

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

MAY/JUNE 2006

ISRAEL'S ELECTION

A Social Revolution?

BEYOND HIP BEATS

Subverting World Music

THE COST OF WAR

Liberal Hawks

Building a Movement

Blueprint for a New Bottom Line

HOWARD ZINN

The Future of the Left

CINDY SHEEHAN

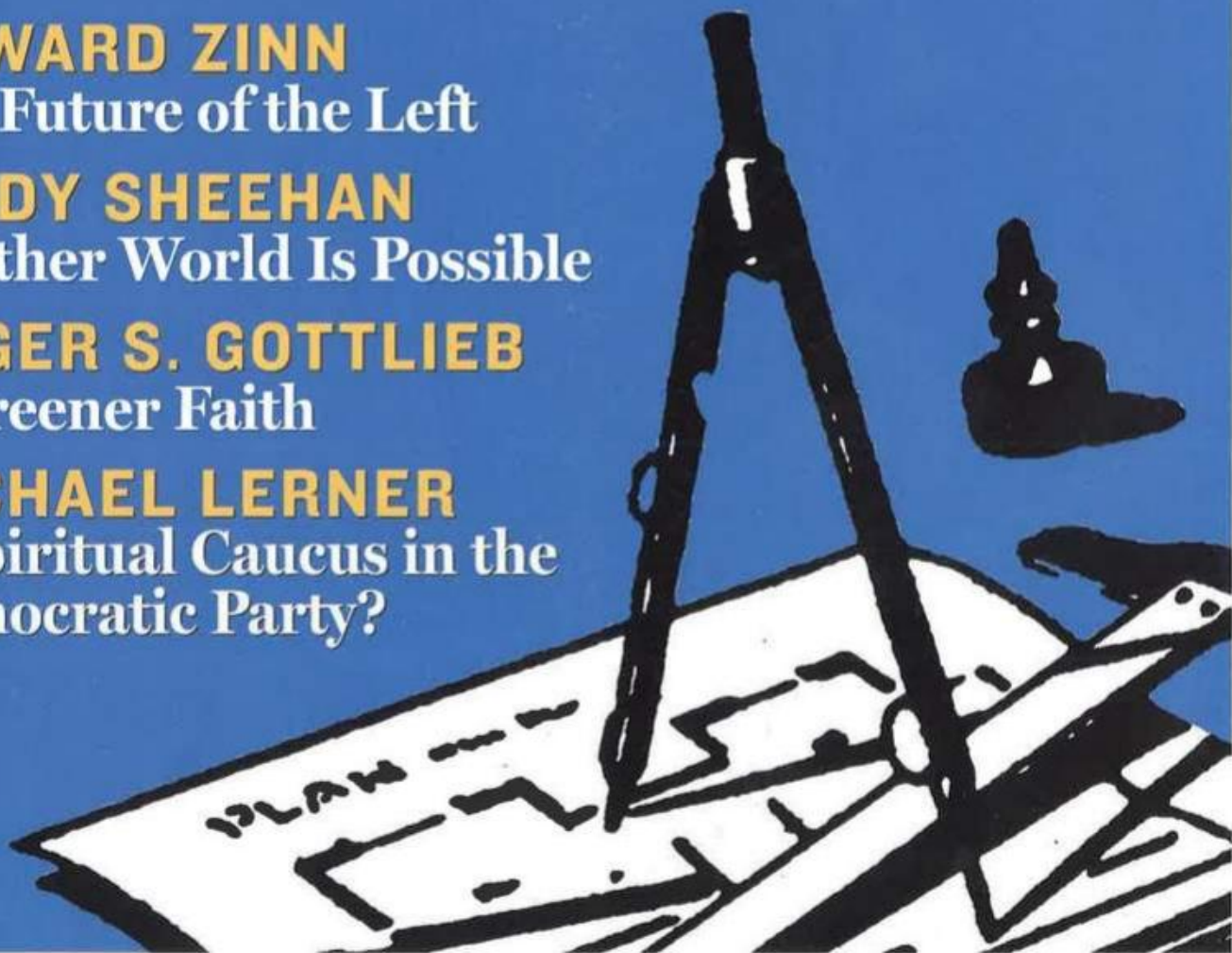
Another World Is Possible

ROGER S. GOTTLIEB

A Greener Faith

MICHAEL LERNER

A Spiritual Caucus in the
Democratic Party?



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Daniel Matt's Kabbalah | Why Trannies Want the Mikvah
Nadine Gordimer at 82 | "Swiftboating" Bush's Bishops
Reviews: 10 Excellent Reasons Not to Join the Military



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*New books by Mike
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DREAMS OF FREEDOM: A Ricardo Flores Magon Reader

Edited by Chaz Bufo. AK Press, 2006

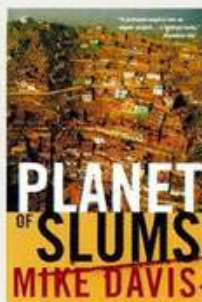
WHY IT TOOK SO LONG FOR MAGON'S work to be translated into English remains a mystery. One of the most influential radical intellectuals in Mexican history—through the efforts of his newspaper *Regeneracion*—Magon leveled fierce criticisms of the country's military dictatorship and thus helped instigate the Mexican revolution. Magon also created a lasting anarcho-communist legacy without which it is impossible to speak of the Zapatistas, and the ideological currents that helped give birth to Central America's Cold War Left. *Dreams of Freedom* goes a long way towards explaining why.



PLANET OF SLUMS

By Mike Davis. Verso Books, 2006

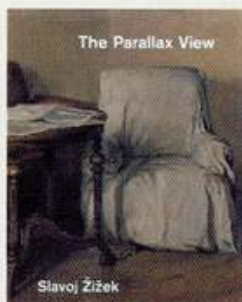
IN THE EARLY NINETIES, URBAN theorist Mike Davis nearly became a household name with *City of Quartz*, a groundbreaking study of the future of Los Angeles, focusing on the history of conflicts between its ethnic and social groups. *Planet of Slums* is an equally important book. Focusing on the exploding slum populations of the developing world, where over a billion people now live, Davis paints a heart-wrenching portrait of the rapidly growing underclass bypassed by capitalist globalization. For those seeking a critical alternative to Thomas Friedman's frequently fawning *The World is Flat*, *Planet of Slums* ought to set the record straight.



THE PARALLAX VIEW

By Slavoj Žižek. MIT Press, 2006

NO ONE DEMONSTRATES THE continued philosophical vitality of Marxism better than Slavoj Žižek. In what the author argues is his magnum theoretical opus, Žižek attempts to make a significant addition to Marx's still relevant concept of alienation with the idea of "the gap" by detailing how societies create artificial social divisions within themselves, which provide the illusion that hierarchy and division are naturally occurring phenomena. Žižek proceeds to show how this is culturally expressed—in disciplines as widely separated as quantum physics and psychoanalysis—in order to explain how deeply anti-dialectical thinking is embedded in modern capitalist culture.



THE POLITICS OF SMALL THINGS

By Jeffrey C. Goldfarb. University of Chicago Press, 2006

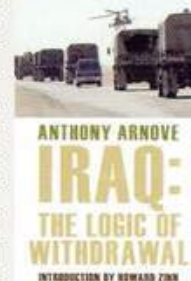
AT A TIME WHEN THE LEFT COULD not be more depressed about its political prospects, sociologist Jeffrey C. Goldfarb serves up an absolutely inspiring book-length treatise on the positive ways radical politics is evolving, and what kinds of prospects for change this might open up. Taking as his foundation the notion that from a whisper can evolve a big political bang, Goldfarb points to such contemporary progressive phenomena as MoveOn.org and Redeem the Vote, contending that they are revolutionizing the political landscape on a micro, as opposed to a macro, level. Every old-school activist ought to read this. There is indeed life outside the so-called party.



IRAQ: The Logic of Withdrawal

Anthony Arrove. The New Press, 2006

ONE OF THE MOST VEXING PROBLEMS confronting the antiwar movement is making a compelling case for withdrawing from Iraq that both conservatives and liberals can buy into. Despite the clearly progressive partisanship of his demands, in *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal*, Anthony Arrove supplies the necessary ammunition. Exploring the real reasons for the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq and detailing the devastating humanitarian and geo-political reasons for withdrawal, Arrove assembles a formidable arsenal of information and suggestions that anyone, from the most hyperbolic activist to the most jaded conservative, will find useful.



HELLO, I'M SPECIAL: How Individuality Became the New Conformity

By Hal Niedzviecki. City Lights Books, 2006

EQUAL PARTS JERRY SEINFELD and Thomas Frank, Hal Niedzviecki has been tearing Canada up for years with *Broken Pencil*, his irreverent and loving guide to Canada's increasingly beloved counterculture. An equally gifted fiction writer and social critic, Niedzviecki in his new book gives us everything that makes his brand of literary genius so, well, *special*. Breaking every hipster's heavy heart by identifying the shared cult of individuality underlying both mainstream and alternative cultures, *Hello I'm Special* makes an impassioned—and oftentimes hilarious—case for a personality that money just can't buy.



Readers Respond

BEING "GOOD AMERICANS"

EARLIER TODAY I SPENT A long lunch hour with a close friend who was born in Germany just as World War II was ending. In the past we have frequently discussed such questions as how much ordinary Germans knew about the atrocities committed under Nazism, why there wasn't greater popular protest, and whether more protest would have been effective. Today, however, we talked about America, where top government officials openly defend the torture of other human beings, and where protestors face no risk of punishment. We wondered why there hasn't been a greater outcry against the violation, in our name, of the most basic principles of morality. We wondered what we could do besides writing letters to Congress and going to demonstrations. Then I came home to find the latest issue of *Tikkun* [March/April, 2006] and read Fred Branfman's "On Torture and Being 'Good Americans.'" Branfman expressed clearly and eloquently the same outrage and despair that so many of us feel but are unable to express, and it is

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

cheering to know that he will reach a wide audience. This is a letter of thanks to him, and to *Tikkun*.

RACHELLE MARSHALL
Stanford, CA.

PASSOVER ANALOGY

THE MARCH/APRIL EDITION'S Passover *Haggadah* reading used an analogy with which I vehemently disagree. It relates to the Hebrews in their condition of bondage, which is compared to the impotence of the Palestinians. What makes it inaccurate is that the Hebrews never threatened the existence of the Egyptian nation, nor did they attempt to overthrow Pharaoh's governing institution. The goal of the Hebrews was solely to be able to exit from Egypt, from their condition of detention against their will. The goal of the Palestinians, since May 12, 1948, has been to extricate the Jews and their sovereign State of Israel from the Middle East. How can you possibly see the two situations as analogous?

SHIRLEY ANN NEWMAN

Editor Responds:

According to the Torah, the Children of Israel "despoiled the Egyptians" of their wealth after the God of the Jews had killed every firstborn son of the Egyptians in retaliation for a previous genocide against the Israelites by a previous gen-

eration of Egyptians. Oppressive regimes always feel threatened by those whom they oppress. While my full and more nuanced account of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is found in my book *Healing Israel/Palestine, I refuse to accept any account that leaves either Israelis or Palestinians as the "blameless victims" of the other side.*

MORE CHURCH AND STATE

I WAS EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED by the editor's response to the "Church and State" letter in the March/April issue.

In advocating for "religious inclusivity in a context

of neutrality," the editor urges that a wide variety of creation stories be taught in a course on world religions in the public schools. So far, so good.

But then the editor describes the course as one in which the teacher's responsibility would be to passively present videos without comment. That may be an appropriate role for a projectionist in a movie theater, but it is an oxymoron to call passively showing a video "teaching." And there are reams of studies demonstrating that passively watching videos does not result in meaningful learning of any subject. Education only takes place when

From Tikkun.org

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

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW A MAGAZINE/ORGANIZATION dedicated to peace can advocate something as violent as abortion. How does this make sense from your point of view? Please explain.

—SUZANNE BALIK

Michael Lerner responds:

I've never advocated abortion and am against it. But I do not advocate the state imposing one particular view on when a fetus becomes a person or criminalizing those who have a different view and act on it. The Torah clearly indicates that it does not consider a fetus a person at least in the first three months of pregnancy. So I'm pro-choice but against abortion—and hence want to make it much rarer by providing supports for women who choose to raise their children.

educators are free to foster discussion through critical comments and questions.

Worse yet, students would be encouraged to report the names of teachers who do comment and fail to remain neutral. It is ironic that the editor is urging the Religious Left to emulate the Religious Right by encouraging students to out teachers who offend their religious sensibilities by naming names. If I were a teacher, it would be very hard for me to remain neutral about a process that could get me fired if I didn't keep my mouth shut.

In urging this anti-intellectual approach to inclusivity, the editor ironically has proven precisely the opposite of what he intended. If public school teachers cannot be allowed to truly teach religion, what better proof can there

be that religion should not, and cannot, be taught in the public schools?

How in the world would such a course be graded? If a teacher marks a student down, inevitably some religious parent will claim that the teacher did so out of religious animus. The existence of school boards tends to disprove Darwin—most school board members have never developed spines. A teacher faced with such an accusation will find him/herself in precisely the same position as a teacher faced with a false charge of sexual impropriety: out of a job. And what of the false accusation that the teacher interjected his/her religious opinions in a conversation witnessed only by the accuser and the accused? Same result. If we give stu-

dents an opportunity to get teachers fired, sooner or later they'll do exactly that. I have a number of friends who teach high school in good schools, and the environment is truly frightening.

A major problem I have with "teaching" religion in the public schools is the question of who judges whether the course material honestly and fairly presents each religion, warts and all. Case in point: the Mormon Church.

I just finished reading *Under the Banner of Heaven*, by Jon Krakauer. A critical history of the Mormon Church, the book documents that there are serious reasons to believe that Brigham Young personally ordered the massacre of some 200 members of the Fancher wagon train in 1857. Twelve years

later, there are equally serious reasons to believe that some perpetrators of that massacre also murdered three members of the expedition that first navigated the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon within days of their climbing the north slope of the canyon from the river below. There is also serious reason to believe that the highest levels of the Church were aware of the murders and covered them up.

In putting together materials for the course you propose, don't you think the students have a right to know of these very grave allegations? If so, who will tell them? Not the Mormon Church; it is official church doctrine that it is permissible, indeed required, to lie for the Church if telling the truth

Tikkun

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would harm the Church.

Mormonism is currently the fastest growing religion in the world; it is a zealously proselytizing religion. As a taxpayer and parent, I would not want the Mormons to present their history to a public school audience unchallenged. Sound pedagogy requires that the history of any religion be presented critically and not accepted on face value (or on faith, if you will). Otherwise, what you get is not education, but propaganda.

I don't mean to single out the Mormon Church; all religions have warts. But the history of the Mormon Church is illustrative of the insoluble dilemmas in "teaching" religion in the public school. If you let the religion "speak for itself," you get propaganda and no meaningful education

takes place—that is manifestly not what the public expects for its tax dollars. On the other hand, if educators truly attempt to present religion in a critical light, the faithful howl.

There is simply no way to resolve this dilemma. Religion should not be taught in the public schools, for the simple reason that it cannot be done.

SHELDON LASKIN
Baltimore, MD

Editor Responds:

You've convinced me on two points:

First, this must be a class without grades—it's pass/fail, and the only people who fail are those who fail to show up and keep quiet while the material is being shown.

Second, it should not have a teacher at all, but rotating

members of the surrounding community who sign a commitment to not say anything during or after the showing of the video and whose only job is to register which students show up and who refuses to accept the discipline of keeping quiet and who accepts it. Students may indeed need a course that requires a more critical presentation of these issues in the eleventh or twelfth grade, or in college, but the plan of teaching this material throughout their schooling is meant to inform students of the breadth, diversity, and value of religious expression around the world.

ABC REVISITED

I read with amusement the discord [Letters to the Editor, *Tikkun* January/February 2006] between believers and non-believers in

the abortion-leading-to-breast-cancer theory. Many years ago, Rookus et al. showed us that the association of abortion and breast cancer was due to reporting bias by subjects who did not want their abortion status known in areas in which there is a stigma against abortion. Their studies were done to explain the wide variability in results of abortion and breast cancer in different geographic areas. The authors found that the association of abortion and breast cancer only held up in socially conservative regions, but not in more liberal areas. If there were a true biological association, it would hold up regardless of the geographic or socio-political climate.

PAULETTE MEHTA, MD
University of Arkansas
Little Rock, AR ■

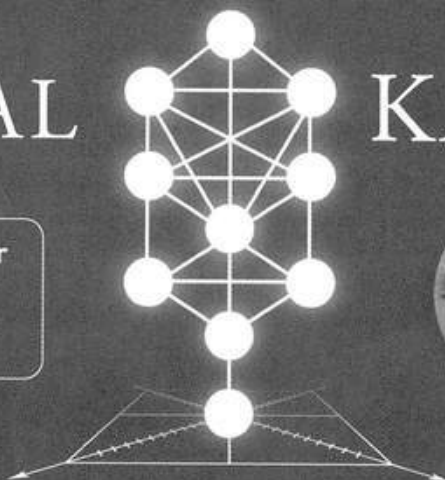
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Current THINKING

The Youth Are Getting Restless

On February 7, French university students began a series of mass protests, staging the single most dramatic demonstrations since the legendary student revolt of May 1968. By March 7, over half of France's universities were occupied, and an estimated one million high school students had joined in a day of protest. On March 28, more than a million people demonstrated throughout the country. The goal? To force the French government to rescind the *Contrat Premier Embauche* (CPE), a new labor law that enables companies to fire people under the age of twenty-six without explanation if they have been employed for less than two years.

Even though thirty-eight years have passed since the May '68 demonstrations, there is more than just a passing resemblance between this student revolt and its 1968 predecessor. Intensely preoccupied by frequently invoked parallels in the mainstream media,

French students posting to English and French language blogs have argued fiercely about the uniqueness of their uprising. Posting to the libertarian-communist U.K. site Libcom.org on March 20, one extremely savvy student set the historical record straight:

Here are a number of differences with May '68.

In 1968, 12 percent of the youth had the "baccalauréat" [certificate granted for passing exams at the end of high school studies]. Today 70 percent of the youth has the baccalauréat. So the perspectives to be integrated in the so-called middle classes are very small. And at the same time the risks taken by the students are much higher.

In 1968, the far Left and the anarchists and all sorts of libertarians succeeded in dominating the student movement ideologically and materially. They could talk for hours about revolution and be taken seriously or least not contradicted. They did not ask for university reform; they wanted the disappearance of the university system, the end of the division of labor, etc.; they had an anti-authoritarian rhetoric

and at least wanted to control the content of the classes, to introduce revolutionary pedagogical methods, to make counter-classes, etc...

Almost forty years have passed. The far Left (what is left: the Trotskyites, the Maoists, and such, have almost

disappeared or are now in the main trade unions or the small anarcho-syndicalist trade union) has become famous for its ability to manipulate general assemblies, to use movements for its own political aims (i.e., to pressure the Left to unite and come to power once more) and





Divest from Sudan

A genocide is happening in Sudan according to the U.S. Congress, the European Union, the World Jewish Congress, and other international bodies. The Sudanese government, allied with the Janjaweed militia, has killed over 200,000 Christian and pagan residents of

Darfur and driven more than 2 million from their homes.

Sending peacekeepers has been a hard sell, particularly given the current U.S. occupation of Iraq. No one wants to be embroiled in another unresolvable conflict. But there is something we all can do to stop the genocide: Divest.

Apartheid in South Africa faltered when the rest of the world pulled their money out of corporations doing business there. Divestment can do the same in oil-rich Sudan. Momentum is building for divestment at universities around the country: Harvard, Stanford, Amherst, Dartmouth, Yale, and now

the University of California system have all voted to divest. More votes will be taken in the next few months, so check with your alma mater.

