be in Egypt or in the Land breeds a bitter politics of despair.

How do we live in the wilderness? No matter where we are, no matter how close or how far we are from Egypt, we—each and every one of us—must struggle to have a vision of the Land. If you don't have the Land to dream of, if there is no hope, then the pull to return to Egypt will be overwhelming. That pull will choke the very breath of your soul that aches to be in the East.

What we need is the ability to believe and hope—despite the sand and sun, despite the bleak landscape around us—that change is possible. That there is a different world and that even though we have not experienced it, our job, day in and day out, is to take one step closer.

There will be many setbacks, as the stories of our ancient text tell us. It won't be a simple journey. And it won't be a journey without a lot of heartache, disappointment, failure, and tragedy, but we are told to believe in the impossible and believe in the possibilities of a promised land despite the bleak universe in which we live. ■

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York City and the author of Listening for the Oboe, available at www.cbst.org.

CORPORATE COMPLICITY IN CONGO'S WAR

(continued from page 40) the behavior of the corporations involved, FOE and the U.K.-based group Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) filed a complaint with the U.S. State Department on August 4, 2004 against Cabot, Eagle Wings Resources, International, and OM Group, Inc. According to Colleen Freeman, who works with RAID, Wesley S. Scholz, from the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs in the U.S. State Department, declined to investigate the companies further, citing the Panel's conclusion that the issues involving the U.S. companies were resolved. However, in January 2005 he notified the three companies that FOE and RAID still had issues they wished to discuss and offered to facilitate an informal dialogue between the two organizations and the corporations. When RAID contacted Scholz in September 2005 to follow up, he said that the companies had confirmed receiving his letter, but did not respond.

By failing to act, the U.S. and other Western governments have sent a troubling message: Corporations are not responsible for ensuring that their purchase of natural resources does not finance weapons and human rights abuses in the Two-Thirds world. There is a thin but clear link between money that flows to the militias from corporations interested in protecting their claim to the Congo's resources, and the militias' ability to recruit new soldiers and to continue attacking villagers. Unless the corporate plunder of the Congo is stopped, the terror—and the rapes—will continue.

What We Can Do

THE ORGANIZATION I WORK FOR, Christian Peacemaker Teams, places teams in areas where an international presence might deter violence. After we described how our presence has been valuable in Colombia, the West Bank, Iraq, and North America, most of the Congolese we talked to said that a team of volunteers in the countryside—where most of the violence happens—would probably be raped and killed along with the villagers we would intend to protect. Indeed, the only action that most Congolese requested of us was to pray, tell their stories, and to send to Congo more Westerners, especially women, who could publicize what was happening in their country.

To those in Congo trying to create change, one of the most discouraging aspects of their work is the feeling that their efforts happen in a vacuum, that no one outside Africa cares about what happens in eastern Congo. The challenge for North Americans, then, is to look beyond the mainstream media and make a commitment to educating themselves about the war and plunder in Congo, to bring what they learn before their friends, congregations and legislators, and to proclaim that the lives of baby Esther and her mother matter. ■

Kathleen Kern has worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams since 1993, serving on assignments in Haiti, the West Bank, Chiapas, and Colombia. Her novel, Where Such Unmaking Reigns, based on her experiences in the West Bank, was selected as a finalist for Barbara Kingsolver's 2002 Bellwether Prize.

AN UNUSABLE PAST?

(continued from page 58) claims of the other in the service of creating a larger unity. "We love this land and believe in its future; and seeing that such love and such faith are surely present also on the other side, a union in the common service of the land must be within the range of the possible."

History took events in a different direction—partition, war, a Jewish state, and an implacable Arab opposition to that new reality, which redefined the "possible." In 1948, Buber recognized the need and right for Jews to defend themselves. "The war being waged for a political structure risks becoming a war of national survival at any moment. Thus against my will I participate in it with my own being, and my heart trembles like that of any other Israeli." Buber accepted the Jewish state as legitimate, if not ideal. "I have nothing in common with those Jews who imagine that they may contest the factual shape which Jewish independence has taken." While he continued to preach a prophetic stance of criticism, he remained a loyal opponent to Ben Gurion's emerging brand of statism.

In retrospect many of Buber's views seem contradictory and ill-conceived. He underestimated the depth of the problem of evil and the depths of European anti-Semitism that insinuated itself into Arab thought and discourse. His mistrust of statism similarly denied the real significance that people attach to political nationalism and sovereignty.

Buber today suffers from misappropriation and misreading from the left and the right of Zionism. While the Left approves and the Right deplores, each in effect reads him as a non-nationalist, a universalist preoccupied with the life of "dialogue" and a lofty ethical perch. The Left sees his bi-nationalism as a proof-text for post-Zionism, for dilation upon Zionist "oppression" of Arabs and Palestinians. Such readings ignore Buber's steadfast affirmation of Jewish rights to the land, to the exercise of power, and to the central premise of Zionism: the human dignity of Jews as imbedded in their relationship with one another and with their land. When the Right pays any attention to Buber, it focuses less on his Zionism than on his religious heterodoxy and his reluctant acceptance of the Jewish State.

It remains the case that Buber's commitment to a moral politics presents intriguing parallels to contemporary trends in religious Zionism. Religion in general flirts continually with the mundane, since it seeks to transform that secular realm. Modernity may have relegated religion to the private confessional, but however heterodox Buber became, he never accepted that Western premise. Buber resisted thinking in overtly messianic terms about Israeli politics, but at the same time he continued to argue for a moral politics not just in idealistic terms, but also in practical terms. As a neo-romantic thinker, he refused to concede to pluralism or to the tragic view. Rather than seeing the Zionist predicament as tragically compelled to choose Jewish dignity at the expense of the Arab, he continued to urge a stance, and implicitly a policy, that assumed that both claimants could somehow be satisfied.

Given the weakness of a pro-peace Palestinian "vital center," and therefore the improbability of a peace born from his

Culture

BOOKS | FILM | MUSIC

The Refugee Experience BY LIV LEADER

GATE OF THE SUN, by Elias Khoury. Translated by Humphrey Davies. Archipelago Books, 2006

BAB AL SHAMS/LA PORTE DU SOLEIL, Directed by Yousry Nasrallah, 2004. A co-production of ARTE France, Ognon Pictures, Soread 2M, Gimages Films, and MISR International Films

IN A DILAPIDATED HOSPITAL IN Beirut's Shatila refugee camp, Yunes Al-Asadi lies comatose. At his side sits his friend and doctor, Khalil Ayyoub. Desperate to revive Yunes, Khalil retells the stories of their lives and unwraps the tragic and powerful history of these two Palestinian refugees. These men, once heroic *fedayeen*, are now lonely figures in a revolution where Oslo diplomacy has replaced the Palestinian fighter.

Thus opens Elias Khoury's stunning novel *Gate of the Sun*. Considered a literary masterpiece on par with the work of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, *Gate of the Sun* spans the history of the Palestinian refugee experience from its beginnings in 1948 to Yunes' dreary hospital bed in 1998 Beirut.

Both Khalil and Yunes are trapped in Shatila camp's lone hospital, where Yunes, a fallen hero, lies on his deathbed, and Khalil is hiding from assassins. Khalil can't revive Yunes, so he assumes the task of keeping his body alive: feeding him through a tube, moistening his eyes and, much like Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*,

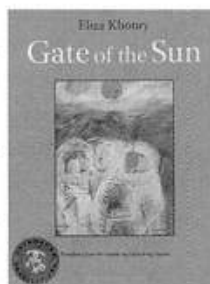
telling him stories. These tales narrate *Gate of the Sun*. What Khalil doesn't know of the Palestinian hero, he invents.

Weaving hearsay with what is known of Palestinian history, Khoury deftly illuminates the lives of the refugees. It's the interplay between the Palestinian oral tradition and Khoury's complex understanding of the last fifty years of Palestinian history that makes this book indispensable to those interested understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Born in the Galilee village of Ain al-Zaitoun during the final years of the British Mandate, Yunes grew up in the shadow of war. Khoury describes the Galilee in the months before the birth of Israel, evoking a time when Europe's war began to haunt Palestine. In 1948, Yunes' people were naïve and unprepared for the war their existence embodied:

Ain al-Zaitoun, in those days, was a small village sleeping on the pillow of war. Everything in it rippled. The people hurled themselves into the electrified air and tasted war. Nobody called anything by its real name, war itself didn't resemble its own name. Everyone thought it would be like the war tales of their ancestors, where mighty armies were defeated, locusts ate up the fields, and famine and pestilence spread through the land. They didn't know that this time the war without a name was them.

Hoping to curb their teenage son's political activism—aimed at ending



the Mandate and preventing Palestinians from selling land to Jews—Yunes' parents marry him to twelve year-old Nahilah. This girl from the town's poorest family is not the olive-skinned beauty of Yunes' fantasies. Both too young for love, the passion of their romance

doesn't develop until they are separated by war.

In May 1948, as the British prepare to leave Palestine, Ain al-Zeitoun is attacked by the Palmah, and Yunes' family flees the village. As Palestinian life in the Galilee is uprooted by war and the newly homeless begin the exodus to Lebanon, Yunes' family decides to stay in Palestine. Leaving Nahilah behind, Yunes and his comrades flee to Lebanon to form the movement that will ultimately become the PLO. Yunes rises in the ranks of the resistance and spends the next thirty years traversing back and forth through the mountains that separate him from Nahilah. Now wanted in Israel for smuggling weapons into the Galilee, Yunes meets his wife in the secret home she's created in the caves surrounding Deir al-Asad. This cave, dubbed *Bab al-Shams* (Door of the Sun), becomes the setting for the adult Yunes and Nahilah to fall in love and grow their family.

First published in Arabic on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1948 war, Khoury's novel captures a Palestine beyond the headlines and activist slogans. His writing reveals the lives of Palestinian refugees to the English-speaking world.

While Khoury is not Palestinian, his life parallels the narrative of his characters. Born in 1948 to a Christian family from East Beirut, Khoury has been a lifelong advocate for human rights. He joined Arafat's Fateh movement in 1967 and worked at the PLO's Palestine Research Center in the 1970s. In 1979 he began editing *Shu'un Filistiniya*, a journal of Palestinian affairs, with Mahmoud Darwish. Like most men of his generation he was pulled into the Lebanese Civil War, in which he was severely injured. He is the author of eleven novels, five of which have been translated into English, as well as several plays. He is Editor-in-Chief of the cultural supplement of the Beirut newspaper *Al Nahar* and teaches at New York University. Khoury is a respected writer in the Arab world who has won awards in Lebanon and garnered praise from the late Edward Said. Years of interviewing Palestinian refugees in Beirut and Jordan in his work at the Palestine Research Center provided the insight and trove of material necessary for writing *Gate of the Sun*.

Khoury's novel is significant because his writing reflects an ability to show the struggle of the Palestinian refugees in its full dimensions. His characters are not simply underdogs, untarnished heroes fighting for Palestinian liberation. Rather, they are nuanced men and women struggling to survive the difficulties history has thrown at them. Both Yunes and Khalil were left disillusioned by the Lebanese Civil War, a war that Yunes believes criminalized the Palestinian *fedayeen*. These men spent their youth brandishing the fiery words of revolution. It is their legacy of passionate struggle that we see in today's angry Palestinian youth. But what Khoury shows us is something a foreign reporter will never be able to capture. He reveals what is hidden in the refugee experience: namely the women, and the pain of losing Palestine. Nahilah and the midwife Umm Hassan ultimately resist without weapons and are the true heroines of the novel. Khoury elegantly describes the loss and frustration that remains after



the revolution is over. His fighters are scarred men, whose lifetime of fighting is weighed down by a sense of defeat.

Khalil is too intellectual to be a real fighter; he's a *fedayi* who has lost the urge for war. Born in Beirut's camps, Khalil's father was assassinated at his doorstep. Abandoned by his mother and raised by his grandmother, Yunes mentors the child and sends Khalil to the PLO's training camps. As Khalil later tells Yunes, "I became a political commissar because I loved literature, I became a soldier because I was like everyone else, and I became a doctor because I had no choice." Khalil is not a real doctor. After a three-month-long course in field medicine in China, he returns to Beirut's Shatila refugee camp and becomes a doctor of the revolution. To Khalil, nothing is concrete in this sea of refugee homes and a life of political uncertainties:

This isn't a hospital, it just resembles a hospital. Everything here isn't itself but a simulacrum of itself. We say house but we don't live in houses, we live in places that resemble houses. We say Beirut but we aren't really in Beirut, we're in a semblance of Beirut. I say doctor but I'm not a doctor, I'm just pretending to be one. Even the camp itself—we say we're in the Shatila camp, but after the War of the Camps and the destruction of eighty percent of Shatila's houses, it's no longer a camp, it's just a semblance of a camp—you get the idea, the boring semblances go on and on.