Pensioners are also getting into the act, with calls for divestment from state-held pension funds. For more information, go to www.sudandivestment.com.



procedures in the general assemblies, even if they did not always succeed. They created "coordinations" which were supposedly independent from the parties and trade unions. That's why today instead of having only the tiny bureaucratic student trade unions and the small "revolutionary" groups at the front of the struggle, there are student coordinations that are trying to limit the maneuvers of political professionals. The national student coordination meets each time in a different town and the number of delegates has doubled in size, from 200 to 400. The demands of the

coordination not only concern the suppression of the CPE, but also a general amnesty for all the persons condemned in the November riots, the suppression of all laws favoring [economic instability for workers], etc. The students' coordination is trying to build links with high school students but also with small groups of workers [who lack job security] to enlarge the movement and its aims.

Amen to that. Read more fascinating blog entries about the 2006 French student uprising at www.libcom.org/blog/. ■

then, for some of them, to enter the SP or the State apparatus and have a traditional political career, etc. Already in the 1986 movement, it was obvious that the students no longer criticized the ideological content of their studies, did not care about of the reactionary pedagogy of their

teachers. They did not want to change society and were looking for good jobs. They wanted more grants, more teachers, bigger classrooms, etc. But there was something positive and new: they did not want the far left groups to manipulate them and tried to have democratic

The Response to Our Message Grows

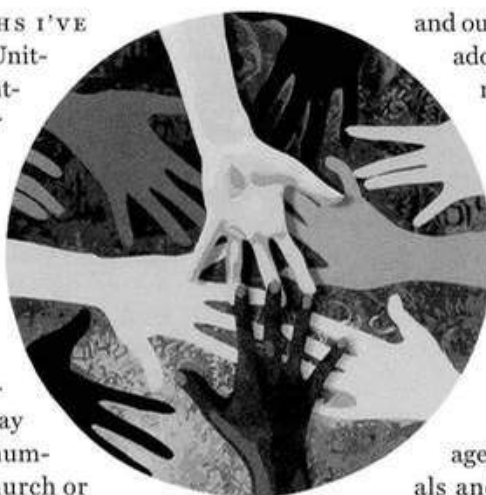
BY MICHAEL LERNER

FOR THE PAST FOUR MONTHS I'VE traveled to many parts of the United States and have been delighted to meet thousands of our readers and supporters—and thousands of others who never heard of me or *Tikkun* until they encountered my new book *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right*.

Crowds have filled churches, synagogues, and bookstores. Sometimes hundreds of people had to be turned away because of fire law restrictions on the numbers of people allowed into a given church or synagogue.

These encounters have often felt less like a traditional book reading and more like a town meeting. Many of the people I've met have told me that they had not attended many political events before. They came because they are angry at the way religion has become a sledgehammer in the hands of the Religious Right. They feel that "the Right Hand of God" consciousness—which sees the world through the framework of fear and domination, that experiences God as an angry and punishing father figure, and that picks on the least able to defend themselves (the poor, those who benefit from governmental social programs, gays and lesbians, the homeless, immigrants)—does not understand the God that they believe in nor the God they were taught about when they grew up in more loving and affirming religious communities. They want to hear more about the Left Hand of God, and they want others to be reminded of that vision: a God of love and generosity, kindness and compassion. And they want to hear about what we are going to do to change the dynamics of American politics.

Some are hoping for a "quick fix" and get disappointed when they realize that the Network of Spiritual Progressives is actually advocating for a much deeper transformation of American society. Some recognize that our New Bottom Line



and our Progressive Spiritual Covenant could, if adopted by the Democrats, transform the dynamics of American politics. However, they have doubts that the Democrats will be smart enough to move in that direction. Most of the people who came to my readings told me that they are energized by the gatherings and by the book itself. The most frequently voiced response: "Listening to you or reading this book gives me hope that I haven't had for many years."

Who are these people? They are teenagers and seniors in wheelchairs, professionals and craftspeople, artists and musicians, small shop keepers and people who've worked for decades in large corporations. They are mostly people who were raised as Christians (some still practicing avidly, some occasionally, some turned away from the religious life and saying that our vision is the first thing that has made it possible to respond to their own inner spiritual yearnings without feeling that in so doing they were being asked to abandon their intellectual integrity or their support for peace and social justice). I'm sorry to say that Jews have been less present (many synagogues simply won't invite me because of my stance supporting Palestinian rights). But once they get into the room, they are every bit as enthusiastic about what they hear as their Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and atheist brothers and sisters.

Most of them heard about the Network of Spiritual Progressives or the book through word of mouth, or because some of you, our readers, sent them an email note telling them about what it is that enthuses you about our *Tikkun*/Spiritual Progressives approach. Others heard me on C-Span's *Book TV* (which got so much demand that they showed it four times), or on the *Tavis Smiley Show*, or on Al Franken's or Thom Hartmann's *Air America* radio shows, or read about the book or the NSP movement in extremely favorable reviews in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Christian Century*, *Alternet*, or other media outlets.

All this excitement translated into making the book a national best seller through much of February and March, and that led to many chain retailers carrying the book, which in turn contributed to more people wanting to get involved with NSP.

I want to thank you, our readers (and especially our subscribers and members of the Tikkun Community/NSP) for

helping get our message out. I'm assigning all future profits to *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

I hope that we can turn this momentum into an important force for building social healing and transformation. Please come to our Spiritual Activism Conference May 17-20 to turn that hope into a reality. For more information or to register, visit www.tikkun.org or call (510) 528-6250.

The Foreign Policy Debate

WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS OF GEORGE Bush, Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Senators Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Joe Lieberman and Dianne Feinstein, and journalists Thomas Friedman and William Kristol, just about everyone in America has come to realize that the war in Iraq has been a disaster. Not only for the Iraqi people, for whom it has unleashed a civil war between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims, but also for our own men and women in uniform. Well...not really everyone—one third of all Americans remain loyal to the Bush administration's wars of empire, and there are plenty of Democrats who still lack the backbone to proclaim that the emperor has no clothes.

But, in the absence of any coherent alternative thinking from the Democrats, many of the conservatives who dominate America's foreign policy debate have moved on and are now debating the failure of this war. The media conveniently divides them into two groups: the "realists" who are said to oppose future ideology-driven interventions and the "neo-con idealists" who remain committed to the role of the United States as a force to spread democracy and human rights in the world.

In this formulation, President Bush and his followers may appear to be losing the war because of their own incompetence. Yet it's hard not to see them as idealistic if one accepts the terms in which the media presents the debate. In a national security document released in March 2006, the Bush administration, despite its growing legion of critics, doggedly stuck to its agenda. "It is the policy of the United States," the report begins, "to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

The so-called "realists" respond by challenging the ability of the United States to be effective in extending democracy. The *New York Times* quotes the Republican chair of the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee as questioning whether America has "the unbounded power" to undertake an open-ended commitment to achieve this lofty

goal of a world filled with democracy. Moreover, as some conservatives (notably former neo-con cheerleader Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History*) are asserting, it is naïve and contrary to the tenets of conservatism for America to think it can act as a midwife for democratic regimes in societies about which it knows very little.

In response, the neo-con "idealists" say that they should not give up their commitment to democracy just because it's hard, or, as the Bush administration's March report makes clear, the task of democratization of the planet will remain "the work of generations." Unfortunately, this debate continues to mystify and deny the reality of the policies actually being pursued by both sides.

At least Fukuyama has the honesty to point out that when President Bush ran for election in 2000, he and his soon-to-be chief foreign policy advisor Condoleezza Rice were outspoken in their criticisms of the Clinton administration's attempts to promote democracy in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans during the 1990s. It was only after the administration failed to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that they suddenly discovered an interest in promoting democracy. As the Iraq intervention became increasingly problematic, the rhetoric of democracy-building suddenly began to trump the less plausible discourse of fighting terrorism (particularly since the Iraq war was actually increasing the numbers of terrorists).

The truth is that the Bush administration is as interested in promoting democracy in the world as this magazine is in increasing the number of people eating pork.

What the Bush administration has always meant by "democracy" is a society that encourages the freedom of corporations to invest without constraints imposed by governments or labor unions. For that reason, the Bush administration cannot recognize the freely elected regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela as a democracy and instead portrays him as a dictator, and they are likely to do the same thing if Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Evo Morales in Bolivia follow Chavez's policy of promoting the interests of working people and restricting the abilities of corporations to pollute and destroy the environment.



THE NEO-CONS HAVE NEVER BEEN idealistic enough and their use of terms such as “democracy” has been entirely without principle, privileging regimes supportive of America’s wealthy elites over the rights and needs of people.

Nor is this particular distortion one to be blamed on Republicans alone. For example, the Clinton administration was very late in coming to the defense of Bosnia’s Muslim community. During its eight years in office, it similarly never contemplated making serious challenges to China over its disrespect for human rights, Russia for its brutal war with Chechnya, Israel’s colonization of the West Bank and Gaza, and the authoritarian regimes governing such nations as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

There are two possible explanations for these policies. The more charitable view says that these are “inconsistencies” on the part of otherwise principled governments that do not have the courage to follow through on their deep desires for democracy, because doing so would upset countries whose support the United States has judged to be indispensable. The less charitable view says that these are not inconsistencies at all, but rather actions quite consistent with the policies of a country seeking world domination by any means necessary. In the example of the United States, one of these means is by preaching the values of democracy.

Whichever of these two views you hold, it quickly becomes apparent that there is little difference between the so-called “neo-con idealists” and the power-oriented pragmatists who dub themselves “realists.” Each offers alternatives that mislead the world about America’s real intentions, and both make it easy to dismiss the antiwar movement as “isolationist” because of its purported lack of a “responsible” internationalist outlook. This is pure ideological distortion.

What such worldviews leave out is the position of Spiritual Progressives. From our standpoint there is no possibility of isolationism, because we start from the spiritual insight of the oneness of all humanity and our fundamental interconnectedness. To be an isolationist would be as irrational as to say, “I have no interest in the pain in my foot, because that is an extremity of my body not directly connected to my brain or heart.” The truth is that isolationism is a fantasy because we are all one. Whatever happens in one part of the world inevitably affects the rest of us. This is why the internationalism of America’s militarists is so misguided.

We advocate a different kind of interventionism: one that is

generated by a genuine love and caring for the wellbeing of others. In the progressive Spiritual Covenant with America that we intend to bring to Congress May 17–20, we in the Network of Spiritual Progressives call for an intervention aimed at ending world poverty, homelessness, hunger, and inadequate health-care and education. We aim to repair the damage done to the global environment by 150 years of irresponsible forms of industrialization in both capitalist and communist countries. We advocate a Global Marshal Plan that would dedicate 5 percent of the GDP of all the G8 countries each year for the next twenty years to advancing this goal, and require that these funds be allocated to autonomous local groups whose use of them would be carefully monitored to ensure that they are used in ways that are respectful to existing communities and traditions. We would similarly seek the guarantee that these funds be provided in a spirit of true generosity, not in a spirit of arrogance or demands for an immediate return on the investment.

No one will be surprised if this kind of “third path” doesn’t get much sympathetic attention from the corporate-dominated media. And we also won’t be surprised if it is quickly dis-

missed by the mainstream of a Democratic Party that continues to attempt to position itself as “tough on terror” and “militarist” in regards to foreign policy. From the moment they lost the 2004 Presidential elections, a steady stream of centrist Democrats have proclaimed that their defeat stemmed from their inability to convey to the American public how they are as tough as Bush. The major cheerleaders for this approach have been the *New Republic* magazine; Senators Lieberman, Biden, and Clinton; and of course every other Democrat with significant military contracts in their district. This cynical realism has had a profound influence on mainstream media in the United States, making it extremely difficult to give serious consideration to such pro-democracy initiatives as the Spiritual Covenant with America, out of fear that such proposals will be used to identify the Democrats as being too idealistic.

Our point is that the neo-cons have never been idealistic enough, that their use of terms such as “democracy” has been entirely instrumental and without principle, and that neo-cons privilege regimes supportive of America’s wealthy elites over the rights and needs of people. And that is no idealism at all.

A Spiritual Caucus in the Democratic Party

WE’VE ALWAYS MADE IT CLEAR THAT WE are not connected to any particular political party. We are bound by law to eschew such an identity. Even if we were not, we’d still be hard pressed to identify any party that at present was truly open to the kind of spiritual politics that we promote in *Tikkun*. We are aware that political parties are capable of dramatic transformations. The changes in the Democratic Party from 1964 and 1968—when it was controlled by men who were true Cold Warriors and who laughed at the emerging peace, environment, and social justice movements of 1970s—represented one such transformation for the Democrats. This transformation was just as dramatic as the transformation of the Republican Party from the voice of nineteenth-century abolitionists to the voice of those most insensitive to the needs of African Americans in the twentieth century.

But change happens. That’s why we would be happy to see a spiritual caucus in the Republican Party or the Greens, if that caucus adhered to the definition of spiritual politics put forth in our Spiritual Covenant with America.

Yet in no place would a spiritual caucus have a tougher

reception than in the Democratic Party. The Democratic leadership is so heavily focused on the economy that it would have a very difficult time even having a clue about what a *Tikkun*/Network of Spiritual Progressives perspective was about, much less take it seriously as an alternative strategy and worldview to those that are currently being debated by the political consultants who brought us the Gore and Kerry disasters and are itching to give us more of the same.

However, it’s not just the top of the Democratic Party that will be hard to penetrate. There are obstacles at the base as well, obstacles that my book *The Left Hand of God* tries to reduce. The obstacles are these:

1. A very large group of Democrats has come to believe that it is “unrealistic” to fight for what they really believe in, because the media and the Republicans have convinced them that the majority of Americans really want a society run by and for corporate interests, will only feel safe with leaders who espouse militarism as a path to homeland security, and will only respond to forms of religion that are authoritarian and patriarchal. This group has concluded that in order to save American society from an impending fascist takeover, their only option is to provide a “kinder, gentler, and more rational”

SPIRITUAL DEMOCRATS COULD PROVIDE the alternative people are looking for: a progressive voice with the courage of its convictions and a commitment to sticking to its ideals.

version of Republican Party politics. They will see a progressive spiritual caucus as hearkening back to 1960s values ("can you believe the naivete of that?" they will shout) that are certain to marginalize their party, because they have never heard a coherent articulation of spiritual politics that seems realistic in terms of American politics as they've come to understand it.

2. An equally large group of Democrats has come to believe that the reason that they have lost past elections is that the American public is stupid and easily manipulated by anti-democratic agitators. Insofar as they understand the vision of the NSP, they see it as complicated and lacking the hyperbolic elegance and propagandistic qualities that will be necessary to defeat the Republicans. This is not to say that they don't understand that there is a "spiritual gap" that the Democrats have to fill. But their strategy is to fill it by getting candidates in 2006 and 2008 to adorn their speeches with Biblical quotations and remarks about their last experience in church, but never address the real spiritual crisis in America discussed in *The Left Hand of God*.

3. Many Democrats are actively hostile to anything religious or spiritual. Some grew up in right-wing religious communities and suffered from the homophobia, sexism, racism, or authoritarianism they may have experienced there. Others have watched the Religious Right manipulate religious categories to justify cuts in social spending and taxes, imperialist wars of domination (such as that taking place in Iraq), and a global ethos of selfishness promoted by American foreign policy. Unable to distinguish between reactionary forms of religion that have gained political power and more liberatory forms that once inspired and led the Left (such as that of the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), such Democrats dismiss all expressions of religion and spirituality.

So it's not going to be easy. But we are urging people in the NSP to take our vision into whatever party they are affiliated with, and for many that is going to mean the Democratic Party.

We envision the Spiritual Caucus being first and foremost a vehicle for raising a progressive spiritual perspective on con-



temporary issues, stemming from our New Bottom Line that institutions, legislation, social practices, corporations, and governmental policies should be judged efficient, rational or productive not only to the extent that they maximize money or power (the Old Bottom Line) but also to the extent that they maximize love and caring, kindness and generosity, compassion and creativity, and enhance our capacities to respond to other human beings as embodiments of the sacred and to the universe with awe, wonder and radical amazement.

Teaching people in the Democratic Party or any other party how to think about social and political issues through the framework of a New Bottom Line would be a tremendous accomplishment,

comparable to the changes that were brought about in the Democratic Party that made it possible for them to move from a patriarchal institution to one that is far more nuanced and sensitive to the needs of women than anyone would have predicted forty years ago.

Drawing upon our Spiritual Covenant with America, the Spiritual Caucus inside the Democratic Party will show their fellow party members that a New Bottom Line can translate into powerful new approaches to the central political questions of our time.

There's one other powerful lesson that must be learned from Spiritual Democrats: in order for your ideals to win, you must be willing to lose with them. That is, one must be willing to advocate for one's vision even at moments when it seems so utopian that no one is likely to buy into it.

One thing I deeply respect about the Religious Right is its willingness to stick to its principles—even when they are not immediately plausible to the American majority—and to continue arguing for them. Compare that with how Democrats often feel that they have to alter their ideals to suit whatever they are being told is "realistic" by soothsayers who interpret polling data as though it contained messages from God about what to believe in and how to conduct our lives. Indeed, it is this seeming spinelessness that has made liberals in general and Democrats in particular seem so contemptible to many

Americans. A Spiritual Caucus or an organization of Spiritual Democrats could provide the alternative that people are looking for: a progressive voice with the courage of its convictions and a commitment to sticking to its ideals rather than continually reformulating them in order to win short-term electoral gains at the expense of long-term intellectual and moral integrity.

Another way of putting this is that the reason so many people have lost respect for liberals is that they perceive liberals to be liberal about their liberalism—unwilling to fight for what they believe in. How can people who have some justifiable fears about security trust the liberals to be responsible in defending our country if the liberals won't be tough in defending their own ideals?

Spiritual Democrats can model a different way of doing politics just by being consistent witnesses for our different vision and not capitulating in order to be popular. Many of those who at first will be the most skeptical will eventually be con-

vinced by a consistent voice that insists that what Democrats need is not a new pretty face or a beautiful orator or a dynamic personality, but a deep and true vision of the kind of world to which most people aspire.

Spiritual Greens and Spiritual Republicans will also play a role in shaping the dynamics of those parties. Imagine the powerful debate inside the Republican Party when people begin to insist on making that party Jesus-true, that is, insist on siding with the poor and the oppressed! And, yes, there will be some who will respond to that message.

So the Network of Spiritual Progressives can play an important role in whatever party you've chosen—not by advocating for a particular candidate or for quick tricks to win electoral victories, but by advocating for a different way of understanding the fundamentals of human needs and our deep aspirations for a life of meaning, purpose, and service. ■

Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun.

THE CONTRARIAN

The Ethics of Capitalism

BY GEORGE VRADENBURG

PROGRESSIVES SEEM TO HAVE A VISCERAL DIS-
taste for capitalism and corporate America; they believe that what most Americans do every day of their lives has little redeeming social benefit and produces damaging side effects to their own spiritual wellbeing.

This is a serious misunderstanding of modern corporate America, leading to misguided efforts to regulate corporate behavior to produce new performance measures not connected to serving individual preferences as expressed through the market.

Capitalism is a system of economic organization that forces producers to serve the preferences of others. To be successful, a for-profit enterprise, be it large or small, must deliver, at affordable prices, the goods and services that large numbers of people are prepared to acquire in exchange for their hard-

earned dollars. A for-profit enterprise that is not effective in doing that will quickly go out of business.

People inside for-profit institutions are motivated to create, design, produce, and deliver what others want. If they are good at serving others, they will succeed; if they are not, they will fail.

Progressives seriously misunderstand corporate America if they assume that power and money are its only driving forces. To the extent that power (measured by promotions and increased corporate authority) and greed (measured by increased salaries and benefits) are motivators for corporate managers, their aspirations can only be achieved if their products contribute to consumers' wellbeing. The system harnesses those "base" motivations, to the extent they exist, in service to others.

But the assumption is simply wrong. Inside corporate

America are loving and caring managers motivated by service to others, who use the corporate forum to express those feelings. The strongest corporations identify their own mission with the wellbeing of their customers and thus the creation of social value. For example, the mission of Wal-Mart is to provide a broad array of products and services at affordable prices to more Americans, thereby enabling Americans, including those of low income, to enjoy a greater sense of satisfaction in their daily lives. America Online seeks to make the Internet as central to the lives of Americans as the telephone and the television, but even more valuable. Corporations whose missions align with the values of their employees and customers are the best performers in the marketplace.