In an interview with Anton Shammas, the Arab-Israeli author of the acclaimed *Arabesques*, Khoury said that in the final stages of writing *Gate of the Sun* he felt that the book needed to be translated into Hebrew. When published in Israel in 2002, the book was criticized by prominent historian Tom Segev. He argued that Khoury went beyond his poetic license in his description of events surrounding the beginning of the *Nakba* (the Palestinian refugee crisis). Segev wrote in Israel's center-left daily, *Haaretz*, "The burden of truth is on the teller. If there is no truth to [stories of Palmah troops executing Palestinians in 1948] ... it is not proper to make fictional use of them. Khoury is not known in Israel, and there is no reason to believe him. Stories of this sort miniaturize the Palestinian tragedy into an argument over specific points."

While we should note Segev's concerns over historical accuracy, his critique of *Gate of the Sun* leaves out what makes the book so rich. The power in Khoury's novel is his ability to tell refugees' stories while acknowledging that these stories are part of oral history, and as such can never claim absolute historical accuracy. The Palestinians of Khoury's novel are poor Galilee farmers whose stories have been passed from one generation to the next. The stories are full of meticulous detail, tall tales, trauma, and unknown endings. In addition to his interviews with refugees, Khoury researched his novel using Benny Morris'

Khalil is too intellectual to be a real fighter; he's a *fedayi* who has lost the urge for war. As Khalil later tells Yunes, "I became a political commissar because I loved literature, I became a soldier because I was like everyone else, and I became a doctor because I had no choice."

authoritative work *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. In his introduction to the revised edition, Morris acknowledges that one of the challenges in recording the history of the refugees is the lack of official Palestinian documentation. Morris' experience interviewing for his book taught him that he could not trust human memories to accurately recall events that occurred over forty years ago. He writes:

The value of oral testimony about 1948, if anything, has diminished with the passage of the 20 years since I first researched the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem. Memories have further faded and acquired memories, ideological precepts, and political agendas have grown if anything more intractable; intifadas and counter-intifadas have done nothing for the cause of salvaging historical truth.

Khoury's novel aims to blend the work of historians with the oral tradition of the Palestinian refugees. While he is not without political agenda, his circuitous writing weaves past with present and brings the reader into an oral tradition of multiplicity. Khoury is telling us that we can't always know what is factual in the stories of the refugees. It will never be clear who shot who, or if the mad woman of Kabri collected chicory root or the bones of those killed in 1948. These stories are the Palestinian refugee experience. They are what Lebanon's 400,000 refugees tell to each other, and they are stories we might also want to hear.

In one of Khalil's bedside monologues to Yunes, we clearly hear the author's agenda. "The whistle rings in my ears," he says. "I see the people being led toward the final trains. I see the trains, and I shudder. Then I see myself loaded into a basin and carried on a woman's head."

"I confess I'm scared," he admits. "I'm scared of a history that has only one version. History has dozens of versions, and for it to ossify into one leads only to death."

"We mustn't see ourselves only in their mirror, for they're prisoners of one story, as though the story had abbreviated and ossified them."

Egyptian filmmaker Yousry Nasrallah's 2004 adaptation of *Gate of the Sun* lacks Khoury's nuance. It's a beautiful work worth seeing, but Nasrallah's drawn out scenes of the Palestinian exodus to Lebanon are sure to find critics. While the film pales next to the novel, the stellar performances by Rim Turki as Nahilah and Bassel Khayatt as Khalil will keep you glued to the screen during the four-hour-long film. Khoury worked closely with Nasrallah on the dramatization and wrote the screenplay himself.

In bringing the novel to the screen Khoury and Nasrallah had to tease out a narrative in the novel's gnarled web that weaves between the past, present, dialogue, and internal monologue. From the moments the credits run over Marcel Khalife's opening score, the film plunges into action where Khoury's novel hesitates.

Nasrallah's film opens to an orange branch hanging on Khalil's cinderblock wall in 1998 Shatila. We see Yunes, before he has lost consciousness, feeding the smiling Khalil, and the camera pans over the faces of these two men, eagerly filling their mouths with fruit while letting the juice of Palestine drip down their chins.

The film is undoubtedly a favorite of activists and those who want to educate the public about the plight of Palestinian refugees. And while the film pulls at the heart, like Khoury's novel, it's not to be

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taken lightly. Like the women in the novel, Rim Tukhi as Nahilah, Hala Omran as Khalil's lover Shams, and Nadira Omran as Umm Hassan dominate the screen. Not only are these women breathtakingly beautiful, but they are also fiery feminists whose power and wisdom grows on the screen.

Nahilah, after years of secret nights with Yunes in *Bab al Shams*, raising their large family, and coping with being a minority on the land of her birth, confronts Yunes with her reality: the life of the woman left behind. On a moonlit night in Deir Al-Asad, when Yunes has snuck into Israel to visit her, the couple sits at the base of an ancient olive tree. Nahilah tells him to stop his heroic stories and to listen. Here's what she says:

Do you know who we are? We spend our lives waiting for you to tap at the window. My life goes on as I wait for you.... Listen, it's like the sky has fallen down on earth. We were kicked out. Those who stayed felt like foreigners in their own country. Can you imagine that? We're foreigners and there are no men because they have no land, no guns, no horses. They took our land and we have stolen on our own land. Stolen our harvests so we can eat. And then we had to work for the Jews on the land they took from us. We no longer dared to look at ourselves in the mirror. We no longer dared to look each other in the eye...I said to the [Israeli] officer: You dragged us down and the same fire that burns us will burn you. But I couldn't forget that daydream thing. Is our life just a dream? You spend your visits talking about Saladin and Nasser, and I believed you. You filled the Door to the Sun with your hero's exploits. I married you a hundred times. I loved your stories and your children. I see you in all of your children. I played a role for everyone. I played the role of the heroine. I played the role of the hero's wife. The role of the married woman. But all these roles exhaust me. I'm tired of all these roles and illusions.

While the film is a powerful love story and introduction to the plight of the refugees, it is monologues like

Nahilah's that make *Gate of the Sun* powerful. Khoury looks where too few of us bother and sheds light on stories that need to be heard. Humphrey Davies' beautiful translation will surely stand up to its Arabic origins. While the Palestinian refugees' right of return may appear to be a dead issue in today's

politics, Khoury reminds us that Palestinians have a history waiting to be reconciled. ■

Liv Leader is a San Francisco-based writer who has reported from Israel and the Occupied Territories. Her work has appeared in Mother Jones, LiP, and muslimwakeup.com.

[BOOKS]

Inextricably Bonded

Rachel Brenner on Palestinian and Jewish Israeli Literature

BY MARK LEVINE

ONE OF THE MOST OVERLOOKED literary products of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been the wealth of commentaries written about its novelists and poets. Enter the world of Rachel Brenner. A professor of literature at the University of Wisconsin, Brenner published *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* in 2005. A groundbreaking analysis of Israel's multicultural literary history, *Inextricably Bonded* challenges the ways Israeli literary history has traditionally been understood. Focusing on how Jewish and Arab Israeli writers have expressed a common identity that resists Zionism's dominant Jewish narrative, Brenner lays the foundation for a larger examination of how Israeli and non-Israeli Arab writers—such as Elias Khoury—have worked together to forge a common Middle Eastern culture. Mark Levine spoke to Brenner about what it means to be inextricably bonded.

TIKKUN: The title of your last book describes Palestinian and Jewish Israeli writers as being “inextricably bonded.” In your earlier works—such as *Writing as Resistance*—you’ve also focused on writing as an act of resistance. Can you

explain to our readers the basic cultural-political considerations that create the bonds you identify and how they relate to resisting the kinds of projects—the Occupation, a dominant Ashkenazi identity—that most of the writers you explore struggle with from one perspective or another.

BRENNER: *Inextricably Bonded* intends to draw attention to literary voices on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as they resist the political reality of Israel. These voices have engaged in a struggle against the ideology, which justifies oppression and occupation. Against the Zionist politics of separatism, they affirm the “inextricable bonding” of the two peoples, who have been shaping each other's identities for over a hundred years now. In other words, both literatures promote the notion that the hope for a solution does not lie in constructing walls, fences, barriers, or unilateral withdrawals—as demonstrated in today's reality—but rather in respectful and empathic sharing of the story; the liberation from the haunting past is predicated upon the parties telling of the story and listening to the story of each other.

The bonds that I discuss in my book emerge from deep emotional need shaped by tragic historical circumstances. My point of departure is that

both victory and defeat are traumatic experiences. Though not comparable from the sociological, historical, or political point of view, both victory and defeat leave indelible traces on the psyche of the adversaries. In the particular case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the defeat of 1948 confronted the Israeli Arab with the trauma of loss. It was not just the loss of the territory; the defeat divided the Palestinian nation, severed the family structure, and destroyed the Palestinian culture. Moreover, as the Israeli-Arab texts I discuss demonstrate, the acceptance of Israeli citizenship caused a tragic split of Arab identity, a split which emerges from a haunting sense of guilt and betrayal. However, victory is not guilt-free either. As my readings of the Israeli-Jewish writings show, the suffering that was inflicted upon the Arab population—the destruction, the expulsion, and the oppression—left an ineradicable and lasting sense of shame and guilt on the Israeli victor. The trauma of the war was augmented by an ideological crisis caused by the collapse of the Zionist humanist image.

That is to say, the atrocities committed toward the Arab population exposed the sham of the “new” Jew—a moral, compassionate fighter—as propagated by the Zionist ideology. And so, while in political terms the 1948 war signifies detachment and estrangement of the parties, in emotional terms, the event is the root of inextricable bonding of the winners and the losers grounded in a sense of moral failure and compromised integrity. The stories of defeat and victory are unequivocally interconnected and the release from the traumas that haunt each party is predicated upon the willingness not only to hear the other, but also to muster courage to tell one’s story to the other. As I show in this book, the writers on both sides—Israeli Jews S. Yizhar, A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and David Grossman and Israeli Arabs Atallah Mansoor, Emile Habibi, and Anton Shammas—have recognized that sharing the stories is a difficult but necessary way toward mutually empathic

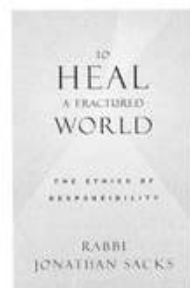
understanding, which may reduce the fear and the anger and perhaps lead to a peaceful coexistence. ■

Mark LeVine is a contributing editor to Tikkun and author of Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil. To read the full-length version of this interview, please visit www.tikkun.org/magazine/brenner.

[BOOKS]

A Call to Action

BY DANIEL MORRIS



TO HEAL A FRACTURED WORLD: The Ethics of Responsibility, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Schocken Books, 2005

IN A CLASSIC JEWISH joke, a man is caught in a house as a flood approaches his door. A boat arrives to rescue him, but he declines help, saying he is waiting for a sign from God. The water rises, and the man heads for the roof, where a helicopter spots him. The man again refuses assistance, once more waiting for a sign from God. The man drowns. In the afterworld, the man meets God. “Why didn’t you send me a sign that you would rescue me?” he asks God. “A sign!” God exclaims. “I sent you a boat and then a helicopter! What kind of sign were you looking for?”

This joke encapsulates the theme of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ passionate, hopeful, and deeply humane defense of Judaism as a socially radical movement. Judaism, Sacks reminds us, was the first religion to speak truth to power, continues to offer us a foundation for peaceful co-existence among different groups, and remains an inspiration for constructive engagement today. In the joke, God acts with tender concern on behalf of the human community, but only in so far as humans enact that help (the boat, the

helicopter) in the real world of crisis through what Sacks calls “the universal language of good deeds,” and only in so far as other humans (the man in the house) are willing to believe in divine assistance that takes the form of a partnership between God and human being. “Far from needing a blessing,” Sacks writes, “the act itself is the blessing.... What matters is the rescue itself.” Although Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth since 1991, has written a sprawling book that spans twenty chapters and three sections (The Call to Responsibility, The Theology of Responsibility, The Responsible Life), his message is thus quite humble and straightforward. However, his call to action has far-reaching consequences when put into practice.

Sacks is far less interested in miraculous and supernatural elements of the Jewish Bible like the parting of the Red Sea, the plagues of Egypt, or manna from heaven than he is in the incidental, small-scale acts of caring performed by early Israelites who, incrementally, sanctify the name of God by making a positive difference in the lives of others, including strangers and the dispossessed. Sacks is fascinated, for example, by the lavish attention the bible’s authors placed on the construction of the Tabernacle—a primary example of community building—as compared to the relatively brief description given of God’s appearance to Moses on the mountain. His biblical models for contemporary behavior include Abraham and Sarah, who “brought God into the world without metaphysical arguments or theological proofs, awesome miracles or military victories, but by welcoming strangers and giving them food and shelter.” Just so, Sacks fills his book with a series of anecdotes about contemporary Jews who serve as models of righteousness by performing acts of *chesed* (kindness, love, or care in actions) in their place of work and day-to-day lives. These individuals create a covenant that extends beyond the particularistic faith of Judaism to encompass all of humanity through unique

“There are structures of power, but we can stand outside them,” writes Sacks. “There are genetic influences on our behavior, but we can master them. We are shaped by our parents, but we can go beyond them.”

expressions of responsibility towards others.