Progressives believe that corporations create a "me-only" environment for their employees with psychological side effects that destroy loving and caring relationships.

There is no question that job demands cause stress to families because of time pressures that reduce family time. So do many activities of modern life, including commuting, soccer practice, and ballet classes. But corporations, like other institutions, continually reform their management practices to respond to worker dissatisfaction. Well-managed companies value managers who respect their workers and their families. Americans learned from the Japanese that companies of "servant managers," who value the opinions and personal lives of their workers, produce a higher quality product than those that treated their workers like cogs in a machine. As a result, workers inside a well-managed corporate environment are valued not for their power seeking and greed but by the creativity of their work.

There is no question that some companies and some managers fall short of this ideal. But in a global arena where highly sought-after creative workers are mobile, work will flow to those companies and workers that produce the most congenial work environment and the products and services preferred by the most people.

Do we need to be vigilant to assure worker safety and environmental responsibility? Of course. But the suggestion that every corporation should submit to a trial by jury to test their adherence to spiritual values would seriously alter the incentives of companies to serve consumers. A market-based, corporate system "cares" about the personal preferences of consumers. And corporations committed to developing their internal "human capital" seek to create "caring" relationships for their employees within the corporate environment and at home.

Is capitalism a mechanistic system without spiritual value? I think not. It is a system, unlike state-directed economic systems, where valuing the consumer is the intended and desired outcome. Its spiritual value is reflected in the free exchange and interplay among human beings each divinely designed "in the image of God." ■

George Vradenburg is copublisher of Tikkun.

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A Social Revolution?

BY JOEL SCHALIT

SOMETIMES TWENTY SEATS CAN SEEM LIKE A whole lot more, especially if you listen to the leaders of Israel's Labor Party analyzing the significance of their own groundbreaking achievements in Israel's 2006 elections. Under the circumstances, Labor didn't just poll well (unlike the Likud, it held onto all of its Knesset seats); it also created something far more lasting: a new public sensibility about the necessity of addressing Israel's mounting social crises. Now, nearly every Israeli political party must declare its willingness to confront Israel's mounting social and economic problems and propose a viable plan of action.

One need look no further than Israeli neo-conservatism's most historically influential proponent, Benjamin Netanyahu, to see how profoundly the emergence of this discourse shook up Israel's political establishment. Desperately seeking votes to shore up his rapidly shrinking Likud party, towards the end of the election campaign the former finance minister found himself apologizing to those who'd been adversely affected by his ruthless economic policies. For such a notoriously unapologetic ideologue to acknowledge criticisms of his free market politics clearly meant that Israeli politicians were taking the public's embrace of these concerns seriously.

From the opposite side of the tracks, the objections to Labor's electoral strategies raised by many peace activists after the election also attested to the significance of Labor's achievement. Why choose to focus on economic issues when the Left's chief responsibility ought to be convincing the Israeli public to accept a bilateral and comprehensive withdrawal to the 1967 borders? By choosing to concentrate its electoral efforts on addressing domestic problems, the Labor Party had essentially conceded to Kadima the battle over the character of the forthcoming withdrawals, and in doing so had failed to offer an alternative foreign policy ideologically consistent with its questionable domestic agenda.

Clearly, Labor has something to boast about. Forcing Israel's Right into a defensive posture on economic issues and drawing intense criticism about its electoral priorities from fellow progressives, Labor's social platform succeeded in moving Israeli political discourse to the Left in a manner entirely analogous to how Ariel Sharon's December 2004 decision to disengage unilaterally from the Occupied Territories helped

legitimate the Israeli public's growing discomfort with the Occupation. Granted, Sharon wasn't necessarily interested in prosecuting a truly just and honorable withdrawal. But by choosing even to consider one, no matter how half-hearted, Sharon helped unleash a tsunami's worth of resentment about the cost of the Occupation that no mainstream Israeli political party has yet been able to satisfactorily channel into a plan to fully return to the 1967 borders.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the success of Labor's social platform is its significance when viewed in terms of wider global struggles with neo-liberal socio-economic policies in the West. Ideologically speaking, much of the analysis that Labor put forward about Israel's program of privatization and divestment from its traditionally large public sector, and about the government's increasing promotion of market-based solutions to social problems is no different from what has been offered by the anti-globalization movement over the course of the past ten years. What is so surprising is the degree to which Labor has been able to translate these ideas into a mainstream party's political platform in contemporary Israel, a highly industrialized first-world country undergoing the same economic transformation—from manufacturing to high tech—as the United States.

Though Labor's social platform is by no means unprecedented among progressive political parties in the West—take, for example, the French Left's criticisms of neo-liberalism, which contributed to France's rejection of the EU constitution in 2005—what makes it so unique is its geographical displacement. Despite the fact that Israel is in many respects a Western nation, it remains a Middle Eastern one as well, plagued by many of the same conflicts that afflict neighboring states, from the role that religion plays in public life to the disproportionate influence of the military on civil institutions, and the concentration of immense amounts of wealth in the hands of increasingly small elites. By having succeeded in promoting a Western social platform in an Israeli context, Labor proved that the global Left's struggle against neo-liberalism can be reinvented in Hebrew vernacular. ■

Joel Schalit is managing editor of Tikkun. His back catalogue of recordings with 1990s agitprop artists Christal Methodists will be reissued this summer through Apple's iTunes store. He is currently working on Israel vs. Utopia, his third book for Akashic.

Pre-Emptive Punishment

A Tale of Two Elections

BY MITCHELL PLITNICK

THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS YIELDED SOME BIG surprises. The death knell was sounded for Likud, at least as it exists now under Binyamin Netanyahu, as they barely edged out Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home), headed by Avigdor Lieberman, a man whose racism shocks even the staunchest of Israel's right-wingers. But of even greater significance was the strong showing by the Pensioners' Party. This single-issue party won seven seats and will be a key coalition partner for Kadima as well as a party with which Labor will try to establish strong ties for the future.

Netanyahu had called this election a referendum on Kadima's plan for further unilateral disengagement. But the truth is this vote was more about internal Israeli politics. Throughout the campaign, talk of peace was virtually absent. That's a reflection of the Israeli mood, which has given up on a negotiated resolution to their long-time conflict with the Palestinians.

Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections certainly helped to cement that feeling. The initial Israeli view of Hamas as they took power was, naturally enough, based on Hamas's charter and their history of targeting Israeli civilians. Hamas may have been as surprised as anyone that they won such a clear majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council. As Hamas struggled to find stances that were both practical and true to their own principles, Israel moved to make that matter more complicated.

Since the Palestinian elections, Israel has withheld tax money collected from the Palestinians. Israel has also tightened the closures around the Gaza Strip, creating a desperate shortage of food, medicine, and other goods needed for simple survival. They have repeatedly threatened the new Palestinian Authority, thereby creating a situation where any accommodation made by the Hamas-led PA will be seen as capitulation to Israel.

The United States has not been much better. The draconian "Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006," currently in committee in the House of Representatives, would severely restrict

both aid to the Palestinians and the ability of American diplomats to deal with any Palestinian leaders, Hamas or not. A less severe version of the bill is in the Senate.

Most of the demands being made of Hamas are reasonable. Foreswearing violence, recognizing Israel, and recognizing past agreements are standard fare. Some demands, however, such as expecting Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, are less reasonable. Fatah never did that. Such recognition is tantamount to admitting that the Zionist movement had every right to dispossess the Palestinians fifty-eight years ago. I can't imagine any Palestinian affirming such a statement. Most importantly, it's not necessary. As long as Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation is recognized, that is sufficient.

Rather than making it politically feasible for Hamas to deal with Israel, Ehud Olmert's government has made it nearly impossible for them to do so without seeming to be caving in to pressure. Of course, if Hamas did agree to talk with Israel, it would be a severe blow to Kadima's unilateralism. Without unilateral withdrawal, Kadima has virtually no platform. And now that unilateralism has been given an apparent mandate, it is no wonder that Olmert would not want to see a Hamas-led PA that was willing to negotiate.

The PA is no better. Hamas is exploring every avenue they can to find a way to negotiate without having to deal directly with Israel. They grudgingly agree that Mahmoud Abbas can negotiate with Israel, but give no indication that they would support his negotiations. The need now is for a third party to pull both sides to the bargaining table. It's obvious that the Bush administration is not up to that task. With AIPAC pushing draconian bills in Congress, the need for a progressive Jewish voice has never been clearer. Right now, the Palestinians and Israelis are looking for reasons not to talk. That path can only lead to destruction. ■

Mitchell Plitnick is director of educational policy for Jewish Voice for Peace.

SPIRIT Matters

Selections from forthcoming books, articles, and talks



ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

*From the book Dear President Bush by Cindy Sheehan.
(April 2006, City Lights)*

A new world is possible ... and necessary! This was the theme of the 2006 World Social Forum that I—and tens of thousands of people from around the world—recently attended in Caracas, Venezuela. The idea of a world where everyone lives in peace and with justice is very “subversive,” but it is close to the heart and soul of millions around the world.

We need a new world. This one is broken.

Before Casey was killed I never traveled much to speak of. I had gone to Israel and Mexico, and that was about it. I had a barely-used passport.

Since I began speaking out against the U.S. occupation of Iraq, I have journeyed all over the United States and now am starting to fill my passport with stamps.

Our world is so beautiful, and the people who inhabit it are, for the most part, loving. All they want is a good life for themselves and their children. They want to feel safe and secure in their communities. They want to be warm and not go hungry. They want clean drinking water. They want to dance and laugh. They want to live long lives with their families, and they want their children to bury them at the end of their time here. In short, the people of the world want the same things that we Americans want.

It is governments who demonize and marginalize other cultures, religions, races and ethnic groups. President Bush and his cohorts want to “fight them over there so we don’t have to fight them over here!” Who is this “them” that we are fighting over there? Is it a baby lying in her crib when a bomb is dropped on her house? Is it the mother who has gone shopping for her family’s daily food who is killed by a car bomber? Is it a car bomber who never even thought to commit

such a heinous act until his country was occupied by a foreign invader? Is it the grandmas and grandpas who are too old, or too stubborn, to leave their lifelong homes while the coalition troops are carpet bombing their region?

We as citizens of the United States of America must stop allowing our leaders to give orders to kill innocent people. I almost said: we must stop allowing our leaders to “kill” innocent people. But we all know that people like Vice President Cheney don’t fight their own fantasy battles nor risk losing their own children by shipping them off to Afghanistan or Iraq. No, they order our children to go over and do their dirty work.

Our soldiers are taught that “Hajis,” the brown-skinned people of Iraq who clean their toilets, showers, and wash their clothes, are less than people. This enables U.S. soldiers to kill them more easily. The dehumanization of non-Americans is also dehumanizing our soldiers. Our children.

I received hate mail from a “patriotic American” once who wrote that when we see Iraqi mothers and fathers of Iraq screaming because their babies have been killed, that they “are just acting for the cameras. They are animals who don’t care about their children because they know they can produce another.” This is the mentality is not far off from that of General Sherman, who said “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” Such racist rhetoric dehumanizes us all.

A new world is necessary and it can only be possible if we live the belief that every human being is inherently equal to ourselves. They feel pain when they are hurt. They have hunger pains when they haven’t eaten. Their mouths go dry when they are thirsty. They mourn when they experience a loss. They shiver when they are cold. They laugh when they are happy. How can we permit our leaders to get away with killing so many of our brothers and sisters around the world? Iraq Body Count [an Internet

database that reports civilian deaths in Iraq] estimates that as of February 2006, between 28,000 and 32,000 civilians—people like you and me—have been killed in Iraq since the U.S. invasion and occupation began.

A new world is necessary and it can only be possible if we rein in the depraved corporations that earn a profit from the killing. War profiteers like Halliburton, Bechtel and General Electric are racking up obscene profits for themselves and their shareholders as they plunder the planet. Conscienceless companies such as Dow are dumping chemicals and other pollutants into the water and atmosphere that sicken people, our environment and our future! Companies like Wal Mart are exploiting workers around the world to enrich one family instead of funding healthcare or a living wage for all of its employees.

A new world is necessary and it can only be possible if we decrease our dependency on oil and use some of the money that we are pouring into the desert sands and sewers of Iraq to expand research on renewable energy sources and expand the renewable sources we already have, such as biodiesel.

A new world is necessary but not possible until the United States gets over the arrogant idea that it can fix the disaster it's created in Iraq and elsewhere alone. We have to reach out to people around the world to forge the bonds that are crucial to protecting innocent members of humankind who are impoverished or killed by our government and the corporations that are largely unchecked.

Peace and justice are intimately connected and the world can't have one without the other. True and lasting peace can only occur when we the people force out leadership that is dependent on the war machine for their jobs and demand justice for the crimes against humanity they perpetrate on a daily basis.

A new world is possible and it is attainable. For this new world to become a reality it is necessary for us to take into our beings what Martin Luther King, Jr. said of his own eulogy, but more importantly, the way he lived his life:

"I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice;

say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness."



HOMOSEXUALS AND THE POLITICS OF DEATH

*Excerpted from Why the Christian Right is Wrong
by Robin Meyers (May 2006) by permission
of Jossey-Bass, a Wiley imprint.*

The issue for many of us in the church is not what "causes" homosexuality (we don't know) or whether acceptance of our gay brothers and sisters is an endorsement of sexual promiscuity (of course it isn't) but whether the Church of Jesus Christ is going to be true to its own founding principle: *radical hospitality*. The Gospel specializes in human beings who are left out but deserve to be invited in. Either we believe it when we say that God loves everybody, or we don't.

And please don't give me that tired line: "Love the sinner, hate the sin." We need to have a thoughtful, prayerful, gracious conversation in the church about sexual orientation, not just about sexual behavior. We're talking here about what someone *is*, not what someone *does*. The handful of condemnations against homosexuality in the Bible are directed at homosexual activities, which were considered unnatural because they were non-procreative and idolatrous because they were grouped with activities that were believed to separate us from God. They were not directed against sexual orientation, which nobody understood in those days and which we still don't understand today.

The importance of this distinction is revealed when the Christian Right makes what it believes to be a charitable compromise: asking homosexuals to be celibate. The unspoken premise here is that we can forgive a condition that we consider to be an aberration, but cannot countenance a behavior that we consider to be repulsive. It is the church's own version of "don't ask, don't tell."

Yet what the church is called to do is to encourage human beings to practice integrity, honesty, and self-discipline—whether gay or straight. We could make a quantum leap forward in the church's struggle with this issue if we could just make it clear that inclusiveness and sexual integrity are not mutually exclusive. Acceptance of gays in the church is not an endorsement of a "lifestyle," when that word is used as a euphemism for flamboyant promiscuity, but a response

to the call of Jesus to welcome every human being into the full sacramental hospitality of the Kingdom. This is not a compromise of "standards" but is in fact a willingness to extend them to more and more human beings.



ENVIRONMENTALISM AS SPIRITUALITY

*Excerpt from A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future by Roger S. Gottlieb.
(June 2006, Oxford University Press)*

Pursued by his enemies, afraid for his life and his throne, King David experienced a moment of grace which he recorded in a poetic prayer that has given people comfort for centuries: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," says the Twenty-third Psalm, indicating a trust in God marked by gratitude and serenity. When a follower of the Buddha finally entered into meditation fully, he told a friend that he was able to let go of any sense of "I am this, this is mine, this is my self." When the orchestra and chorus burst into the *Et Resurrexit* section of the Bach B Minor Mass—an explosive and ascending melody that propels the believer into an awareness of the miracle of Christ's entry into Divine Life—devout Christians may experience a sense of overwhelming joy: a joy, we might note, that is always available, because for the Christian, Christ's resurrection is a permanently recurring miracle that gives meaning and hope to human existence. When we celebrate the Sabbath, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam tell us we should feel delight, thankfulness, and rest. It is a time to appreciate what has been given to us, to see it as the gift of a generous God, and to take a break from thinking about how we can get more.

These are a few of the distinctive experiences fostered by religious life. Their most important shared feature is the way they take us beyond the conventional ego, beyond a frame of mind in which we calculate our interests, compete with those around us, struggle for success, seek to control the world to get what we want from it, or unendingly complain about every damn thing we don't have. In the experience of God or Ultimate Reality or Spirit, we are less depressed, bored, anxious, and selfish and more grateful, joyous, and serene. We taste exuberance or tranquility, reverence or awe, a deep confidence in the universe or a sense of how much of the universe will always be an enthralling mystery. Finally, because we feel we have

achieved communion with an immensely powerful source of meaning, a force or intelligence much vaster than ourselves with whom we can, in some sense, communicate, we no longer feel so *alone*.

For thousands of years religious writings have described these experiences as the product of encounters with God, or with states of mind stemming from meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Yet they are also to be found at the heart of environmentalism. It is precisely because for many of us the encounter with the rest of life on earth—indeed at times with the universe as a whole—provokes profound feelings of awe and reverence, mystery and serenity, that we commit ourselves to its protection.

The connection between nature and powerful, religious-like emotions is a familiar theme in the classic nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nature writers, writers who also were active in or guiding lights of the emerging social movement of environmentalism. Over and over, Thoreau and John Muir, John Burroughs, and Sigurd Olson describe the transformative quality of wilderness. Thoreau celebrated a "wildness" that is "the preservation of the world" and tells us, "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest woods, the thickest and most interminable and, to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, a *sanctum sanctorum*. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature." A keen observer of his surroundings, knowledgeable in natural history, Thoreau also regarded nature in a decidedly spiritual light: "The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. . . . Nature is a personality so vast and universal that we have never seen one of her features." John Muir's celebration of (and lobbying for) California's Sierra Mountains in the late nineteenth century eventually helped give rise to Yosemite National Park. Of his first encounter with them he wrote, "No description of Heaven that I have ever heard or read of seems half so fine." Sigurd Olson, whose life in the rugged lake country of northern Minnesota produced widely read books and articles, suggested in 1938 that what we learn from wilderness "are spiritual values . . . a familiar base for exploration of the soul and the universe itself. . . . With escape comes perspective. Far from the towns and all they denote, engrossed in their return to the old habits of wilderness living, men begin to wonder if the speed and pressure they have left are not a little senseless." John Burroughs, a contemporary of Muir's whose writings on birds made him equally famous in his day, reassured his readers, "Nature we have always with us, an inexhaustible storehouse of that which moves the heart, appeals to the mind and fires the imagination—health to the body, a

stimulus to the intellect, and joy to the soul." During a long ramble in the countryside he described a kind of mystical perfection that could be found through a commonplace encounter with the sky: "The office of the sunshine is slow, subtle, occult, unsuspected; but when the clouds do their work, the benefaction is so palpable and copious, so direct and wholesale, that all creatures take note of it, and for the most part rejoice in it. It is a completion, a consummation, a paying of a debt with a royal hand; the measure is heaped and overflowing!"

These few examples signal a widespread fact: it is quite common, says historian Michael P. Nelson, for people to argue for the preservation of wilderness as "a site for spiritual, mystical, or religious encounters: places to experience mystery, moral regeneration, spiritual revival, meaning, oneness, unity, wonder, awe, inspiration, or a sense of harmony with the rest of creation—all essential religious experiences."

These experiences are not merely the passing pleasures of ecological aesthetes, but are often integrated into lives of environmental activists. Engaged in a fight to prevent Yosemite's magnificent valley Hetch Hetchy from being dammed, Muir raged, "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man." As a twenty-four-year-old, the Jewish forester Robert Marshall, early advocate for wilderness conservation and a founder of the influential Wilderness Society, spent Yom Kippur of 1925 walking in the Idaho mountains and for three hours meditated in silence while sitting on a rock. The experience, he claimed, was for him more religiously effective than traditional observance: "In Temple . . . it has in the past been impossible to banish [trivial] thoughts from my mind, and, at best, fasting, hard seats and dull sermons are not conducive to deep thought. Therefore, I feel that my celebration of Yom Kippur, though unorthodox, was very profitable." Richard St. Barbe Baker, who pursued a lifelong vocation in support of tree planting to repair landscapes, improve agriculture, purify water, and orient humanity to cooperation with rather than unthinking control over nature, often wrote of how forests led him to awe and reverence.

It is important to note that such attitudes toward wilderness are not, as some might suppose, relics of earlier times when people were "more religious" than they are now. During three recent seminars on the "value of wilderness" hosted by the National Forest Service, accounts of the economics of lumber and consumer preferences for outdoor recreation were persistently joined by acknowledgment of the "intrinsic

value" of wilderness, and of how it sustains and elevates humanity's spiritual life.

Of the many religious experiences to which wilderness gives rise, one deserves special mention: a sense of the dissolution of the ego, of the boundaries that sharply divide one's own self from others. Sigmund Freud termed this experience "oceanic," and it has been a hallmark of religious mysticism in virtually every tradition one can think of. A good deal of spiritual practice, from long periods of meditation to extended fasting to intense prayer, has as its goal a lessening of our sense of separation, of rigid demarcation, between "me" and the rest of creation. Such experiences are also common in relation to nature. At certain crucial moments, ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak wrote in 1990, we manage to attend fully to what is around us, and "at that moment the distinction between inner and outer mind dissolves, and we meet our larger self." A century and a half earlier, Ralph Waldo Emerson described how going into the woods provides a "perfect exhilaration," enabling a man to "cast off his years" and be forever a child. "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the current of the universal Being circulates through me: I am part or parcel of God." As traditional religions revere those times when we are overwhelmed by the presence of God, or feel our ego dissolved in meditation, so people have for centuries acknowledged the power of nature to take them out of their normally constricted sense of self.

This expanded sense of self prompts an extended sense of fellowship as well, one in which we feel for all of nature (including people, we hope!) the kinds of moral sentiments held dear by traditional religions: to love our neighbors as ourselves (Christianity and Judaism), to "spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans for the needy, for the wayfarer" (Islam, Qur'an 2:177), or to respond to anyone's pain as if it were our own (Buddhism). To use Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's terminology, each animal and plant, even each mountain and river, becomes a "thou" rather than an "it." In Baker's words, "A Tree is a real thing, it has a personality. It is a living entity. Is it too much to believe that it responds to the love that is given to it? . . . We shall tread softly when we enter the sanctuary of the woods, seeing we are in company with tree beings who respond to our love and care."

This sense of kinship extends to the whole as well as to the particular elements that make up the whole. American nature writer and inspirer of the radical deep ecology group Earth First! Edward Abbey suggested

that love of wildness is "an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need."

It must be stressed that the language of love, awe, and reverence, of nature's capacity to heal and comfort, are not, as some might suppose, simply the province of poetic and private individuals, of a Thoreau in a cabin by Walden Pond or an isolated nature writer whose affection for nature is solely literary. Rather, for many in the environmentalist community, these kinds of experiences of nature are essential to *why they became active environmentalists*, and to why they continue the struggle throughout their lives. Muir helped create America's national parks and founded the Sierra Club, Marshall the national forest system. Baker spent his entire adult life trying to regenerate lost forests, helping protect redwoods in California, creating a tree-planting society among native Kenyans, and improving tree cover for fields in India and Australia. Spretnak has been a political activist in the American green movement for decades.

To take a less well-known but critically important example from recent American history, consider Howard Zahniser, who spent seven years drafting more than sixty versions of what became the 1964 Wilderness Act, an act that set aside more than 9 million acres of the United States as places human beings could visit but not impact and in which the marks of human activity would be absent. The Wilderness Act was an enormously detailed, highly technical legal accomplishment, not the stuff of religious enthusiasm or spiritual musing. Getting it passed required extensive lobbying, negotiating, consulting, and coalition building by Zahniser and his allies. Yet, in "The Need for Wilderness," after giving the more tangible recreational, scientific, and ecological values of wilderness their due, Zahniser went on to emphasize that "the most profound of all wilderness values in our modern world" is its ability to help us "know a profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness and responsibility."

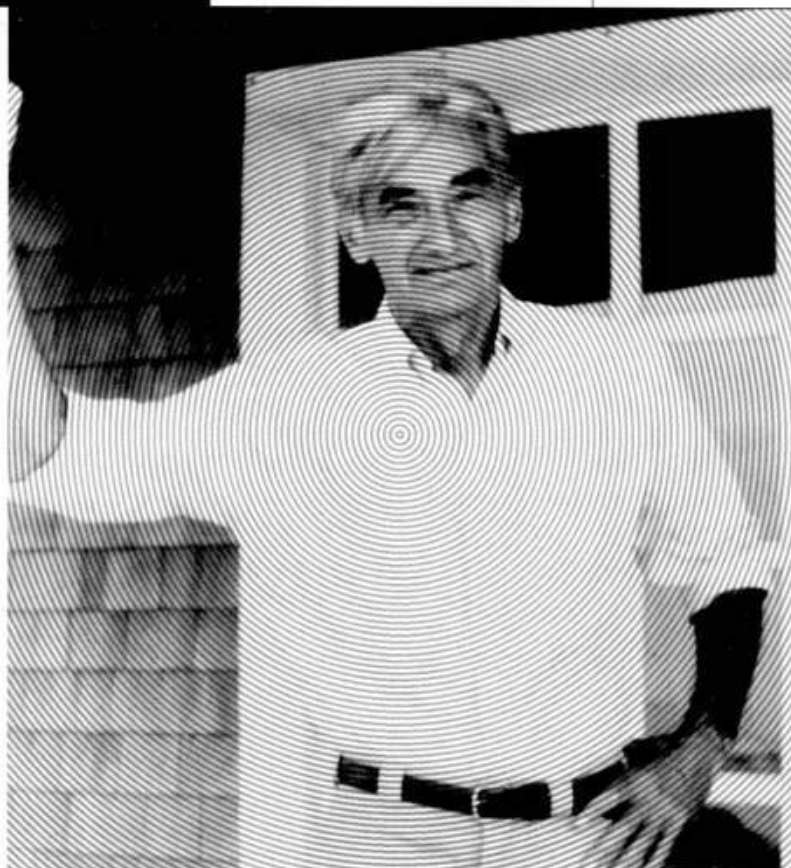
Another conservation professional, chief economist and social science coordinator for the National Forest Service's Inter Mountain region David Iverson, speaks of "a spiritual element to the land: you can feel it every time you're out there." Influenced by a childhood filled with

experiences of nature, by Aldo Leopold and Edward Abbey, Iverson heads the remarkable organization Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, a group of professional foresters who oppose our government's tendency to treat the woods simply as raw material. Their goal is not only to manage the land efficiently, but to pass it "with *reverence* from generation to generation." Of all the words that could have been used in this simple statement of intent, it is striking that an essentially religious word was chosen. In a review of *Nature and the Human Spirit*, a large collection of essays by foresters and environmentalists, Iverson points out that such a volume could not have been possible in the past, and that its endorsement by high-level administrators indicates that the long-standing taboo against speaking of the forests' spiritual meanings may be weakening.

In general, says experienced forester Robert Perschel, many of his fellow paid staffers of the 250,000-member Wilderness Society find a spiritual sensibility underlying their work. If the culture of professionalism forbade a great deal of discussion of that dimension, it still could be tapped. During the Society's annual week-long staff meeting, Perschel initiated an hour-long discussion by asking participants to bring in "sacred objects," something to indicate why they were doing the work they did. "Amazing things came out," he says. "One man talked about taking walks with his dying mother through pine forests where she had played as a child. A woman who had worked for the merchant marine described seeing a pod of whales suddenly shooting out of a massive wave during a typhoon, and her staring into the eyes of one of them who was magically suspended in front of her." Perschel, former head of the Northern Forest Alliance and current environmental director of the Garrison Institute, believes that in the environmental movement, "You can always make a connection to someone about some special moment. Maybe it came in the Grand Canyon, maybe in the backyard, but there is always that common thread: that

there is more to us than just the self, there is the larger community—from the family and the town and the nation, to all of nature, the whole universe." The environmental crisis demands, says Perschel, far more than "rational management": "We have no hope unless we infuse the debate over the environment with the deep emotional and spiritual connections that it warrants and that will be required for a great social transformation." ■

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.



AN
INTERVIEW
WITH

Howard Zinn

By Shelly R. Fredman

WHEN I ARRIVED AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY in 1978, it was like showing up at a party after all the guests had gone home. The Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War protests were over, and everyone around me was studying business and honing their resumes. The Sixties had died. All the activists were gone.

Except for Howard Zinn. You could sign up for Zinn's classes, "Marxism" and "Anarchism," and there, every Tuesday and Thursday, you could hear the stories no one else would tell you: Columbus's arrival on these shores from the Arawak Indian's point of view, Emma Goldman's message to the unemployed in Union Square, black students in Greensboro, North Carolina,

who one day sat down at the Woolworth's counter where only whites could eat. Now, some twenty years later, in the wake of Katrina, mired in Bush's reckless reign and the ever-escalating death toll in Iraq, it seemed a good time to revisit Zinn.

Best known for *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn has been a professor, radical historian, social activist, and intellectual leader of the Left for forty years. In over twenty books, he has devoted himself to connecting America's past with its present, providing a frame for left-wing activism and politics. Praised by academics and lay readers alike, Zinn feels more at home on the streets than in the ivory tower.

Zinn's message of hope is unflinching, and he is busier than ever. He has written a play, "Marx in Soho," is producing a *People's History of the United States* television series, and his new book, *Original Zinn*, will be released in July. He seems to have stashed De Leon's fountain of youth in his back pocket. Though we are seated at a small table drinking coffee, occasionally he still moves his large hands through the air, as he did in class, underscoring the urgency of his words. And at the end of his most radical sentences, a wry smile lights up his eyes, as if he's imagining the glorious trouble we the people can, and will, make.

SHELLY R. FREDMAN: Since the context of this interview is *Tikkun*, I'd like to start by asking you about Michael Lerner's new book, *The Left Hand of God*. In it, Lerner says that, post 9/11, a paradigm of fear has gripped our culture and been used to manipulate the public into supporting politicians who are more militaristic. How would you characterize the post-9/11 world?

HOWARD ZINN: Michael Lerner is certainly right about how fear has been used since 9/11 to push the public into support of war. "Terrorism" is used the way "communism" was used all through the Cold War, the result being the deaths of millions and a nuclear arms race which wasted trillions of dollars that could have been used to create a truly good society for all.

SF: Lerner also claims that the parts of our cultural heritage that embody elements of hope are dismissed as naïve, with little to teach us. You must have had your own bouts with critics who see your vision as naïve. How do you address them?

HZ: It's true that any talk of hope is dismissed as naïve, but that's because we tend to look at the surface of things at any given time. And the surface almost always looks grim. The charge of naïveté also comes from a loss of historical perspective. History shows that what is considered naïve in one decade becomes reality in another.

How much hope was there for black people in the South in the fifties? At the start of the Vietnam War, anyone who thought the monster war machine could be stopped seemed naïve. When I was in South Africa in 1982, and apartheid was fully entrenched, it seemed naïve to think that it would be dissolved and even more naïve to think that Mandela would become president. But in all those cases, anyone looking under the surface would have seen currents of potential change bubbling and growing.

SF: Has the Left responded adequately to the kind of fascism we see coming from Bush's people? Street protests seem to be ineffective; it's sometimes disheartening.

HZ: The responses are never adequate, until they build and build and something changes. People very often think that there must be some magical tactic, beyond the traditional ones—protests, demonstrations, vigils, civil disobedience—but there is no magical panacea, only persistence in continuing and escalating the usual tactics of protest and resistance. The end of the Vietnam War did not come because the Left suddenly did something new and dramatic, but because all of the actions built up over time.

If you listen to the media, you get no sense of what's happening. I speak to groups of people in different parts of the country. I was in Austin, Texas recently and a thousand people showed up. I believe people are basically decent, they just lack information....



SF: You have been outspoken against the war in Iraq. Despite all the chaos we've heard may ensue, do you still believe we should get out of Iraq now?

HZ: Yes, we should immediately withdraw. There will be chaos ... it is actually there already, and much of the chaos and violence has come about because of our involvement. But that doesn't change the fact that our occupation of Iraq is wrong.

What's more troubling [than a military mistake] is that this is an administration that is impervious to pressure. If you listen to LBJ's tapes, where he discusses the escalation of the war in Vietnam, you can hear that he is torn....

Still, the good news is that more and more of us are becoming aware of Bush's true nature. Less than fifty percent of Americans are for the war, and forty percent are calling for [Bush's] impeachment.

SF: Where do you see the Democrats in all this? What of their role, their responsibility?

HZ: The Democratic Party is pitiful. Not only are they not articulating a spiritual message, as Lerner says, they don't even have a political message. The Democrats are tied to corporate wealth. And they are incompetent when it comes to understanding how to win elections. By the time Kerry ran, the public had actually shifted. Fifty percent were against the war. The Democrats should have been saying they would end the war, and make those dollars available for health-care.

SF: What about the upcoming crop of presidential candidates—Hillary Clinton, for instance?

HZ: Hillary Clinton is so opportunistic. She goes where the wind is blowing. She doesn't say what needs to be said. And Barack Obama is cautious. He's better than Clinton, but I'd suggest Marian Wright Edelman as the Democratic candidate for president. She's the epitome of what we need. A very smart black woman who deals with children, poverty.... She's in the trenches, and she ties it in with militarization. But she doesn't come out of government.

That's another problem—the Democratic Party is a closed circle. It may take a threatening third party to shake things up.

SF: Many people believe that history is a pendulum, and that we are overdue for a

People very often think that there must be some magical tactic beyond the traditional ones—protests, demonstrations, vigils, civil disobedience—but there is no magical panacea, only persistence.

swing to the Left. Lerner, for instance, views American history as an oscillation between the voices of hope and the voices of fear—the fear after the stock market crash in 1929, the hope of the New Deal, the fears of McCarthyism, the hope of the Civil Rights movement and social change movements in the sixties. Is this a compelling view of history?

HZ: Without making it chronological, like a roller coaster, with predictable ups and downs, it's certainly true that in any period there are voices that demand maintenance of the status quo, and other voices demanding change. In other words, it isn't so much a period of hope, then a period of fear, etc. But in every period there are both tendencies, with one or another dominant and the dominant characteristic often leads to a simplified picture of an era.

My differences with Lerner, though, reside in the proportion of attention he pays to spiritual values. These are important, but they're not the critical issue. The issue is how are people living and dying. People are dying in Iraq and our wealth is being squandered on war and the military budget.

SF: Don't you believe the Left needs to address spiritual needs to win? How else can we galvanize the heartland, people taken in by the religious rhetoric of Bush?

HZ: Yes, there are special needs and they need to be addressed. But after the last election there was a kind of hysteria among liberal pundits about a "failure" to deal with the moral issues. There is a hard core for whom religion is key. They are maybe twenty-five percent of the population. It's a mistake to try to appeal to that hard core.

I define the spiritual in emotional terms—to the extent that religion can draw on the Ten Commandments (for example, thou shalt not kill), it is important. And I find the spiritual in the arts, because they nourish the spirit and move people. Artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, for example, and now Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam. We need more of these.

It's not that people are turned off by the Left. The Left hasn't reached out to people with a clear, coherent, and emotional message. The Left often does not know how to talk to other people. *Tikkun* itself appeals to intellectuals.

I've never spoken the language of ivory tower academics. And there are other voices on the Left that speak in understandable language. For instance, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, in which she took menial jobs across the country and wrote about those lives, was a bestseller. There's an emotionalism to her message that makes contact and touches thousands. Michael Moore's movies have been seen by all sorts of people. GI's in Iraq watched his movie. We just have to do more along those lines.

SF: Many on the Left seem to identify religion with the fundamentalist versions of it we see in the worst moments of human history. Do you see any value in religious ideas and traditions? If I can get personal: do you identify at all as a Jew, with the Jewish story? Is there anything in it that's meaningful to you? Are there any thoughts of the world beyond this one—where, for example, you can sit with Marx in Soho and eat Deli Haus blintzes together?

HZ: If I was promised that we could sit with Marx in some great Deli Haus in the hereafter, I might believe in it! Sure I find inspiration in Jewish stories of hope, also in the Christian pacifism of the Berrigans, also in Taoism and Buddhism. I identify as a Jew, but not on religious grounds. Yes, I believe, as Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons which reason cannot know." There are limits to reason. There is mystery, there is passion, there is something spiritual in the arts—but it is not connected to Judaism or any other religion.

For those who find a special inspiration in Judaism or Christianity or Buddhism or whatever, fine. If that inspiration leads them to work for justice, that is what matters. ■

Shelly R. Fredman recently made her lech lecha from St. Louis to New York City. Her work has appeared in Best Jewish Writing, First Harvest, the Chicago Tribune Magazine, and the Forward.

The Death of the Republican Ideal

BY FRANK BROWNING



FOR TWO WEEKS LAST FALL, Alain Finkielkraut, one of France's most prominent intellectuals, a one-time Maoist firebrand and latter-day analyst of anti-Semitism, sat terrified before his television, as suburbs across the country were set afire. The torchbearers were mostly unemployed young men born of North and West African immigrants. But for Finkielkraut, who had breathed the fire of revolution on the streets of Paris in 1968, they were enemies of France and indeed of civilization itself. Or so he said in an interview in the conservative daily *Le Figaro* and again in *Ha'aretz*.

Three years ago, after a worrisome flurry of desecrations and attacks on synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, Finkielkraut, whose grandparents perished in Auschwitz, warned of a new *Krystallnacht* sweeping France. Most of the perpetrators were young men of North African descent, demographically the same cohort who were roaming the streets of suburban ghettos with torches in 2005. In his eyes, the link was obvious. This was not the straightforward rebellion of the dispossessed one had seen in Watts or Detroit forty years ago, but a full-fledged culture war in which civilization, and Jewish survival, hung in the balance. Finkielkraut meant his *Krystallnacht* statement to be

What distresses Finkielkraut is that unlike his 1968 generation of enragés, who also tossed Molotov cocktails at police squadrons, these rioters showed no sign of wanting to reform the Republic.

provocative, and few French Jews took it as anything more than that, even though there was real reason for concern about the attacks.

During the 2005 riots, Finkielkraut decided to raise the flag of provocation higher when he sat down for coffee with two *Ha'aretz* reporters at the elegant Café Rostand beside the Jardin du Luxembourg. "We prefer to say the 'youths' instead of 'blacks' or 'Arabs,'" Finkielkraut told *Ha'aretz*. "But the truth cannot be sacrificed, no matter how noble the reasons. And, of course, we also must avoid generalizations: this isn't about blacks and Arabs as a whole, but about some blacks and Arabs. And, of course, religion—not as religion, but as an anchor of identity, if you will—plays a part. Religion as it appears on the Internet, on the Arab television stations, serves as an anchor of identity for some of these youths." The rioters, who focused almost all of their rage on their own barren housing complexes, were in Finkielkraut's view the tools of a broader and far more pernicious campaign.

"I have found that they are also sending the youngest people to the front lines of the struggle," he went on. "You've seen this in Israel—they send the youngest ones to the front because it's impossible to put them in jail when they're arrested. But still, here there are no bombings and we're in a different stage: I think it's the stage of the anti-republican pogrom. There are people in France who hate France as a republic."

Theo Klein, the former president of CRIF (the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France), captured in a phrase the essential problem with Finkielkraut's tirade: "This is what happens when you're more interested in concepts than in facts." Following the rigid Cartesian rules of his university training, Finkielkraut begins with a fundamental principle—a war of civilizations—and then constructs his corollary concepts to illustrate his argument. The two key concepts in play are "pogrom" and "republic."