There is the story of David Baum, a British pediatrician who helped to mend or perfect an imperfect world (*tikkun olam*) by improving levels of childcare in such desperately needy places as Kosovo and Ethiopia, and that of Ansell Harris, who became involved with Oxfam in order to provide “medical, educational, social, and financial help to people in distress regardless of the religion or ethnicity.” Granted, these are extraordinary examples of individuals who took up the Jewish vocation as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” but Sacks makes it clear that we each have a duty to serve others in ways that are unique to each individual. “It is precisely in our day-to-day relationships, at work or among friends, in our dealings with people and the integrity, sensitivity, and generosity we bring on them, that we most add or subtract to the respect those around us have for the values by which we live.” The anecdotal nature of Sacks’s book puts flesh and bone on what might otherwise be a dry sermon on Jewish ethics and morality.

Sacks’s appreciation for the value of what he calls (after Tennessee Williams) the “kindness of strangers” in the context of individual behavior in everyday life also has implications for how nations should treat other nations. In words that should have been heeded by the Neoconservatives who influenced the Bush administration’s policy of nation building in Iraq, Sacks opposes what he calls “prophetic peace”—a utopian desire to forcefully convert other cultures into an image of one’s own belief system through “Holy War,” for example. Sacks favors what he calls “a non-utopian programme for peace in the here-and-now” that accepts “that in this not-yet-fully-redeemed world, peace means *living*

with difference—with those who have another faith and other texts.”

For all of his emphasis on the progressive aspects of Judaism as a force for peace and good works in a world of conflict and stress, I must admit that I was dismayed with Rabbi Sacks’s reliance on behaviorist psychology, existentialist philosophy, and the work of Viktor Frankl on the importance of finding meaning in suffering as primary models for how people in desperate straits can overcome their dilemmas. From Sacks’s point of view, it seems that maintaining a positive attitude and engaging in some good old-fashioned hard work should be enough to pull oneself out of poverty and despair. Discussion of the role that social forces beyond the control of the individual play in determining outcomes, he argues, should be discounted as an expression of bad faith akin to the refusal of Adam, Eve, and Cain to accept responsibility for their transgressions. “There are structures of power, but we can stand outside them,” writes Sacks. “There are genetic influences on our behavior, but we can master them. We are shaped by our parents, but we can go beyond them.”

That reservation aside, *To Heal a Fractured World* is an inspirational call for social action that crosses the boundaries of national identification and religious affiliation. Sacks’ shifting of the issue of responsibility from divine to human initiative, and his emphasis on both personal and communal responsibility for the welfare of others seem to be crucial messages in our time of religious intolerance, human indignity, hopelessness, and narcissism in which the question is often “what is in it for me?” rather than “what is it that I can do to help?” ■

Daniel Morris is professor of English at Purdue University and editor of Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies.

[BOOKS]

Capsule Reviews



GLOBAL VALUES 101, Edited by Kate Holbrook, Ann S. Kim, Brian Palmer and Anna Portnoy. Beacon Press, 2006

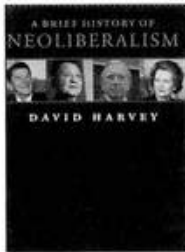
GLOBAL VALUES 101

grew out of one of Harvard’s most popular courses, in which students interview prominent progressive activists—from Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, and Amy Goodman to Harvey Cox and Robert Reich—about their work and what sustains their commitment to social justice advocacy.

Equal parts social movement overview and undergraduate course reader, *Global Values 101* is an introduction to some of the central issues of contemporary progressive politics. For example, Naomi Klein provides a valuable gloss on globalization, while Noam Chomsky gives a dazzlingly succinct history of American foreign policy. The fact that the speakers come from various backgrounds—politics, business, journalism, and various academic disciplines—adds to the book’s appeal.

Despite the varied backgrounds of its contributors, one theme emerges prominently in the book: As global citizens, remaining aware of the other is one of our central duties. Disinformation, media bias, and chauvinism make this nearly impossible, and so we must vigilantly seek out what Naomi Klein calls the “entry points”—the places where we can use a local phenomenon to help us piece together the larger picture.

Frustratingly, *Global Values 101* is not without its deficits. Perhaps in the interest of reproducing the spontaneity of good political conversation, the editors chose to leave the book’s interviews “raw,” despite the fact that the interviewers tend to focus on one issue and then skip to the next without the kind of logical follow up one expects. Nonetheless, *Global Values 101* is a valuable primer for young activists. —Liz Winer



A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEOLIBERALISM, by David Harvey. Oxford University Press, 2005

DAVID HARVEY'S *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* is an excel-

lent overview of the subject for readers who already know a little bit about it. In just over 200 pages, one of the world's preeminent geographers covers the history of neoliberal ideas, experiments, and economic policies and their effects and future prospects. As is true in much of his work, Harvey is at his best when painting a big picture and synthesizing ideas developed by other authors into a general theory. Harvey advances several important arguments in the book, but they all hinge on a central thesis: that neoliberal practice has almost nothing to do with neoliberal ideology.

Harvey casts neoliberalism as a set of beliefs in the value of strong private property rights and minimal government intervention in markets and trade. But he argues that the primary effect of neoliberal practice has been to restore economic and political power to a narrow capitalist elite. Throughout the book, Harvey demonstrates that when the interests of these elites come into conflict with official neoliberal ideology, neoliberal practice—whether by governments, international regulatory agencies, or transnational corporations—generally favors their needs at the expense of the official party line.

Harvey writes that as a practice, neoliberalism is often at odds with the democratic process. This is why so many important neoliberal institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, are not elected or representative bodies. As countless members of the anti-globalization movement have noted, their existence outside of traditional governmental or business channels also makes these institutions harder to resist. Nevertheless, Harvey argues that neoliberalism is unsustainable for two reasons: first, the levels of economic concentration and mass deprivation it occasions cannot continue indefinitely; and second, the contradictions

between neoliberalism's official doctrine of free markets and its de facto practice of concentrating wealth are not compatible.