Pogrom by definition implies an organization and a belief system, a coordinated effort to cleanse and eliminate its enemy. No matter that most representations of the rioters in France portrayed a specter of chaos and nihilism, young men devoid of any program or objective, unable to find a target outside their own barren, highrise housing developments. In Finkielkraut's analysis, they are the witless foot soldiers of a war of civilizations:

Why have parts of the Muslim-Arab world declared war on the West? The Republic is the French version of Europe. They, and those who justify them, say that it derives from the colonial breakdown. Okay, but one mustn't forget that the integration of the Arab workers in France during the time of colonial rule was much easier. In other words, this is belated hatred. Retrospective hatred... We are witness to an Islamic radicalization that must be explained in its entirety before we get to the French case, to a culture that, instead of dealing with its problems, searches for an external guilty party. It's easier to find an external guilty party. It's tempting to tell yourself that in France you're neglected, and to say, 'Gimme, gimme.' It hasn't worked like that for anyone. It can't work.

To an American, his critique might sound like just another attack on lazy welfare recipients angry over the paltry size of their handouts. But in the French context, Finkielkraut is sounding a far more worrisome alarm. It is an alarm that cuts to the heart of liberty and citizenship in Republican France, and it takes its origin at the birth of the French Revolution and the subsequent freeing of the Jews by Napoleon.

Until the Revolution of 1789, church and crown were inseparable. During the terror following the Revolution, churches were stripped of their properties, and liberty of belief was declared for all. (It would take a little more than a century for the schools to be separated from the church, a separation that underlay the law passed in 2004 banning students from wearing headscarves or other religious symbols in schools.) French Jews, on the other hand, continued to subsist in their own ghettos, forbidden to own property outside them, to do business, or to hold public office. In 1802, (continued on page 62)



| WHAT'S WITH THE LIBERAL HAWKS? |

The Agony of Defeat

WITH THE PASSING OF THE THIRD anniversary of the invasion of Iraq this past March, it has become clear that America has lost the war. Not only has the invasion failed to achieve its stated goals of defeating terrorism and creating the Arab world's first secular democratic state, America's occupation has plunged Iraq into the modern Middle East's most violent civil war to date. With dozens of bodies being delivered to morgues on a daily basis and the estimated civilian body count over 35,000, the three-year old war in Iraq has already matched one-third of the total number of civilians killed in Lebanon's fifteen-year-long civil war.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration persists in its attempts to whitewash its failures. Even though December's parliamentary elections failed to create a national government, Bush insists that democracy is on the way. Despite the rising death toll, Bush monotonously repeats that an end to the country's sectarian strife remains within reach.

If only things were that simple. The world, however, is a complex place, and even a tightly controlled superpower could not execute its foreign policy endeavors with the same kind of ruthless efficiency that it secured for its domestic hegemony. When it came to the Fertile Crescent, the Bush administration proved to be less savvy than it is at rounding up the goodwill of America's overwhelmed citizens. Between March 2003 and March 2006, every single one of the administration's legislative, judicial, and ideological triumphs at home has been matched by an equally consistent and successive string of failures in Iraq.

It is safe to say that the Tigris-Euphrates river valley has become a graveyard for more than just 35,000 Iraqi civilians. Iraq has become the final resting place of the Bush administration's credibility. The chaos and destruction in Iraq has resulted in calls for Bush to be impeached and in an utterly abysmal approval rating matched only by Nixon's during his second term. Indeed, one might even argue that the Iraqi debacle has signaled the end of the road for the last utopianism of the twentieth century—that of the neo-conservatives—which finally succumbed to the same logic of defeat as communism and fascism.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Years away from withdrawal, we will not be able to engage in a proper post-mortem for decades to come. However, we can begin to analyze how and why Americans have become so hypnotized by the necessity of engaging in this sadistic and ultimately self-destructive imperial adventure. In this special section, Elliot Neaman, Danny Goldberg, and Max Ajl revisit the phenomena that became known during the war as "Liberal Hawks": progressive intellectuals, who, despite their misgivings about the Bush administration, found a reason to support its foreign policy in the War on Terror.

By no means a complete portrait of the phenomenon, this section nevertheless reflects a great deal of the debate about liberal hawks that has taken place at *Tikkun* since the onset of the war. Please feel free to add to this discussion by emailing us at editors@tikkun.org. ■

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Future Imperfect

BY ELLIOT NEAMAN

THE LEFT HAS HISTORICALLY TENDED towards liberal internationalism. In matters of potential conflict, war was always supposed to be a last option. And yet, from the buildup to the Iraq war, through the first year of the occupation, this consensus began to unravel. A small but nevertheless influential number of liberal intellectuals began to find something seductive about Bush's messianic rhetoric about spreading democracy through the use of force. Still moved by the 1960s-era hope for a progressive foreign policy, identifying with their Jewish neoconservative peers (many of whom still had the scent of Trotskyism about them), they broke rank with their comrades, and threw their weight behind the war.

Dubbed "liberal hawks" by the press, many of these individuals had solid progressive credentials—for example, Paul Berman, a one-time anarcho-syndicalist leader of the radical Students for a Democratic Society at Columbia, who wrote regularly for *Dissent*, *The Nation*, *Village Voice*, and the *New Yorker*. Or Tom Friedman, the *New York Times* foreign policy columnist, who was not exactly Noam Chomsky, but not Charles Krauthammer either. Even at the solidly liberal *New Yorker*, editor David Remnick and staff writer George Packer found good reasons to support the Iraq project. The list of renegades who went along for the ride goes on, from Gore Vidal biographer Fred Kaplan



and human rights specialist Michael Ignatieff, to *Slate* columnist and *Vanity Fair* writer Christopher Hitchens, along with many others, including myself.

The initial success of the invasion emboldened these new radicals, whose newfound friendship with neoconservatives seemed to have been vindicated. But after inexplicable missteps by the Coalition Provisional Authority, the welcome overthrow of a bloody dictator turned into a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites, while the Kurds retreated into a guarded autonomy to wait out the storm. After a thousand days of this chaos, many of the chastened liberals now claim that the Iraq dream could have become reality had the Pentagon not disbanded Saddam Hussein's army, made domestic security a top priority, put many more American troops on the ground, sealed the borders to incoming insurgents, and more. No one could expect, they cried, that the Bush Administration would screw up so badly something that was obviously in their self-interest to pull off. This understanding of the events is plausible and explains both our initial enthusiasm and our eventual disillusionment.

But something deeper is at play here. There is still a good chance, though perhaps not better than fifty/fifty, that the outcome in Iraq will eventually produce a stable government and a brokered peace deal between the country's ethnic and religious groups. Control of Iraq's vast oil wealth keeps the stakes high and puts pressure on all sides to come to the table. But whatever happens, the future is not going to look like the neoconservative fantasy of a secular democratic state, and Iraq is certainly not going to be a model for the rest of the Middle East to follow. It is already clear that Iran will come out ahead, with its nuclear ambitions strengthened and its anti-Israeli and anti-American hardliners emboldened. But for many liberal hawks, the result will most likely not be a return to their former, pre-war ideological selves.

The primary lesson of the failure in Iraq may be to teach liberal hawks that it is impossible to impose human rights and democracy on cultures that lack traditions of liberty. But liberal hawks will probably not return to liberal internationalism, because even though American rhetoric about freedom often comes across as suspicious, the real reason for rejecting it is that given all the options, many modern societies still choose fanaticism or fascism over real transformation. This is a sobering thought that should give pause to anyone interested in the age-old hope of peace. ■

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| WHAT'S WITH THE LIBERAL HAWKS? |

George Packer's War

BY DANNY GOLDBERG

GEORGE PACKER IS THE BEST POSTERCHILD that liberal hawks have. He has the imprimatur of the *New Yorker*, which regularly publishes him. Packer's writing is at its best in the chapter of his widely praised book *Assassins at the Gate*, in which he describes in nuanced detail the anguish of Chris Froheiser, whose son Kurt was killed in Iraq in 2004. However, Packer remains in stubborn denial about the depth of the mistakes made in going to war in Iraq and remains in the grip of a sullen hostility to those who opposed it.

Packer criticizes Bush without criticizing the Bush doctrine. The problem with Bush's foreign policy, he thinks, is not the policy itself but the *way* the Bush administration has executed it. Echoing Michael Dukakis's ill-fated Presidential campaign, Packer believes that the problem with Bush's foreign policy is not its ideology but its lack of competence.

For a writer purported to be intellectually rigorous, Packer is remarkably resistant to giving voice to dissenting ideas. There are no summaries of the arguments of the twenty-three Senators and the one hundred and thirty-three House members who voted against authorizing the war. Nor is there any mention of former UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter, who with uncanny accuracy predicted all the woes of the actual war before it happened, nor of the careful but unmistakable opposition from Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor to the first President Bush.

What is the psychology that prevents liberal hawks from logically and fairly discussing, even now, the enormous risks and costs of the war? When the subject is anti-war opinion, Packer's usually nuanced writing is replaced by thuggish smears. Regarding those who supported far less costly interventions in Bosnia and Haiti but opposed the Iraq War, he writes "Perhaps the fact that the United States had strategic interests in the region (oil) and that the issue of Iraq involved unconventional weapons as well as mass murder, made the war more complicated for airy humanitarians." Of course such straw men do not exist in real life, but only in the desperate defensive imagination of those who cannot bear to admit that they were wrong.

Similarly, Packer writes that Eli Pariser of Moveon.org "seemed to exist so that the rest of the country couldn't dismiss the antiwar movement as a fringe phenomenon of graying pacifists..." The word "graying" is not usually a pejorative in describing foreign policy thinkers. The word "pacifist," although associated with an intellectual tradition that deserves more than a cartoon-like reference is not, in fact, an apt description of millions of middle aged and older people who opposed the Iraq War but who supported other wars. The obvious examples are those millions who opposed the Iraq War but supported the invasion of Afghanistan.

Packer appears certain that only a select group of insiders are worthy of inclusion in foreign policy discussions. In an Op-Ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times* written to coincide with the publication of *Assassins at the Gate*, he said that "In the winter of 2003,

what you thought about the war mattered less to me than how you thought about it.... In those tense months, the mark of second-rate minds was absolute certainty one way or the other."

What you thought about the war mattered less than how you thought about it. Those who predicted with painful accuracy the perils of the war were presumably "second rate" intellectually compared to those like Packer, who writes without irony that "democratic idealism" was a plausible motive of the likes of Dick Cheney. ■

Danny Goldberg is the former copublisher of Tikkun, the author of the book How the Left Lost Teen Spirit, and a contributor to the anthology Proud to Be Liberal.

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Taking Flight

BY MAX AJL

WRITING ABOUT POST-COLD WAR American foreign policy, liberal interventionist David Rieff states that "most of the interventions in the 1990s," particularly those in Haiti, Kosovo, Somalia, and Bosnia, "were undertaken under the banner of preventing human rights abuses or righting humanitarian wrongs." The analysis is accurate, and also applies to interventions of the new millennium, as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, carried out under the veneer of moral messianism, have reminded us.

However, it was only during NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo that this banner was fully unfurled—not primarily by the State Department, but chiefly by liberal intellectuals seeking to direct American military power toward halting the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Fragments of the Left that until then had been rigidly opposed to American militarism underwent a radical transmutation into fierce interventionists. No longer was the abattoir of Indochina to be the touchstone of American liberalism; instead, these "Bosnian-generation liberal intellectuals," as George Packer called them, having seen the horrific effects of American inaction in Bosnia were drawn "to use American military power to serve goals like human rights and democracy."

Liberals advocating for the use of force inscribed a new message in the ideological record: America was willing to use its military in the service of humanitarianism. What's more, this militancy was cast as the necessary fulfillment of the most profound of moral obligations: that when people are being murdered, the murderers must be stopped. One can understand why so many liberals found this concept deeply seductive. Through a wholesale reorientation of American foreign policy—from capitalist mercenary to moral conservator—the willingness to marry force to humanitarianism offered the possibility of finally transforming the state according to the highest ideals of democracy and multiculturalism.

Thus, Thomas Friedman wrote that a "sustained bombardment could achieve" America's "basic objectives," among them "the return of Kosovo Albanians to their



homes, with self-rule," thereby offering legitimate "military resistance to Serbian racism and aggression," as Christopher Hitchens advocated. When NATO's bombing campaign failed to dislodge the Serbian military and caused a massive refugee crisis for the province's Albanian population, Friedman advocated a savage increase of the bombing, dictating that "it should be lights out in Belgrade."

Despite the disastrous results of NATO's bombing campaign, liberal hawks continued to maintain a posture of intentional ignorance, invoking quasi-theological mantras attesting to the fact that "the NATO allies were well-intentioned," as they always are, and that "they clearly did not anticipate... President... Milosevic's mendacity and ability to drive out thousands of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo," to quote Friedman. Problematically, facts intrude on doctrine: NATO did foresee this happening and was quite forthright about it. Then-Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark claimed that the ethnic cleansing that undeniably accelerated under the NATO barrage was "entirely predictable." Nevertheless, just-war theorist Michael Walzer, while agreeing with Clark that ethnic cleansing was "partly [the] consequence" of the air campaign, still lauded the not-so-efficient air assault as ultimately just. Clearly, such sentiments are not far removed from Donald Rumsfeld's panegyric five years later to the ruin of Iraq: "the carnage was horrendous, and it was worth it."

The question is why this ruin had to happen at all. Perhaps the only answer is that it is nothing new for powerful states to set off fireworks as an attempt to obscure the realities of imperial aggression, and for subservient intellectuals to mouth constructions that ideologically legitimate state violence. These may come enveloped in a rhetoric of humanitarianism, but the truth lies within, recognized even by exponents such as Rieff, who noted after the war that "you send your F-15 to help the Kosovars and what it does is it blows up a bunch of children in a hospital. That's what war is." Indeed.

Max Ajl is a freelance writer and independent scholar working out of Brooklyn, NY. His research and writing interests include American foreign policy and political culture, Israeli foreign policy, and Latin American politics.

Spiritual Activism

How to Become Truly Alive?

By Fred Branfman



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRULY ALIVE? About twenty years ago, I discovered the answer to this question through an intense experience that released enormous reservoirs of energy and aliveness that I had previously unconsciously wasted on repressing my pain about my mortality. In the years that followed, I discovered that I was not alone, that there is no more important (but less discussed) body of evidence on how to live than the accounts of people with terminal illnesses and their loved ones; accident, suicide attempt, war, and crime survivors; and many others whose lives have been transformed to new levels of love and aliveness by facing the pain of death. Unconscious death anxiety cripples our lives. Facing it consciously can liberate us.

Many of the founders and most respected adepts of religion began their spiritual searches after facing great pain about their eventual death. And existential thinkers like Robert Firestone,

IGNATZ DESIGN

Otto Rank, Ernest Becker, Irvin Yalom, and Daniel Liechty have explained why and how we can find life in death.

Of all those who have inspired and instructed me, however, no one has taught me more than an anonymous New York City yarn salesman who never wrote a book, appeared on TV, or gave a lecture but, on one heroic weekend, transformed my life forever.

A Phone Call

AUGUST, 1986. AN EXCITING TIME. I was the research director at a think tank chaired by the leading contender for president, Senator Gary Hart, working on what was to be the main plank of his platform, experiencing the exhilaration of helping to shape the national economic policy debate.

Suddenly, a phone call. A rush to the airport. A plane flight to Fort Lauderdale. A taxi ride. A large, red building. Rushing through corridors, to a nondescript room. A hospital room. A bed. In it a shrunken, skeletal old man lying on his back. Dying.

My father.

My father beckoned
to me again. I bent
over. "If you love me,
put me out!"

My father, Ivan Brantman. In his time a kind, handsome, mustached, charming character, one of the top yarn salesmen in one of the toughest jungles of the world—the New York garment center—where we couldn't go ten feet without hearing someone yell "Hey, Brant!"—wanting a word from this Runyonesque figure who could charm, bedazzle, and get a man laughing in less time than it took me to have a thought. My father. Dying now from lung disease, emphysema, and heart disease. The proximate cause was the 1.2 million cigarettes I'd calculated he'd smoked in his lifetime. The real cause was whatever had made him smoke, gamble, keep it all inside, and remain a loving but somewhat distant presence to his sons.

What occurred when I entered that room was thus one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. My father, that stranger, suddenly sat up in his bed and smiled at me with a look of the most pure, intense, and unconditional love that I have ever seen, before or since. It lasted no more than ten or fifteen seconds. But it transformed my life. The room was filled with light and suddenly, for the first time, I understood that word I had heard so often and seen so little.

My father had decided that though his body had periodically to be drained of fluids in order for him to remain alive, he would endure the painful procedure at least until my brother Yaakov, a Hassidic Jew, arrived from Jerusalem on Sunday morning. That Friday night my father had two such incredibly painful drainings, which left his entire body spasming. On Saturday morning, around eleven, he motioned towards me. I leaned over, pulled aside his oxygen mask, stuck my ear near his mouth. "When Yaakov comes, put me out." In shock, I asked him to repeat himself. There was no doubt in his voice: "When Yaakov comes, put me out."

I looked so stricken that my family immediately asked what he had said. I motioned for them to go out into the hallway. After I repeated his words the six of us spontaneously grabbed each other and began wailing at the top of our lungs. The Word had been heard, the veil pierced, for the first time. My father was calling the shots, and he had now clearly called the final one. This was no nightmare, no rehearsal. He had decided to die. He *was* going to die. For real.

When the doctor showed up just a short while later, wearing golf pants, I told him of my father's request. Clearly anxious to leave as soon as possible, he curtly informed us that "putting my father out" was against state law and out of the question.

We stayed up all night Saturday. Sunday dawned. A sudden bustle. Yaakov had arrived! Magically, my father again lifted himself up, and gazed at him with the same look of unconditional love that he had conferred upon the rest of us. "He's a *tzaddik*!" Yaakov whispered, referring to the twelve hidden righteous ones upon whom the existence of the world rests. It was a remarkable statement, symbolizing how my father had been transformed and was transforming us in his dying. And, at that moment, it was easy to believe.

Shortly after we reentered the room, my father beckoned to me. I leaned over. "Now put me out!" came the whisper. The room stood still. I went into shock. "I can't, Dad," I heard myself saying. "The doctor says it would be murder." I held my arms out helplessly. I told my family what he had said, they repeated what the doctor had said. We all circled the bed, crying, weeping, saying over and over again, "We love you, we love you, we love you!" My father beckoned to me again. I bent over. "If you love me, put me out!" I gestured helplessly again.

I did not realize those would be the last words he would ever utter.

The next minutes were the most extraordinary of my life. I found myself moving closer, until I was less than a foot away, directly facing my father's great, mustached face, utterly absorbed as slowly, ever so slowly, it passed from life to death. At first he breathed normally. Slowly, he began breathing more and more laboriously. Ten, fifteen, thirty minutes, it seemed like a lifetime until, suddenly, a tongue protruded. A face turned purple. Eyes went blank.

Another seventy-five-year old man dead, in another hospital room in southern Florida.

My father.

Death with Dignity

THIS EXPERIENCE, NOT SURPRISINGLY, made me an advocate for legislation allowing death with dignity. I was later to interview euthanasia opponents like Dr. Herbert Hendin, who claimed it had been abused and that medications today are so powerful that no one need experience pain. I might have been convinced had I not experienced the anguish of having to deny my father his last, most dignified, request.

I can only hope the "culture of life" advocates who fight death with dignity so vigorously can descend from the heights of their religious imagination to the real-life reality of what it would mean for them or their loved ones to be in a similar situation to my father.

Facing Death

THIS EXPERIENCE'S DEEPEST IMPACT UPON ME, however, concerned how I was to live my life from that moment on, not what would occur at the end.

My attitude toward politics changed profoundly. I was struck both by how seriously I had taken my work on Hart's presidential platform before, and how irrelevant it had become while my father was dying. My political work had been the focus of my life since I had discovered and sought to stop the secret U.S. bombing of Indochina in 1969. But my father's death led me to quit full-time politics in 1990 and embark upon a spiritual and psychological journey that continues today. While I did not leave politics entirely, I came to see it as the small portion of life that it is.

I was later to recognize in this experience Joseph Campbell's description of an epiphany: an event so powerful that it transcends our previous understandings of good, evil, or any other categories, and connects us to the primal powers of life, death, and the universe.

As my father lay dying those two days, I experienced levels of feeling that I never knew existed, as wave after wave of emotion lifted me up to the most exalted heights and crashed me down onto the rocks, minute by minute, over and over again.

In that forty-eight-hour period, I experienced not only the greatest love but also the greatest anguish of my life. To suddenly come to love him so much, and to then lose him so suddenly. My family's pain, the horror of his physical suffering. And, above all, the horror of what occurred at the end.

And something else besides, something that only fully hit me in the days and weeks to follow: *the same thing was going to happen to me!* No denial of my death now. I had been unable to stop my father's death. I could do nothing to prevent my own. I faced the loss of this life for all eternity.

Truly Alive

REALIZING THAT I, TOO, would die led to many insights, but this above all: I had not been happy in that hospital room. But I had been truly alive, more alive than I had ever been before. And what I wanted most was to continue to be as truly alive as possible between now and my own end.

Like every adult, I had known intellectually that I would die. After witnessing my father's death, however, I realized I had been living emotionally as if I would not. Like the Buddha when a prince, I never thought about death. Without realizing even a fraction of what the words meant at the time, I wrote in a journal: "I have been living as if I will never die. This is a lie. And to live a lie is not really to live at all."

It was only later, studying Dr. Robert Firestone's work, that I realized the deeper truth of these words. The more we truly love life, the more pain we feel at the prospect of losing it. Seeking to avoid that pain, we unconsciously withdraw feeling from much of our lives, particularly our relationships, our willingness to take chances, and our potential for deep feeling. We settle into routine, unconsciously turning to addictive behaviors—work, entertainment, the Internet, small talk—to avoid the pain of being truly alive. Our choice is stark: more life, more pain; less pain, less life.

I realized that as much satisfaction as I had derived from my work, I had been living a far greater horror than my eventual death. I had been wasting much of the short life I had been granted by unconsciously spending my energy repressing my pain about my death.

This psychological realization was also political. Imagine if a significant portion of the seventy-seven-million-strong U.S. baby-boomer generation were to use their final years to be more truly alive, and in doing so come to value the domain of spirit over the material and to feel greater concern for future generations. That experience alone could transform planetary politics—at least enough to halt our slow species-suicide from global warming, biodiversity loss, water aquifer pollution, ocean pollution, and chemical contamination. It could also reduce violence, as we would no longer feel so threatened by others' ways of life.

Whether the human species is facing the end of its world, however, one thing is sure: I am facing the end of mine. I fervently hope my consciousness survives my death. But even if it does, I will lose what I most love about *this* life—my love for my wife, Zsuzsa, and others close to me, and the many other experiences I most treasure.

This has led to my own personal credo, one that arises directly from my experience in my father's hospital room twenty years ago: "Alive in the Apocalypse!"

The realization that I face my personal apocalypse causes me intense emotional pain on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis. And, when I can allow myself to fully feel this pain rather than deny it, it is transformed into the kind of rapture, wonder, awe, and love for life that I first touched in my father's hospital room. My hospital experience was involuntary, the gift of my father's dignity, strength, and courage. But I find I can voluntarily have similar experiences on my own, in which I surface my pain about death and see it transformed into the deepest possible appreciation for life.

I do not know if there is life after death. But I know now that I can be truly alive before death, something I had not realized until my father revealed it to me through a courage that has set a standard for my life.

I thank my father for the gift of my physical life. But I honor him even more for something far more precious: the discovery of what it means to be truly alive. It has made the idea of my eventual death far more painful. But it has given me a way to deal with this pain other than the denial I learned as a child. I have learned to feel my pain about death as it arises, and transform it into appreciation and energy for life. I will try to continue doing this until my final breath.

Thanks, Dad. ■

*Fred Branfman is a writer and long-time political activist. This article is based on material available on his website www.trulyalive.org and the forthcoming book *To Be Truly Alive: Facing Death at Any Age*. He can be reached at fredbranfman@aol.com.*

Embodied Spirituality, Now and Then

BY JORGE N. FERRER

EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY¹ HAS BECOME a buzzword in contemporary spiritual circles, yet the concept has not been dealt with in a thorough manner. What do we really mean when we say that spirituality is “embodied”? Is there a distinct understanding of the body underlying this expression? In practice, what distinguishes “embodied” from “disembodied” spirituality? What are the implications for spiritual practice and spiritual goals—and for our approach to spiritual liberation—of taking embodiment seriously?

Before attempting to answer these questions, two caveats are in order. First, though the following reflections seek to capture essential features of an emerging spiritual ethos in the modern West, by no means do they represent the thinking of every spiritual author and teacher who today uses the term “embodied spirituality.” The present account reflects my own standpoint, with its unique perspective and consequent limitations. Second, this essay engages in the task of a “creative interreligious hermeneutics” that not only freely—and admittedly somewhat impetuously—weaves together spiritual threads from different religious traditions, but also at times revisions them in light of modern spiritual understandings. Though this procedure is still considered anathema in mainstream academic circles, I am convinced that only through a critical fusion of past and present global spiritual horizons can we begin stitching a trustworthy tapestry of contemporary embodied spirituality.

What Is Embodied Spirituality?

THE EXPRESSION “EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY” can rightfully be seen as redundant and perhaps even hollow. After all, is not all human spirituality “embodied” insofar as it necessarily transpires in the bodies of men and women? Proponents of embodied spiritual practice, however, tell us that important trends of past and present spiritualities are “disembodied.” But what does “disembodied” mean in this context?

In light of our spiritual history, I suggest that “disembodied” does not denote that the body and its primary energies were ignored in religious practice—they definitely were

not—but rather that they were not considered legitimate or reliable sources of spiritual insight in their own right. In other words, body and instinct have not generally been regarded as capable of collaborating as equals with soul, mind, and consciousness in the attainment of spiritual liberation. Many religious traditions believed that the body and the primary world (and aspects of the heart, such as certain passions) were actually a hindrance to spiritual flourishing—a view that often led to the repression, regulation, or transformation of these worlds in the service of the “higher” goals of a spiritualized consciousness. This is why disembodied spirituality often crystallized in a “heart-chakra-up” spiritual life that was based preeminently in the mental and/or emotional access to transcendent consciousness and that tended to overlook spiritual sources immanent in the body, nature, and matter.

Embodied spirituality, in contrast, views all human dimensions—body, vital world, heart, mind, and consciousness—as equal partners in bringing the self, community, and the world into a fuller alignment with the Mystery out of which everything arises. With this approach, the engagement of the body and its vital/primary energies are crucial for not only a thorough spiritual transformation, but also the creative exploration of expanded forms of spiritual freedom. The consecration of the whole person leads naturally to the cultivation of a “full-chakra” spirituality that seeks to make all human attributes permeable to the presence of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies. This does not mean that embodied spirituality ignores the need to emancipate body and instinct from possible alienating tendencies; rather, it means that *all* human dimensions—not just somatic and primary ones—are recognized to be not only possibly alienated, but equally capable of sharing freely in the unfolding life of the Mystery here on earth.

The contrast between *sublimation* and *integration* can help to clarify this distinction. In sublimation, the energy of one human dimension is used to amplify, expand, or transform the faculties of another dimension. This is the case, for example, when a celibate monk sublimates sexual desire to increase the devotional love of the heart, or when a tantric practitioner uses sexual energies as fuel to catapult consciousness into disembodied or even trans-human states of being. In contrast, the integration of two human dimensions entails a mutual transformation of their essential energies. For example, the integration of consciousness and the vital world makes the former more embodied, vitalized, and even eroticized, and grants the latter an intelligent evolutionary direction beyond its biologically driven instincts. Sublimation is a mark of disembodied spirituality, and integration is a goal of embodied spirituality. This is not to say, of course, that sublimation has no place in embodied spiritual practice. The sublimation of certain energies may be necessary—even crucial—at specific junctures or for certain individual dispositions. To turn sublimation into a permanent goal, however, is a fast lane to disembodied spirituality.

A more subtle type of disembodied orientation sees spiritual life as emerging exclusively from the interaction of our immediate present experience and transcendent sources of consciousness. In this context, spiritual practice is aimed either at accessing such overriding realities or at bringing such spiritual energies down to earth to transfigure human nature and/or the world. The shortcoming of this understanding is that it ignores the existence of a second spiritual pole—immanent spiritual life—that is intimately connected to the vital world and stores the most generative power of Spirit. To overlook this spiritual source leads practitioners—even those concerned with bodily transformation—to neglect the significance of the vital world for a creative spirituality, as well as to seek to transcend or sublimate their sexual energies. A *fully* embodied spirituality emerges from the creative interplay of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies in individuals who embrace the fullness of human experience while remaining firmly grounded in body and earth.

To be sure, religious attitudes toward the human body have been profoundly ambivalent, with the body being regarded as a source of bondage and defilement on the one hand, and as the locus of spiritual revelation and divinization on the other. Our religious history houses tendencies that fall along a continuum of disembodied to embod-

ied goals and practices. Examples of disembodied trends include the asceticism of Brahmanism, Jainism, monastic Christianity, early Taoism, and early Sufism. Many Hindu schools view the body as unreal (*mithya*) and the world as illusion (*maya*). Early Buddhist accounts describe the body as a repulsive source of suffering, nirvana as extinction of bodily senses and desires, and “final nirvana” (*parinirvana*) as attainable only after death. Christianity often viewed the flesh as the source of evil and the resurrected body as asexual. The Safed Kabbalists were obsessed with the sinfulness of masturbation and nocturnal emissions.

Likewise, examples of embodied trends include the Zoroastrian view of the body as part of human ultimate nature; the biblical account of the human being as made in the “image of God” (*Genesis*); the tantric affirmation of the non-duality of sensual desire and awakening; the early Christian emphasis on incarnation (“the Word became flesh”); the goal of “attaining Buddhahood in this very body” (*sokushin jobutsu*) of Shingon Buddhism; the Jewish religious enjoyment of all bodily needs and appetites in the sabbath; the radical embrace of sensuality in the Sufi poetry of Rumi or Hafez; and the Judeo-Christian advocacy for social engagement and justice in the spiritual transformation of the world, among many others.

Many apparently embodied religious orientations, however, conceal highly ambivalent views toward sensuality and the physical body. For example, Taoism did not generally value the physical body in itself, but as a dwelling place for the gods. Also, whereas the Jewish sabbath is a day for the consecration of sexual intercourse between husband and wife, many traditional teachings (e.g., the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*) prescribed the need to engage in such union without pleasure or passion, as it was supposedly carried out in the orchard before the first sin. What is more, much of the Vajrayana Buddhist appreciation of the “gross” physical body as a facilitator of enlightenment lay in considering it the foundation of a more real, nonphysical “astral” or “rainbow” body. Though certain religious schools generated spiritual goals more inclusive of embodiment, a fully embodied spirituality that engages all human attributes in co-creative interaction with both immanent and transcendent spiritual sources was, and continues to be, an extremely rare pearl.

An examination of all the variables behind the tendency toward disembodied spirituality goes beyond the scope of this essay, but I would like to mention at least one possible underlying reason: The inhibition of the primary dimensions of the person may have been necessary at certain historical junctures to allow the emergence and maturation of the values of the human heart and consciousness. Specifically, this inhibition may have been essential to avoid the reabsorption of a still relatively weak emerging self-consciousness into the stronger presence that a more instinctively driven energy once had in human collectivities. In the context of religious praxis, this may be connected to the widespread consideration of certain human qualities as being spiritually more “correct” or wholesome than others, for instance: equanimity over intense passions, transcendence over sensuous embodiment, chastity or strictly regulated sexual practice over open-ended sensual exploration, and so forth. What may characterize our present moment, however, is the possibility of reconnecting all these human potentials in an integrated way. In other words, having developed self-reflective consciousness and the subtle dimensions of the heart, it may be the moment to reappropriate and integrate the more primary and instinctive dimensions of human nature into a fully embodied spiritual life.

Many apparently embodied religious orientations conceal highly ambivalent views toward sensuality and the physical body.

The Living Body

EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY REGARDS THE BODY as subject, as the home of the complete human being, as a source of spiritual insight, as a microcosm of the universe and the Mystery, and as pivotal for enduring spiritual transformation.

Body as subject: To see the body as subject means to approach it as a living world,

with all its interiority and depth, needs and desires, lights and shadows, wisdom and obscurities. Bodily joys and sorrows, tensions and relaxations, longings and repulsions are some of the means through which the body can speak to us. By any measure, the body is not an “it” to be objectified and used for the goals or even spiritual ecstasies of the conscious mind, but a “thou,” an intimate partner with whom the other human dimensions can collaborate in the pursuit of ever-increasing forms of liberating wisdom.

Body as the home of the complete human being: In this physical reality in which we live, the body is a locus of freedom that allows us to walk our own unique path, both literally and symbolically. Once we fully overcome the dualism between matter and Spirit, the body can no longer be seen as a “prison of the soul” or even as a “temple of Spirit.” The mystery of incarnation never alluded to the “entrance” of Spirit into the body, but rather to its “becoming” flesh. Would it then perhaps be more accurate to appreciate our bodies as a *transmutation* of Spirit into fleshy form, at least during our physical existence? Through the ongoing incarnation of innumerable beings, life may aim at the ultimate union of humanity and divinity *in the body*.

Body as source of spiritual insight: The body is a divine revelation that can offer spiritual understanding, discrimination, and wisdom. Bodily sensations, for example, are foundational stepping-stones in the embodied transformation of Spirit’s creative energies through each human life. As the Buddha said, “Everything that arises in the mind starts flowing with a sensation in the body.” Listening deeply to the body we realize that physical sensations and impulses can also be genuine sources of spiritual insight. In certain Zen schools, for example, bodily actions constitute crucial tests of spiritual realization and are seen as the ultimate verification of sudden illumination (*satori*). Being physical itself, the body can reveal the ultimate meaning of incarnated life. The body’s answer to this mystery is not given in the form of any grand metaphysical vision, but gracefully granted through states of being that render life naturally meaningful and profound. The meaning of life is not something to be discerned intellectually by the mind, but something to be felt in the depths of the flesh.

Body as microcosm of the universe and the Mystery: Virtually all spiritual traditions hold that there is a deep resonance among the human being, the cosmos, and the Mystery. This view is captured in the esoteric dictum “as above so below”; the Platonic, Taoist, Islamic, Kabbalistic, and tantric understanding of “the person as microcosm of the macrocosm”; and the biblical view of the human being made “in the image of God” (*imago Dei*). All these perceptions portray the human body as mirroring and containing the innermost structure of both the entire universe and the ultimate creative principle. This structural correspondence between the human body and the Mystery shaped mystical practices in which bodily rituals and actions were thought to affect the very nature and inner dynamics of the Divine. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the body is to be valued *only* because it represents or can affect “larger” or “higher” realities. This view subtly retains the fundamental dualism between body and Spirit. Embodied spirituality recognizes the human body as a pinnacle of Spirit’s creative manifestation and, consequently, as overflowing with intrinsic spiritual meaning.

Body as essential for an enduring spiritual transformation: The body is a filter through which human beings can purify polluted energetic tendencies, both biographical and collectively inherited. Because the body is denser in nature than the emotional, mental, and conscious worlds, changes taking place in it are more lasting and permanent. An enduring psychospiritual transformation needs to be grounded in somatic transfiguration. The integrative transformation of the somatic/energetic worlds of a person effectively short-circuits the tendency of past energetic habits to return, thus creating a solid foundation for a thorough and permanent spiritual transformation.

Features of Embodied Spirituality

IN LIGHT OF THIS EXPANDED UNDERSTANDING of the human body, I now offer a consideration of ten features of embodied spirituality:

1. A tendency toward integration: Embodied spirituality is integrative insofar as it seeks to foster the harmonious participation of all human attributes in the spiritual path without tensions or dissociations. Despite his downplaying the spiritual import of sexuality and the vital world, Sri Aurobindo was correct when he said that a liberation of consciousness *in* consciousness should not be confused with an integral transformation that entails the spiritual alignment of all human dimensions.

This recognition suggests the need to expand the traditional Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisattva* vow—i.e., to renounce complete liberation until all sentient beings attain delivery—to encompass an “integral *bodhisattva* vow” in which the conscious mind renounces full liberation until the body and the primary world can be free as well. Since most individuals understand the conscious mind as the seat of their sense of identity, an exclusive liberation of consciousness can be deceptive because it allows us to believe that we are fully free when, in fact, essential dimensions of ourselves are underdeveloped or alienated. Embracing an “integral *bodhisattva* vow” is not returning to the individualistic spiritual aspirations of early Buddhism because it entails a commitment to the integral liberation of all sentient beings, not only of their conscious minds or conventional sense of identity.

2. Realization through the body: Embodied spirituality explores the development of *kaya sadhanas* (“realization through the body”) appropriate for our contemporary world. With the notable exception of certain tantric techniques, traditional forms of meditation are practiced individually and without bodily interaction with others. Modern embodied spirituality rescues the spiritual significance not only of the body but also of physical contact. For example, the practice of contemplative physical contact in a context of relational mindfulness and spiritual aspiration can have a profound transformative power.

In order to foster a genuine embodied practice, it is essential to make contact with the body, discern its current state and needs, and then create spaces for the body to engender its own practices and capabilities—devise its own yoga, so to speak. When the body becomes permeable to both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies, it can find its own rhythms, habits, postures, movements, and charismatic rituals. Some ancient Indian texts state that yoga postures (*asanas*) first emerged spontaneously from within the body guided by the free flow of its vital energy (*prana*).

3. Awakening of the Body: The permeability of the body to immanent and transcendent spiritual energies leads to its gradual awakening. In contrast to meditation techniques that focus on the mindfulness of the body, this awakening can be more accurately articulated in terms of *bodyfulness*. In bodyfulness, the psychosomatic organism becomes calmly alert without the intentionality of the conscious mind. A possible further horizon of bodyfulness was described by the Mother, the spiritual consort of Sri Aurobindo, in terms of the conscious awakening of the very cells of the organism.

4. Re-sacralization of sexuality and sensuous pleasure: Sexuality and the vital world are the first “soils” for the organization and creative development of immanent Spirit in human reality. That is why it is so important that sexuality be lived as a sacred terrain free from fears, conflicts, or artificial impositions dictated by our minds, cultures, or spiritual ideologies. When the vital world is reconnected to immanent spiritual life, the primary drives can spontaneously collaborate in our psychospiritual unfolding without needing to be sublimated or transcended.

Because of its captivating effect on human consciousness and the ego, sensuous pleasure has been viewed with suspicion—or even demonized as inherently sinful—by most religious traditions. In a context of embodied spiritual aspiration, however, it becomes fundamental to rescue, in a non-narcissistic manner, the dignity and spiritual significance of physical pleasure. In the same way that pain “contracts” the body, pleasure “relaxes” it, making it more porous to the presence and flow of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies. In this light, the formidable (continued on page 63)

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“Swiftboating” Bush’s Bishops

BY ANDREW J. WEAVER

IN NOVEMBER OF 2005, ninety-six United Methodist bishops from every region of the United States as well as Europe, Africa, and Asia, released a joint statement of conscience entitled, “*A Call to Repentance and Peace with Justice*” [see Tikkun, March/April 2006 for an excerpt]. The bishops are the elected officials who constitute the consecrated leadership of the 11 million member United Methodist Church (UMC), which includes President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

In the statement, the bishops confess, “In the face of the United States Administration’s rush toward military action based on misleading information, too many of us were silent.” They commit themselves to pray for the end of war in general and “the unjust and immoral invasion and occupation of Iraq” specifically, to reclaim their prophetic authority to speak out against war and injustice, and to engage in advocacy and peacemaking because it is integral to Christian discipleship. The diversity in age, gender, location, and theological bent of the signers reflects a wide consensus.

The statement of conscience was widely reported in the media, but when Fox News contacted the White House for a comment, they got no response. Think about it—what exactly could Karl Rove say when the leaders of the president’s own church stated *en masse* that his war and the occupation of Iraq are immoral? Nothing! Rove has left his right-wing “think tank” troops to smear them, “swiftboat” style.

The primary instigator of the trashing is a neo-conservative Washington “think tank” which calls itself the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD). In an article published in the *Weekly Standard*, the IRD follows the neo-conservative party line, accusing the bishops of being out-of-touch “liberal elites” who promote “anti-Americanism” and harbor “hostility to capitalism.”