One way out of this bind is for states to turn to ever-more authoritarian forms of government—a process that is already well underway in the United States and other parts of the world. The alternative would be to reverse the damage wrought by neoliberalism through more effective, coordinated action by emerging social movements. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* helps to point out where we might find fissures in the post-democratic status quo so that we can begin to do just that. —Jonathan Sterne



IN THE HEART OF THE HEART OF ANOTHER COUNTRY, by Etel Adnan. City Lights Books, 2005

READERS WHO PICK up this memoir by Lebanese-American poet, novelist, and essayist Etel Adnan are in for the unexpected: the seven prose pieces that comprise *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* are less concerned with recounting a series of events in the author's life than they are with describing a state of longing and unease that comes with having two homelands. Adnan's prose communicates a feeling of rootlessness and spiritual fragmentation, moving rapidly between the physical and the abstract, facts and hallucinations, diary-like observations and dark, formative memories. Adnan's constantly shifting attention paradoxically creates a feeling of isolation even as she speaks to communal problems—the weight of memory or the mundane convergence of commerce, politics, and love.

The book's title takes its name and structure from William Gass's short story "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country," which uses a series of titled paragraphs to examine life in the provincial Indiana town of "B." Responding to Gass, Adnan assembles a portrait of her own "B.," the volatile Beirut of the 1970s. Having just returned to Lebanon after a seventeen-

year absence, she approaches the city as both an insider and an outsider, at times writing trance-like accounts of Beirut's madness, at others jarring the reader with bluntly strange physical details. In abrupt but casual gestures, Adnan captures the city's atmosphere of barely checked violence: "A man in a motorboat hit a swimmer and sped away.... A large space of blood covered the sea. Painters rushed to the scene to make a painting for sale."

In the middle of *The Heart*, Adnan writes chiefly from her home in California. Expressing her anxiety about living in safety while her homeland is in turmoil, Adnan ambivalently calls the West a "chartered, measured, and parceled world where living has become the theater." The book's final piece, "To Be in a Time of War," a reaction to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003, is a catalogue of infinitives which, while evoking the sorrow of the particular experience, also functions as an illustration of universal grief that captures Adnan's profound sense of statelessness.

—Liz Countryman

The Bad Secret

Poems
JUDITH HARRIS



"The reach of Harris' metaphors is dizzying, the way being fiercely alive is, and the vision that gives rise to her metaphors is both terrifying and electrifying. Hers is not a poetry for those who wish to be entertained or amused, or tugged at, just a little, by the ironic and off-beat." —Gray Jacobik

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[TELEVISION/FILM]

Crossing Borders

Eran Riklis' The Syrian Bride BY SHAI GINSBURG

IN HIS AWARD-WINNING FILM *The Syrian Bride* (Israel, 2004. Released by Koch Lorber Films in the United States in December 2005.), director Eran Riklis follows a Druze family through the Golan Heights town of Majdal Shams on the wedding day of its youngest daughter, Mona (Clara Khoury). The wedding, however, is anything but a simple celebration of union: the establishment of the new family means separation and disintegration. To join her betrothed, a soap opera actor in Damascus, Mona has to give up her Israeli "citizenship" and become Syrian. Once she crosses the frontier, she will be cut off forever from her family in the Golan.

The political border between Israel and Syria is not the only border that transects the lives of the film's characters and limits their choices. The family gathering in Majdal Shams occasioned by the wedding reveals Mona's family to be both eager and afraid to cross the borders that press against their lives, borders that at once define and confine them.

In an early scene, Mona's brother, Marwan (Ashraf Barhoum), arrives at Ben-Gurion Airport. Dressed in a light suit, carrying a briefcase, looking impatiently at his wristwatch, he appears to be an ordinary businessman. Yet when Marwan approaches passport control, he hands the female immigration officer an orange *laissez-passer* (pass) rather than a blue passport. The camera focuses on the first page of the passport: "undefined" is written under nationality. Upon seeing this, the immigration officer loses her smile. Trying to ease the process, Marwan begins to flirt with the official in literary Hebrew, but she has no patience for him and curtly asks for details about his trip. Marwan's answer—that he is a businessman—does not satisfy her. The immigration officer becomes further annoyed when he takes a business call on his cell phone. Unmoved by Marwan stating that he was already interrogated on his way out of Israel, she detains him for further questioning.

While the scene ostensibly depicts a trivial incident, it also highlights the

"gentle oppression" the film's characters continually face, and how it consistently destabilizes their identities. Marwan confronts not only officially sanctioned discrimination (which is seemingly furtive and excusable), but also the subordination of his identity as a successful, young international businessman to the whims of a petty immigration official who similarly rejects his masculine charisma. Returning home after his travels, Marwan has to acknowledge that, despite his best efforts, his political status as "undefined" not only marks him as stateless in his country of origin and residence, but that it also undermines his personality as a friendly, playful human being.

In *The Syrian Bride*, oppression does not express itself solely in the Israeli authorities' treatment of their "undefined" Druze residents. The experience of discrimination similarly impacts Druze social relationships and family life, blurring the distinction between public and private life, consistently privileging the collective over the personal. On Mona's wedding day, her

father Hammed (played by the veteran actor Makram Khoury), finds himself torn by two competing demands: the responsibilities of a father and those of a political activist. Although Hammed is on parole after several years in prison for pro-Syrian activities, the community expects him to break the terms of his parole and attend a pro-Syrian demonstration on a day when the importance of his family ought to take precedent. Though Hammed wants to attend Mona's marriage, he fears being regarded as a coward if he fails to show up at the protest. At another point in the film, Hammed faces a similar conflict with his oldest son, Hattem (Eyad Sheety), who has married outside of the Druze community. If he welcomes his son into his home without punishment, Hammed faces the possibility of being ostracized by the village elders. In both situations, Hammed finds himself unable to make any personal choices. Every move he makes is dictated by his political identity.

While the men in the film are almost helpless in face of the metaphorical borders imposed on them by the outside world—whether by the State, custom, or community—the women in *The Syrian Bride* feel their subordinate position keenly and ultimately take an active step towards breaking the boundaries put on them by the men of their community. It is in the actions of Mona's older sister, Amal (Hiam Abbass), the film's main character, that the entire community's struggle against oppression becomes most conspicuous. From the beginning of *The Syrian Bride*, Amal is marked as a rebel by the jeans she wears (which greatly perturb Majdal Shams' elders). Though independent-minded, Amal had for many years yielded to the restrictions imposed on her by her husband, who loves her dearly, but fears that his wife's liberal behavior will reflect poorly on him in the village. For the sake of her family, she always heeded her husband's fears and curbed her personal aspirations. Now that her daughters are older, she takes a step towards releasing herself from the grip of the image of the "good"

woman and applies to the Program of Social Work at Haifa University. Upon doing so, she summons the strength and the energy to overcome the constraints forced upon her by the Druze community and her family.

When Mona's wedding day arrives, the whole family gathers at the border crossing between Israel and Syria. Here, the true impact of the border on the lives of the Golan Druze comes into view. When an Israeli functionary puts an Israeli "Exit" stamp on Mona's *laissez-passer*, his Syrian counterpart refuses to accept it: "Since when do they put their stamp on the Laissez Passer?" he asks a UN official who tries to negotiate between the Israeli and the Syrian. "The Golan is Syria," he continues. "She comes from Syria and she is going to Syria, she didn't come from Israel." Sheltered behind a wall of stamps from the effect of

their regulations, these bureaucrats thus fight their mindless skirmish over terminology at the expense of ordinary people like Mona, for whom this language has the greatest consequence.

The prospect of canceling the wedding is devastating. "It's bad luck not to get married on your wedding day" Mona mutters; "If she doesn't get married today," Amal tells the UN official, "she is never going to get married." Mona is thus caught in no-man's-land: no longer an Israeli, not yet a Syrian, no-longer single, not yet married. How is she to escape this non-status imposed on her by the men around her: Israeli, Druze, and Syrian? How is she to define herself as a woman against these borders? ■

Shai Ginsburg is the Jess Schwartz Professor of Modern Hebrew Literature at Arizona State University.

[MUSIC]

List of Ingredients *Matthew Herbert's Plat du Jour*

BY CHARLIE BERTSCH

THE SOUNDS ARE STRANGELY familiar: a rustle, a snap, a slow fade into silence. But you were expecting something less strange, music to pace your work or pleasure. The book-like case of Matthew Herbert's *Plat du Jour* is awash in color, a tie-dye suitable for a T-shirt or scarf, what the more sober-minded dismiss as "eye candy." Despite the idiom that warns against judging a work by its cover, your experience tells you that they usually correspond. A soft-lit portrait of an earnest, bespectacled man playing an acoustic guitar is unlikely to adorn an album of Norwegian death metal or X-rated gangster rap. By rights, then, this record with the unabashedly pretty packaging should sound like a spring day, bright flowers studding a sweet-

smelling field. And it does, in a way. Only the sounds you're hearing don't merely call such a pastoral vision to mind. They actually *sound* like something recorded in a pasture, documenting a relaxing picnic lunch in the park. These sounds sound, in other words, like the sort of thing people have in mind when they say, "It was like music to our ears," precisely because it *isn't* music they are hearing. If there is dissonance in listening to *Plat du Jour*, it comes less from the sounds themselves than from the anxiety stirred up by the difficulty of classifying them. What does this record record? Does it matter where the sounds come from? Is it music or not?

Matthew Herbert has been provoking questions of this sort since the beginning of his career. One of the most respected figures in the world of electronic

popular music, where he is a highly sought after "remix" specialist, working with artists like Björk, REM, Yoko Ono, and Serge Gainsbourg, he has devoted much of his own output to experiments in sound collage. These projects owe as much to the Modernist avant-garde of movements like Futurism and Dada as they do to the dance floor. In his first project, *Wishmountain*, which he began while a student at England's Exeter University in 1992, Herbert used the sampling technique pioneered by hip-hop DJs to record and perform tracks comprised, not of the shards of 1970s soul and funk, but of soundbites of everyday life. When he created a new persona as Radio Boy in 1997, he redeployed this aesthetic strategy in a more extreme form. Under the rubric *The Mechanics of Destruction*, for example, he used sounds made by destroying various branded consumer items on stage, such as a McDonald's Big Mac, a can of Coca-Cola, and a pair of boxer shorts from The Gap.

Confronting *Plat du Jour* for the first time, a listener familiar with Herbert's history as a politically aware provocateur might reasonably wonder whether he has gone soft, since both its sounds and the abstract imagery on the cover are outwardly soothing in comparison with Radio Boy and even *Wishmountain*. Take the first track. It begins with low-volume ambient noises that are gradually overlaid with percolating rhythms, what sounds like someone moaning in ecstasy, and a peripatetic figure, resembling a vibraphone, in which the pitch seems to shift ever so slightly off true in order to create synthetic "blue" notes. Yet as busy as this layering might seem, it never becomes abrasive. It's not a stretch to imagine it as the bed for a cutting-edge television commercial or the soundtrack for shoppers at a hip furniture store. And then, five minutes



in, the peripatetic figure comes to the fore, with only the faintest rhythm bubbling beneath it. Suddenly freed from sonic clutter, the track's shimmering essence is revealed to be exceedingly easy listening, a wave machine for the ears. It's so soft that you sink into it like a velour beanbag chair. The experience unsettles. Has Matthew Herbert sold his soul to the industry heavies that see music only as a "social lubricant"?

A look at that first track's title, "The Truncated Life of a Modern Industrialized Chicken," suggests that he hasn't. And the liner notes confirm as much: "Field recordings: 30,000 broiler chickens in one barn. 24,000 one minute old chicks in one room of a commercial hatchery. 40 free-range chickens in a coop. One of those chickens being killed for a local farmer's market and its feathers washed and plucked." At first, the relationship between this list and the track itself is unclear. Herbert could be mocking the way song credits are normally written. But as the text continues, it becomes clear that he is interested in something deeper than parody. "All melodies and chords are samples of eggs on pyrex bowls," he notes. "All live percussion is made from a dozen organic free-range eggs, egg boxes, and egg cups played with chopsticks," and "the

bassline is a 'cheep' from a minute-old chick pitched down." Clearly, the track's superficial softness is built on harder truths.

There's no guarantee, of course, that the people who listen to *Plat du Jour* will read that far. In the era of the iPod, many listeners never even see the records from which their playlist is drawn. Desperate to combat this trend, record labels frequently pack as many extras as possible into their releases—DVDs, posters, lengthy essays—in the hope that this less-easily-copied content will convince consumers to pay for a record

they can listen to for free. The beauty of *Plat du Jour*'s presentation is both an excellent example of this strategy—few records lose more when they are reduced to MP3 files—and a reminder that these "extras" can serve a different purpose than shoring up the music industry's sandcastle. Indeed, the album radically undermines the distinction between what is "extra" and what is not, suggesting that supplementary materials such as the packaging, liner notes, and the artist's website are as integral to the project as the tracks themselves.