In a Christmas fundraising letter, the IRD claimed that the bishops’ statement of conscience is “insulting” to the “brave young men and women” who are serving in Iraq. The IRD also scoffs at the bishops’ call for peace, justice, and reconciliation in Iraq as sounding “like warmed-over 1960s utopianism” and proceeds to mock them as “flower children and chronic demonstrators who never really grew up and faced the real, sinful world.” Challenging the patriotism of the bishops with rhetoric that would “warm the heart” of Joseph Goebbels, the IRD declares that, “No doubt, if transported back in history, these bishops likewise would have impartially ‘lamented’ the ‘continued warfare’ between Allied and German forces in Normandy in 1944, while blaming the plight of millions of victims of fascist aggression on the United States.” This malicious accusation comes despite the fact that among the bishops are decorated World War II combat veterans.

Mainline Protestant denominations, such as the UMC and the National Council of Churches (NCC), as well as other progressive leaders such as Rabbi Michael Lerner of *Tikkun* and Rev. Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*, have been the targets (continued on page 65)

Israel|Palestine



From Jabotinsky to Kadima

By Eran Kaplan

WHEN MENACHEM BEGIN GUIDED the Likud Party to victory in 1977, the Labor Party's leadership feared that Israel would find itself in a perpetual state of war. Much to everyone's surprise, the Begin government's first major undertaking was a peace agreement with Egypt. As contradictory as this gesture was to everything that the Israeli Right had historically stood for, Begin ultimately remained true to form by launching two initiatives that had a more profound impact on Israeli society: a radical shift from a state-controlled economy to an unregulated free market, and a massive expansion of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. These two programs captured the basic principles that

Artists put the finishing details on a large mural depicting two of the main contenders of the Israeli elections, Ehud Olmert of Kadima, right, holding a picture of Ariel Sharon, and Amir Peretz of Labor, left.

the Zionist Right has stood for since the 1920s: capitalism and territorial maximalism. These commitments would direct Israeli state policy for the next thirty-five years.

However, with the beginning of construction on the Separation Wall in 2004, Israeli politics witnessed the emergence of a new paradigm, which portends as much change as that which was brought about by the 1977 elections: unilaterally determined separation between Israelis and Palestinians. This ideology has redefined the political agenda of the Israeli Right and has led to the formation of Kadima, a new political party made up primarily of former members of the Likud and dedicated to pursuing separation. Although these developments may augur a radical shift in Israeli politics, a closer examination suggests that they are perfectly consistent with the history of Israeli conservatism, and reflect broader developments in Israeli society that parallel similar changes in other developed countries.

Revisionist Versus Labor Zionism

THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT, FOUNDED IN 1925 by the writer, translator, and political ideologue Ze'ev Jabotinsky, became the main right-wing faction within the Zionist organization (its later political incarnations were Herut and the Likud). Militarism and the free-market were its two primary articles of faith. Conversely, the Revisionists believed in an immediate national revolution backed by a strong Jewish military, or as Jabotinsky put it, "For the generation that grows before our eyes and who will be responsible, probably, for the greatest change in our history, the Aleph Bet has a very simple sound: young people learn how to shoot." While the Zionist Left believed in building social institutions and companies that would create the necessary foundation for a vital society, the Revisionists believed in the power of laissez faire economics. According to Jabotinsky, "If it were possible to build the Hebrew majority in Palestine on the basis of 'national funds,' we were all very happy; but it is impossible, and the success of our enterprise depends, as we all know, on private property."

In the pre-State era and in the early years of Israeli independence, the Revisionists, and later Herut, were sizeable but marginal parties. They appealed to young Zionists who were fascinated by Jabotinsky's notion of Jewish power and to middle-class Israelis who rejected Labor's economic vision. However, for nearly sixty years, the Zionist mainstream was controlled by the Labor movement. For a society that faced enormous political and economic challenges, Labor's emphasis on the creation of social support institutions—and later an elaborate welfare state—was highly reassuring. In what seemed like a constant state of struggle, the Right's vision of an individualistic marketplace seemed fantastic, if not dangerous.

In the first two decades after the establishment of the state, Israeli society was highly mobilized and uniform. It was the era of the *tzena* (austerity), when most aspects of every citizen's life were controlled by the government or its satellite institutions (most notably the Histadrut—the federation of labor unions—that was affiliated with the Labor Party). Food and clothing were rationed; housing projects were government-sponsored; education and health were administered by the state. Consumerism was the domain of a select few. And even the country's elite of the time (mainly politicians and generals) could boast tremendous political and social power, but not much wealth.

This was a collectivist society that in the face of perceived existential trials shunned manifestations of individuality. It was a society that the sociologist Uri Ram described as being governed by a "single voice of Israel." And that voice was the voice of Labor Zionism. The Right in those years was relegated to the role of political provocateurs: leading campaigns against reparations agreements with Germany (and against normalizing relations with Germany) and speaking out against government corruption.

Cracks in the Labor Consensus

IN THE 1960s, HOWEVER, ISRAELI SOCIETY underwent important changes that helped pave the way for the rise of the Right in Israeli politics. Beginning in the mid-60s, Israel's government began easing state restrictions on the market and encouraging

more private economic initiatives. But the most dramatic changes took place after the 1967 Six Day War. Israel's decisive victory not only changed the political climate in the Middle East; it also transformed Israel's social character. The war provided Israelis with a sense of invincibility. If 1966 was the year of an economic depression and great fears about the country's future—a famous cartoon from that period depicted a sign at Israel's airport asking the last departing passenger to turn off the lights—the events of June 1967 provided Israelis with unbounded optimism about the future. The war also provided the state with vast new territories (breaking the sense of siege that Israelis shared since the end of the 1948 War) and an occupied population that soon became a cheap work force fueling an expanding Israeli economy. For example, in the years between 1962 and 1972, Israel's GNP grew by an average of 9.7 percent per year.

If the stern collectivism that defined Israel in the 1950s and early '60s kept market forces and new cultural trends and styles from reaching Israel (when the promoter Ya'acov Ori tried in 1964 to book the Beatles for a concert in Israel, he could not get the approval of a special governmental committee, which felt that the group would have a corrupting influence on Israeli youth), once these forces were unleashed, they could not be harnessed. And Israel rapidly transformed into a society that accepts and ultimately celebrates individual expression.

Culturally, this new sensation of liberated individualism witnessed A. B. Yehoshua's and Amos Oz's experiments with new narrative forms that challenged the old authoritative voice of the Zionist novel; the pop group *Ha-Halonot ha-Gevochim* released a Beatles-inspired album that included the sharp antiwar lyrics of Hanoach Levin; and Ya'acov Shabtai, in *Zichron Dvarim*, stretched the limits of modern Hebrew syntax while depicting the disintegration of the Zionist collectivist ethos. But this new sense of individualism was not restricted to a select group of artists. Israeli society as a whole became more and more individualistic. Israelis came to value the benefits of their new economic reality (more and more Israelis bought cars, traveled abroad, and after much government resistance brought televisions into their homes). And they came to realize that there was no longer a single ideological framework that defined the Israeli experience.

In fact, a growing number of Israelis came to view Labor's vision as antiquated, no longer fitting the new economic reality. Also, in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war the Israeli Right (with some important additions of leading Laborites) championed the notion of a "Greater Israel," calling for the annexation of the newly captured territories, even though most Israelis believed that the Occupied Territories would ultimately have to be returned as part of a peace deal. Over time, however, most Israelis came to believe that there was no real urgency to relinquish control over the territories—the benefits were too great, and the population in the territories showed very little resistance. Over time, the Right's vision of a Greater Israel became the de-facto Israeli consensus.

The decline of Labor's almost absolute grip over Israel is powerfully expressed by the dissolution of its cultural homogeneity. If early Israeli society was symbolized by the young Ashkenazi Sabra, more and more groups began to claim their place on the Israeli social and cultural landscape, perhaps none less dramatically than the *Mizrahim* (Jews from Arab and Muslim countries). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new generation of Mizrahim in Israel came to view the Labor movement and its policies as the main culprit for the plight of Mizrahim in Israel. For them, the Labor (in fact the Israeli) establishment marginalized and oppressed Mizrahi Jews and prevented them from fully integrating into Israeli society.

In the years immediately following independence, Mizrahi Jews, who were brought to Israel by the government and who relied on the government for most of their needs, tended to vote for the ruling party—but in the rapidly changing Israel, they sought an alternative. And that alternative was Menachem Begin, the leader of the Israeli Right, who, too, was marginalized by the Labor establishment and who was able to cultivate in the Mizrahi community a shared sense of victimization and a hope for a brighter future.

In the 1960s, a growing number of Israelis came to view Labor's vision as antiquated, no longer fitting the new economic reality.

To the Mizrahim, Begin was not the champion of militarism and territorial expansion; he was rather the symbol of a long-standing opposition to the Labor establishment, and this was his most fundamental appeal to them.

From Collectivism to the Peace Camp

DURING THE FIRST TWO DECADES of its existence, Israel, like many post-colonial states, faced challenges that could have easily destroyed it. And like so many other Western societies after the Second World War, it had to rely on strong state institutions in order to provide its citizenry with their basic needs. Labor's social agenda was rooted in Eastern European Marxism, but it paralleled development in Western countries that also relied heavily on state-run programs in those challenging years. And when the West emerged from these times to the relative prosperity of the 1960s, these collectivist measures came to be regarded as unnecessary burdens. Big government was no longer seen as the solution but rather, as conservatives phrased it, came to be viewed as the problem. The true revolutionary fervor was now with the conservative Right, which championed two major causes: deregulation and privatization of the market, and expanding military might to deter (and bring down) the enemies of capitalism. This was also true in Israel.

Israel's Left became the peace camp, preaching territorial concessions in the name of improving the (moral as well as physical) quality of life in Israel, while the Right became the agent of political change. These changes entailed the massive fortification of the Occupied Territories by settlements, and liberalization of the Israeli economy. The main architect of the new economic policies was Simcha Ehrlich—the head of the Israeli Liberal party (which joined Herut to form Gahal and later the Likud) and a disciple of Milton Friedman—who became Begin's finance minister. Ehrlich instituted a radical program of economic liberalization that dramatically opened up Israeli markets for competition and flooded Israel with foreign consumer goods. Israel, once a bastion of Central and Eastern European culture, soon became vastly Americanized. While the first settlements were built by ideologically motivated national religious activists under Labor governments, under the Likud they became part of a government plan to obliterate the pre-1967 Green Line and to strengthen Israeli control over the territories.

The Crisis of Israeli Conservatism

WITH THE DAWN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM, however, the social conditions that allowed for conservatives to become a hegemonic force were to alter drastically. In the West, it was the anti-globalization movement that exposed the many contradictions of post-Cold War international capitalism, while it was the rise of global terrorism that revealed that the political stability of this order was highly tenuous. In Israel, it was the rise of Palestinian terrorism, and especially the second Intifada, that made it clear to most Israelis that they could no longer hold onto the territories and their inhabitants (either by direct rule or by granting the Palestinians limited autonomous powers) without major consequences.

For Israelis, the second Intifada was accompanied by an economic downturn. The vast economic gaps between the rich and poor that were a product of state economic policies over the course of the past thirty years finally came to the surface. And just as the West began to erect walls to protect it from terrorist threats and undocumented workers, Israelis began to consider separating from the Palestinians. The dream of Greater Israel has come to be the domain of a shrinking ideological group, headed by Bibi Netanyahu—also the greatest champion of privatizing government agencies and services—while the majority of Israelis have come to support the erection of a wall between Israel and majority of the Palestinian territories. And under Sharon, whose symbolic journey to the Temple Mount ignited the second Intifada, Israel began to carry out this program by pulling out of the Gaza Strip and by building the Separation Wall.

When Sharon faced opposition to his disengagement plan from within the ideological core of the Likud, he decided to create a new political entity: Kadima. The notion of disengagement also had many supporters from the ranks of the Labor party, and some

of its leading members decided to join what pundits have described as a centrist party (the name *Kadima* means “forward,” deliberately invoking the memory of early twentieth-century radical movements). But what Kadima offers is not necessarily a third-way solution to the main dilemma that has haunted Israeli politics since 1967: the future of the Occupied Territories. Rather, it is a reflection of the changing social realities in Israel and the overwhelming desire among the Israeli public to disengage from the Palestinians and maintain Israel’s Jewish majority and character.

The idea of separating from the Palestinians realigns the Left-Right dichotomy in Israeli politics. The new Right, now under Ehud Olmert’s leadership, uses fear to ground its desire to disengage, blaming foreigners for Israel’s current economic and social crisis. This new Right wants to resurrect certain elements of Jabotinsky’s Zionist vision: creating an iron wall to protect Israel, though placing this wall well short of Jabotinsky’s Greater Israel boundaries, and behind that wall continuing the policies of the free market.

Now under the leadership of former Histadrut chief Amir Peretz, Labor views the disengagement as an opportunity to define the limits of Israeli sovereignty: to create a sphere where the state can re-engage in social matters and provide the means and institutions to support all those members of Israeli society who did not enjoy the fruits of the economic expansion of the last four decades. Peretz wants to revive some of the collectivist values of the old Labor party to counter trends that created enormous wealth and opportunities for some Israelis, yet at the same time increased social and economic divisions. In the aftermath of the March 2006 elections, it is still evident that the Right, in its new guise, is the hegemonic force in Israeli politics. But the Right’s own evolution might suggest deeper changes in Israeli society that would lead it on a new path towards greater collectivism and social commitment. ■

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The Electronic Intifada

Pushing the Envelope with Ali Abunimah

A TIKKUN INTERVIEW

IF YOU LISTEN TO NPR AND THE BBC as frequently as the editorial staff of *Tikkun* does, in all likelihood you’ve heard the British-accented voice of Ali Abunimah.

The editor and publisher of both the Electronic Intifada (www.electronicintifada.net) and Electronic Iraq (www.electroniciraq.net) since 2001, Abunimah has established himself as one of the single most influential Palestinian intellectuals in North America. Multitasking as both an activist and a social science researcher at the University of Chicago, Abunimah has contributed essays to various noteworthy collections covering Middle Eastern politics—including *Iraq Under Siege* (2000) and *The New Intifada* (2001)—delivered countless lectures on

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and participated in numerous political debates.

In every possible sense of the word, Abunimah is a revolutionary. Even if you don't agree with all of his political opinions, his intelligence, wit, and capacity to engage in serious dialogue with those who consider him their opponent is worthy of the utmost respect. Fresh from having completed his first collection of essays, *One Country* (forthcoming in September from Metropolitan Books), Abunimah spoke with *Tikkun* about his preference for a one-state solution, and why he contends that Israel, through the Occupation, has ironically embraced this concept as well. What transpired was a remarkably spirited and thought-provoking conversation.

TIKKUN: This Spring, *Left Curve* published a widely circulated "state of the movement" article concerning the struggle against the Occupation. Titled "Challenging the New Apartheid: Reflections on Palestine Solidarity," the authors provide an overview of the advances made by Palestinian activists within the North American Left since the start of the second Intifada. One of the piece's main points is that there has never been more sympathy with the Palestinians among domestic progressives than there is now. Do you agree?

ALI ABUNIMAH: To some extent. But I don't think sympathy within the North American Left is what's going to make the crucial difference. Understanding and sympathy across American society—not just within the Left—is important, but it's a paradoxical situation. Palestinians do have a great deal of sympathy, but they keep losing on the ground, so that sympathy is not being translated into political power. Having said that, I don't want to minimize the enormous suffering that Israel is inflicting on Palestinians.

I see Israel as being in retreat and ideologically totally bankrupt. I don't think that Israel in its present form has a long-term future. The entire peace process was structured not to bring peace, not to end the conflict, not to bring justice, but to preserve Israel as a so-called Jewish state with a Jewish majority at whatever price. That price was to be paid by the Palestinians. However, this effort has failed, and now Israel is in a desperate rear-guard effort to save itself physically and ideologically. I don't think it will succeed.

TIKKUN: What's your basis for that claim?

AA: The Protestant state in Northern Ireland collapsed in 1972. It was set up on exactly the same terms as Israel. The British fostered the partition in order to create a fake Protestant majority in part of the country. However, it was resisted from day one. That Protestant state was ruled by and for the Protestant minority without any regard whatsoever for the rights of Irish Catholics, and it collapsed. Since then, Ireland has been moving more and more toward reunification—if not formally, then in practice.

The apartheid state collapsed in South Africa, where it was also a state set up for the minority. Once that state became morally untenable, they tried to use partition. They tried to create fake states—bantustans—in order to make it appear as though whites were the majority. That failed. And now Israel's in a situation where sixty years after it was created, Palestinians are once again the majority and Israel is desperately trying to impose partition by force in order to preserve a gerrymandered entity with a Jewish majority. There's no sign whatsoever that this is going to be accepted by the Palestinians. So if I were an Israeli Zionist, I would be very pessimistic. This doesn't mean we [Palestinians] should be optimistic either. It also doesn't mean that the alternative is a happy ending, because this could just portend more chaos and endless bloodshed. However, in its present form, Israel does not have a future.

TIKKUN: Based on how you've portrayed the present situation between Israelis and Palestinians, what specifically do you see happening?

AA: In a way, it's up to us. I have a book coming out in September that argues forcefully that a single state is really the only viable way out, but that it is by no

means inevitable. Like South Africa, there could be a happy ending to the story. This is not to say that contemporary South Africa is by any means utopia. By “happy ending,” what I mean is a chance for a normal life and a politics based on universal values, which is what you have in South Africa. Granted, South Africa suffers from massive income inequality and high levels of HIV among its population—every social problem that every African country has to deal with—but they have a political system that allows South Africans to deal with these issues through normal channels. So that would be the happy ending.

On a less optimistic note, there could also be a permanent stalemate like that which exists in Northern Ireland, which though by no means ideal is still much better than the current situation in Israel/Palestine. Or there could be a bloodbath and a failed state where the whole thing breaks down into war. I think that we have a say in the outcome because if we start talking about happy endings and start giving people an alternative, then we increase the chances that it will happen. I base my reasoning on the understanding that a lot of the madness and cruelty in Israeli policy is in part based on fear. I’m not saying the Israelis are merely traumatized and have no agency. However, I think that Israel’s leaders know exactly what they’re doing. A lot of ordinary Israelis go along with the current situation because they don’t see an alternative. They’re told that they have to preserve Jewish majority or they will all die. Of course it’s a lie, which is why we have to offer an alternative.

TIKKUN: So your alternative is a one-state solution?

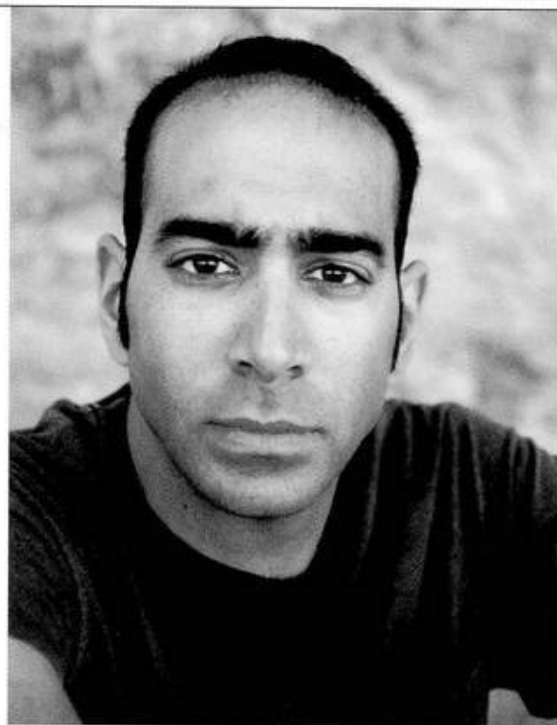
AA: Yes. I don’t have any particular dogmatic view of what that state should look like. There are all sorts of ways it could be organized. In my book, I go into that a little bit, but my discussion is by no means comprehensive. I’m simply trying to start the discussion in order to say that there are all sorts of states in the world that face these kinds of divisions. We just need to start a discussion about it and stop this ridiculous discourse that a nineteenth century-style nation-state where everyone is homogeneous is the solution to the Middle East’s problems, because that is what has been the problem, not the solution.