Still, Herbert recognizes that listeners who concentrate on the record itself may miss the point. "I really don't have a problem with how people listen to it. There's no right or wrong way." Even those who have no knowledge of where the sounds on that first track come from will still be hearing something strikingly different from what the major labels market. "That has always been part of my politics, to try to encourage people to listen to different sounds whether they want to or not." *Plat du Jour*'s appealing appearance and relatively placid sonic texture serves as that sort of encouragement. If they make listeners comfortable, it is in order to leave them disturbed. "That's one of the political points on this record," Herbert notes, "how something

can appear to be what it actually is not. For example, the first track kind of stops and is almost on the verge of being jazz, quite light, and that's the moment in the piece where you sit down and enjoy the meal." In other words, this is where those chickens listed on the liner notes come home to roost. "So it's supposed to sound slightly naïve. If it sounds peaceful, there's a reason for it, a politics to that presentation as well as to the sounds themselves." At some point, a thoughtful listener is going to realize that the album's picnic of sounds—most of the tracks have food or drink in the title—is no picnic.

The superficial sweetness of *Plat du Jour* is thus a trap for unsuspecting listeners, inspiring them to take a closer look and then revealing, like one of those photographs that shows all the microscopic creatures that crawl around on our outwardly clean bodies, that our pleasure frequently depends on not looking too closely. Herbert is as politically engaged as ever, maybe even more so. Because this time he is out to question not only the corporations that destroy the fabric of human-scaled communities, but the foundations of taste themselves. "If you're asking people to think differently about their food, then it seems to me logical that you would ask them to think differently about sound." He isn't interested in "trying to write songs about chickens with a guitar," because hearing the conventions of protest music will prevent us from hearing anything new. By making his listeners wonder how *Plat du Jour* was made, as well as what it means, Matthew Herbert forcefully demonstrates his conviction that the products we consume, from music to muffins, must not be considered separately from the process of making them. In the end, it is the means of production that mean the most. ■

Charlie Bertsch (cbertsch@comcast.net) is an assistant professor of English at the University of Arizona, where he specializes in twentieth-century American prose, cultural studies, and the history of aesthetics. He also teaches film.

[MUSIC]

Capsule Reviews

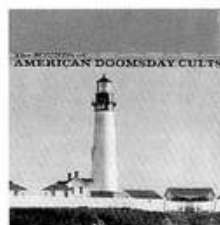


HOLOCAUST HYMNS.
Crisis. Apop Records,
2006

"URBAN TERROR-ism is no substitute for the building of a revolutionary working class party," yelled Crisis' lead singer on the 1980 album *Red Brigades*. "The idea of a permanent fascist state is crazy," the band argues, condemning the 1978 kidnapping of Italian industrialist Aldo Moro as an act counterproductive to the goals of the Left. How strange to hear these words twenty-six years after they were recorded by one of the U.K.'s most important political punk bands. Situated between the Clash's criticisms of American imperialism in the post-Vietnam era and Crass' Situationist anarcho-punk, this short-lived band injected into the punk rock of its day an explicitly Marxist line that far exceeded the superficial anti-establishment politics of contemporaries like (the recently revived) Gang of Four.

Falling somewhere between the Socialist Workers Party and the late International Marxist Group on the ideological spectrum, Crisis is best known as the predecessor to the politically ambiguous Death in June, the long-running British electro-folk group always photographed wearing featureless white masks and SS uniforms. Containing twenty-four digitally re-mastered versions of tracks recorded for their own label (the appropriately titled Peckham Action Group Records) and the BBC's *John Peel Show*, *Holocaust Hymns'* spare rhythms, slashing guitars and impassioned vocals recall a time when the whole concept of "protest music" was undergoing the most drastic of revisions. Moving away from an emphasis on consciousness raising to a sustained critique of the leftist politics of their day, Crisis brought substance to a punk radicalism that had been largely rhetorical before they came on the scene.

—Joel Schalit



THE SOUNDS OF
AMERICAN DOOMSDAY
CULTS. *Faithways International*,
2006

FOR ANYONE INTERested in the extremely complex politics of new age spirituality, Elizabeth Clare Prophet's Church Universal and Triumphant has much to offer. Synthesizing Judeo-Christian mystical traditions, Hinduism, and pop psychology with an utterly contemporary apocalyptic worldview, the CUT's ideology blurs many of the distinctions traditionally drawn between evangelical politics and the post-1960s religious avant-garde. Led until 1998 by Leona Helmsley look-alike Elizabeth Clare Prophet, the CUT fell into disrepute over the course of the past sixteen years due to a combination of lawsuits leveled at Prophet by former church members, failed prophecies, and the Clinton administration's crackdown on millenarian cults after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

The Sounds of American Doomsday Cults collects a number of recordings of services at Prophet's Montana compound which, over the course of the past twenty plus years, have been circulated on cassette by electronic musicians, who have used them as source material for political audio collages. First issued on vinyl in the early 1990s by the mysterious Faithways International label, this recording's reissue could not be more timely. Indeed, much of the material collected on this album would not sound out of place in a Pentecostal megachurch today. Featuring condemnations of the corrupting influences of popular culture, high speed chanting (which sounds an awful lot like tobacco auctioneers speaking in tongues), and an absolutely remarkable opening sermon in which Prophet samples ideas and metaphors from every conceivable post-war Western religious current, this CD is an absolute must-listen for students of religion in *fin de siècle* America. —Benito Shrieberman

Orientation Talk for a New Immigrant

What is this resurrection game I'm playing
where I imagine dying in the bathtub, corner cafe, bus coming home?

Forms of protection: hard-hats, bicycle helmets, access to running water,
"my husband," extra strength tampons, pretending not to know what you are saying.

If I don't read the newspaper, if I don't call home, if I say the country's going to the dogs,
if I stop speaking Hebrew, if I forget thee . . .

This is how widows live. They shut the doors to the old bedroom.
They float all day. His picture comes at night, lying awake in the darkness.

Will the loudspeakers never stop their warnings at the Tel Aviv Central Bus Station,
where I go in dreams, trying to change my route?

Corner of Vine and Walnut, bay-view, prayer over wet newspaper dispensers:
(Say it!) We will be living in war for the rest of our lives.

It's my education (Rabbi Akiva raked by combs, the atrocities, etc.)
that compels me to ask, *How long, daughter do you think to live without your fate,*
your shadow?

How many days of peace are left for you this year?
Near the Bakery, they dug up the concrete, restored Strawberry Creek to sight.

In Berkeley, fall comes on alternate street corners; I count days on my finger joints.
The blind man with the burn scars tells me to watch the meteors tonight.

—Yosefa Raz