Zionists believed that they could create such a state in a country that had a majority of people who lay outside the boundaries of the nation that Zionism defined. That’s where the problem started. There was no conflict between Jews and non-Jews in Palestine prior to the Zionist claim of Jewish sovereignty. We need to move beyond that. Unfortunately we’re stuck in a situation where even raising the issue creates panic, when the reality is that the model of partition was never a good idea. Even if partition was at one point the solution, it certainly isn’t now. The solution is equal rights, not trying to draw boundaries between people. That is the most banal and mundane idea in every other context except this one.

TIKKUN: To what extent do Palestinians still accept the idea of partition?

AA: Palestinians accepted it only to please Israel. They said, “Okay, if we accept a Jewish state, and retain only a fraction of our country—the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—our state, will you leave us alone?” Palestinians naively thought that Israel would accept this, but then discovered that Israel didn’t. It’s not about what Israelis said or did not say. It’s what they did.

Israel built massive colonies throughout the West Bank with the stated intent of making a Palestinian state impossible, and they haven’t reversed that. They continue to build new settlements today. So the Israelis have made it clear that they want a



We need to stop the ridiculous discourse that says the solution to the Middle East’s problems is a nineteenth century-style nation state where everyone is homogeneous, because that is what has been the problem.

one-state solution, but they want it to be a Jewish Zionist state in which Palestinians have no rights. So in effect, Israel chose the one-state solution. Israel has given us this reality of a state in which there are two inseparable populations. However, it's really an apartheid state.

Thus, the Palestinian response has to be, "Fine, it's a single state, but it's not going to be an apartheid state; it's going to be a state based on modern universal principles."

For the past several decades, the entire Palestinian leadership signed up for the two-state solution, and they brought a lot of the public with them. Despite that fact, opinion polls have shown consistently that support for a single state varies between a quarter and a third of all residents of the Occupied Territories. It's probably much higher among refugees and people outside of the country, but we don't know that for a fact. Remember that there is no prominent Palestinian leader calling for a single state. If the question were to be placed on the agenda, it would very quickly gain support among a lot of Palestinians.

I also think that the one-state proposal has the potential to be adopted by Israelis. However, we have to stop being fearful of offending Israelis by questioning the sacred cow of a so-called Jewish state, which is clearly untenable. You can't have a Jewish state in a country where the majority of the country is not Jewish. We have to deal with reality, not with wishful thinking. I'm sure that Israelis wish that there was a Jewish majority in Palestine, but the reality is that there isn't.

TIKKUN: How would you counter the charge that no such state is possible under present circumstances because the respective political leaderships of both Israel and Palestine are committed to ideas of the state that are ethnically and religiously exclusive?

AA: These respective leaderships are to a large extent the consequence of an insoluble contradiction. The Zionist parties and the whole notion of disengagement are based on the failure of Zionism: that Zionism intended to take an Arab Muslim country and turn it into a Jewish country. That failed, and now they're trying to salvage what they can, based on the same idea that you need a territory and you need a majority. The Israelis are just trying to reshape the territory, which is the result of the absence of an alternative discourse base on a different kind of values.

There's very little support for a theocratic state among Palestinians, and Hamas has not made theocracy part of its program. I think Hamas is actually very pragmatic. Just look at its rhetoric and statements. Its leaders played by the rules of democratic politics and they've bent over backwards to try to include the defeated parties in their government. (I don't like to say government because it gives the impression there's a state, and there isn't, but you know, "government.")

It's important to remember that it was Fatah that rejected taking a role in the Palestinian government, not Hamas. Hamas leaders are the ones who tried to bring in everyone else, and they were rebuffed. Hamas has every right to lead the Palestinian Authority on its own. It won the elections with a crushing majority. I think it's very important to remember that their leaders consistently have made statements which emphasize that they're willing to come to terms with an Israel that's limited to the 1967 borders.

The irony of this, of course, is that Israel has no interest in limiting itself to the 1967 borders. So again, you have a Palestinian leadership that, like its predecessor, accepts Israel within its 1967 borders and limits its territorial ambitions to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Unfortunately there is no one on the other side willing to accept that very far-reaching offer. Amongst the current Israeli leadership, there remains a consensus for keeping the vast majority of the settlements, annexing east Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, building the Separation Wall, and denying the rights of refugees.

In effect, this remains a consensus against a two-state solution because it undermines the existence of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. ■



Opening Up the Mikvah

By Ari Kristan

AS A CHILD, TUCKER LIEBERMAN COULD barely stand to take showers. When he passed the bathroom mirror, he would “go into what almost seemed like a mild state of shock, with chills and painful, uncontrollable shaking” because the girl’s body that he saw didn’t accord with his understanding of himself as a young man. Even after having chest surgery, taking hormones, and living as a man for seven years, he avoided undressing in men’s locker rooms. Nonetheless, in March of 2005, he and a friend entered Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikvah and Education Center in Newton, Massachusetts, undressed, and experienced Judaism’s most intimate ritual—immersion in the mikvah (ritual bath).

Mikvah immersion can be a daunting experience for anyone whose body does not conform to commonly held expectations. It requires the participant to completely disrobe, enter a bath, and dip below the surface of the water. In immersions that are governed by Jewish law, such as for conversion or family purity, a guide must witness the ritual to ensure that the participant has immersed completely. The vulnerability involved in the process may be daunting for transgender people who, like Tucker, are born into bodies that do not match their gender identity. Along with this vulnerability, they face the knowledge that traditional communities would exclude transgendered people from the mikvah, and perhaps from their communities as well.

Nonetheless, mikvah immersion stands out as a compelling ritual for individuals struggling with gender identity or changing their gender or sex. Traditional Judaism, with its prohibitions against cross-dressing, certainly prescribes no life cycle ritual for gender transition. Modern uses of mikvah emphasize rebirth and healing; particularly appropriate for individuals who often confront prejudice and misunderstanding while dealing with great change. In recent years, as individuals have sought ways to connect more deeply with Jewish tradition, they have often embraced mikvah as a way to mark a variety of life cycle events. Rabbi Michelle Medwin has overseen rituals for a woman going through fertility treatments and for a widow who wanted to move on after mourning her husband's death. She says, "There's certainly an encouragement to use mikvah in creative ways within the liberal Jewish community."

Creating Sacred Space

UNFORTUNATELY, THE ORTHODOX AUTHORITIES who operate most mikvaot around the country often limit immersion to rituals prescribed by Jewish law. As a result, several communities have built their own mikvah facilities that encourage both innovative and traditional uses of ritual immersion. Even among those organizations, Mayyim Hayyim is leading the way in making the mikvah experience accessible and meaningful for everyone, regardless of gender or sexual identity. Opened in May of 2004, Mayyim Hayyim is an interdenominational center envisioned by community leaders, including author Anita Diamant, to be "a sacred space open to all Jews in the Greater Boston area." At the organization's core are seven guiding principles including *petichut* (inclusion) and *klal yisrael* (the oneness of the Jewish people).

Making the mikvah experience truly safe for transgender individuals is complicated by the fact that immersion is among the most strictly gendered rituals in Jewish tradition. Although men and women used the bath equally in ancient times, since the destruction of the Temple immersion has been primarily a women's practice. The laws of *niddah* (family purity) require women to immerse after each menstrual period before they can have physical contact with their husbands. Most mikvaot have separate times for men and women to immerse, and many are communal baths, which makes transgender inclusion even more challenging.

Rabbi Medwin had little experience with transgender issues until a young woman named Rebecca (name has been changed) asked her to do a funeral for her old, male self. Rebecca, who was born into a male body and spent her first twenty years as Robert, had just completed her first year of living as a woman. Her relationship with Judaism had lapsed, and she wanted to reconnect with the tradition while marking her transition. Rabbi Medwin suggested that instead of a funeral, Rebecca affirm her womanhood and new life through immersion in the mikvah.

Together, Rebecca and Rabbi Medwin adapted a conversion ceremony written by Anita Diamant and Rabbi Jane Lipman to include visualizations about Rebecca's past, present, and future. During the ceremony she dipped below the surface of the water

RESOURCES

Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikvah
1839 Washington Street (Route 16)
Newton, MA 02466
Phone: (617) 244-1836
www.mayyimhayyim.org

Keshet, Boston's LGBT Jewish organization
www.boston-keshet.org
(617) 524-9227

three times, envisioned herself as a Jewish woman, and let go of her male self. She remembers it as extremely powerful, and the experience has helped her to re-engage with ritual as a Jewish woman.

Aliza Kline was well aware of both the need for and challenges of creating a transgender friendly mikvah when she began working as executive director of Mayyim Hayyim. She had “heard horror stories of lesbians and gay men, let alone trans people, being turned away from a traditional mikvah, or having to lie about their identity...or simply never considering mikvah as an option because of the fear of rejection.” She met with staff from Keshet, Boston’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jewish organization, to collaborate on ways for Mayyim Hayyim to fulfill its mission of inclusion.

According to Mycroft Holmes, who chairs Keshet’s Transgender Working Group, the crux of the issue is how to match mikvah guides with transgender immersees, who may be in various stages of transitioning from male to female bodies, or vice versa. Traditionally, guides are matched by sex—women with women, men with men. As Holmes notes, “With transgender people and intersex people, there’s so much variety that there is no one like them. So, the question is really about who is the right guide.”

Mayyim Hayyim and Keshet decided to collaborate on a series of workshops to train Mayyim Hayyim’s forty-eight mikvah guides about gender issues and provide them with the skills necessary to work with transgender immersees. Mayyim Hayyim’s program director, Kathy Bloomfield, reported that the majority of the guides felt comfortable guiding transgender individuals and wanted more training on how to best support immersees of all gender identities. Malka Young, who decided to become a mikvah guide at Mayyim Hayyim largely because of the organization’s dedication to inclusiveness, enjoyed the session because “the leaders were very open and personable. They got the group thinking about gender and our first awareness of our own gender.” She admits, “Before the training, I wouldn’t have been aware that there might be particular or special needs for transgender people. Now I understand what they need to feel safe in the space.”

Re-purposing the Mikvah

HOWEVER, EVEN SOME MEMBERS OF THE transgender Jewish community question the need for a trans-friendly mikvah. Since transgender women do not menstruate, they are exempted from the laws of *niddah*. Beth Orens, who runs a list-serve for orthodox transsexual Jews, considered going to the mikvah after her sexual reassignment surgery. Instead she went to an Orthodox women’s *davening* group where she was called to the Torah by her new, female name. For Orens and many other traditional Jews, “The purpose of mikvah isn’t really about rebirth and renewal. The primary purpose of mikvah is for married women to go after their period. What,” she wonders, “is being accomplished by trans folks using a mikvah? What does it do?”

For Tucker Lieberman, it did a lot. As a child in Hebrew school, he was profoundly disturbed by the disempowerment of women in the Torah. Even after transitioning at the age of eighteen, he feels uneasy about gender roles in Jewish texts and rituals. He says, “Treating myself as a full human being, a Jew practicing like any other Jew [at the mikvah] does a lot to counteract the idea I acquired in childhood that women somehow don’t count as much to God. Having the opportunity to be open about my transsexual body if I choose to be...allows me to go through the cleansing and opening that is supposed to happen in the mikvah.” ■

Ari Kristan is a freelance writer based in Boston. A graduate of Tufts University, she is particularly interested in issues of gender, sexuality, and religion. You can find more from Ari at www.arikristan.com.

The crux of the issue is how to match mikvah guides with transgender immersees, who may be in various stages of transitioning from male to female bodies, or vice versa.

Jewish Renewal and American Spirituality

BY SHAUL MAGID

Our natural religion is polytheism...

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*

As a moralist I am a monotheist; as an artist I am a polytheist; as a naturalist I am a pantheist.

—Goethe

Americans have always been spiritual seekers. From the Puritans onward, spirituality in the United States often has been rebellious, using new religious ideas to subvert orthodox Christian doctrine and practice. As a particularly American form of Judaism, Jewish Renewal can trace its spiritual lineage back to these American Spiritualists as much as, or even more than, it can claim Eastern European Hasidic ancestry.

American Pantheists

THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY witnessed a veritable spiritual renaissance in American culture as Transcendentalists, Theosophists, New Thought spiritualists, and Occultists introduced Buddhism and Hinduism to American society and with them a new form of pantheistic religious practice. The mid 1890s saw the climax of this new spirituality with the 1893 convening of the World Parliament of Religions and the founding of the Greenacre community by Sarah Farmer in 1894. Among other things, this community introduced American “seekers” (including some prominent Reform rabbis) to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

The World Parliament of Religions was strongly inspired by Walt Whitman’s vision of a noninstitutional, interfaith spiritual renewal. It brought together members of dozens of religious faiths with the intention of creating a new religion, or at least a new religious consciousness, liberated from the confines of classical (that is, biblical) theism. While it is true that the introduction of Eastern religions at the World Parliament was filtered through a monotheistic lens, it nonetheless opened new vistas for American spiritualists seeking fulfillment in unorthodox ways.

An important precursor to this Parliament was an article entitled “Sympathy for Religion” by Thomas Wentworth Higgins (1823–1911) published in 1871. Higgins’s essay espoused the recognition of commonalities between religions based on the principle of sympathy. A Transcendentalist, Higgins’s spiritualism was based on what he termed an “extra Christian” (and not anti-Christian) perspective where true religiosity is founded in the human experience of the world. America was ripe for this kind of religious eclecticism: it possessed a vast unchurched frontier, a significant geographic distance from European centers of religious power, and a radical Protestantism that had served as its progenitor.

The movements of the late nineteenth century did not die out in the turmoil of the twentieth century, but played a lesser role in American consciousness. They reemerged

among the Beats in the 1950s and then again in the 1960s and 1970s in the movement that has been termed New Age spirituality.

Renewal's American Roots

JEWISH RENEWAL HAS THE SAME ROOTS as the New Age movement. While its bedrock is Jewish mysticism—specifically Hasidism—Jewish Renewal's deviations from these more austere and conformist traditions is obvious.

The nature of these deviations, however, becomes much more understandable once they are seen as adaptations from, and accommodations to, the long tradition of American spiritualism from Emerson and Thoreau to Ram Dass and Allen Ginsberg.

Viewed from the outside, Jewish Renewal's theology combines nature religions and Eastern polytheism or nontheism in a way very similar to that of Transcendentalist thought. While Jewish Renewal is not the first American Judaism to introduce Eastern spiritual practices (the radical reformer Felix Adler's 1905 *The Essentials of Spirituality* introduces Eastern terminology and practice), it is the first American Judaism to emerge after these practices became mainstream, influenced by the Beats (and then the Beatles).

Renewal added to that mix Jungian and neo-Jungian psychology, theories of holistic healing, and a belief in multiculturalism—creeds straight out of the New Age culture that developed in the 1970s. Renewal filters these American traditions through the Jewish mystical spiritualism of Kabbalah and Hasidism and enhances them through Jewish ritual and interpretive practices to create a vibrant American Jewish movement.

Paradigm Shift

THE ADDITION OF EASTERN RELIGIONS to the Jewish context was not without theological consequences. Served up "American style," these religions functioned as a theological bridge between classical Jewish monotheism and the theology that became Jewish Renewal. Renewal founder Reb Zalman Shacter-Shalomi calls what he is doing a "Paradigm Shift" from a theology where God exists but is utterly distant, to a world where God is an organic part of creation.

Reb Zalman justifies adapting Buddhism in particular to Judaism by suggesting that American Buddhism is no longer Buddhism per se. He argues that American Buddhism did for Eastern Buddhism "what Saint Paul did to Torah," that is, when Americans adopted Buddhism they largely severed Buddhist theology from its ritualistic, devotional, and disciplinary Eastern roots. In other words, he claims American Buddhism gave us a "Protestant" Buddhism that Reb Zalman could then configure to his paradigm shift vision of a new Judaism.

American practitioners of Eastern religions—and particularly those who identify with New Age movements—share a belief in the world as a living organism, or, as Reb Zalman calls it, "Gaia consciousness," a belief that refracts nature religion and pantheism through a revised monotheistic lens. Reb Zalman embraces "Gaia consciousness" and justifies this move away from traditional biblical monotheism and its patriarchal roots by citing Proverbs 1:9: "Listen my child to the disciple of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother." Zalman argues that the disciple of your father represents the old paradigm, the Torah of patriarchy. If one can no longer hear that Torah, there is still *the instruction of your mother*, the Torah of Gaia, the notion of the world as an organism that requires our attention. Both are "Torah" but represent different templates, each one corresponding to a different "reality map."

The radical nature of this paradigm shift should not be underestimated. Reb Zalman has said of Judaism that "It can make of God no less than pantheism.... This is what I have in mind when I say, 'No less than...,' that God can be no less than pantheism. If pantheism is a given, what is already there as a minimum, then what else can we say about God?" The "what else" in this sentence is where monotheism either lives or dies.

If pantheism is a given, then what else can we say about God? The "what else" is where monotheism either lives or dies.

Reb Zalman is not that interested in monotheism for its own sake. We cannot, he argues, say anything about God before we acknowledge that God is everything—and once we use that as a beginning, the edifice of classical monotheism begins to shake.

A Jewish Theomonism

REB ZALMAN'S OBSERVATION RESEMBLES a position about Sufism explicated by the great scholar of Islam Henri Corbin. Corbin argues that mystical Islam, especially Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), adheres to what he calls a "theomonism," an idea that the oneness of being is manifest in the many different dimensions of the created universe. The world is thus not simply the consequence of God's activity (a standard Jewish view that acknowledges God's presence in creation while maintaining his utter transcendence) but is itself divine.

Corbin argues that the experience of the phenomena of creation (the world) is itself "theophany" (a revelation). Revelation is happening at every moment. While rabbinic midrash makes a similar claim ("God renews creation every day...") Corbin and Reb Zalman's theology actually bracket the transcendent God—the backbone of monotheism—as a reference for worship and theological reflection. Revelation, in the widest and not merely symbolic sense, is happening at every moment and an act that responds to that moment is a religious act.

What would it mean to live inside that myth—to treat the world and its creatures as if they were direct consequences of theophany? Among other things, such a view threatens the hierarchical nature of Judaism's claim of uniqueness based on the revelation at Sinai as a historical event that can never be repeated. Religious authority founded on continuous revelation is always in a state of flux, and religious experience (even Hasidic *devekut*) is freed from its classic monotheistic/hierarchical framework. Perhaps this helps us to understand what Reb Zalman means when he says that pantheism is a given, an experiential starting-point of Jewish theology. What can we say about God if we bracket His transcendence? Thus begins Jewish Renewal. The conscious move from monotheism to pantheistic monism or theomonism reframes the notion of revelation, thrusting it out of its historical confines and context, making it a trope that can be used to justify the reformation of a monotheistic religious tradition.

To many, this conversion of monotheism to theomonism (continued on page 65)

Be the Change

BY ARYEH COHEN

IF YOU HAVE SPENT ANY TIME AT ALL in an organized Jewish setting during the last twenty years, you will have been told that Judaism has a problem, and that the problem is *continuity*. How will the next generation be Jewish when they seem so uninterested in our synagogues and federations, and so very interested in assimilating? Or, as the interviewer on the *Eternal Light* program asked Abraham Joshua Heschel in the early 1970s: *What do you have to say to the young people?*

Well those young people are now retiring but we are still asking the same question, and attempting to answer it by creating more and more elaborate outreach schemes.

"SWIFBOATING" BUSH'S BISHOPS

(continued from page 46) of IRD-orchestrated "swiftboat style" smears since the IRD was formed with the assistance of the Reagan administration. Founded in 1981 by several key leaders of the neoconservative movement, including Roman Catholics Michael Novak (the Institute on Religion and Public Life) and Father Richard John Neuhaus (American Enterprise Institute), the IRD has relentlessly used unethical propaganda methods to carry out the radical political agenda of a handful of secular benefactors. The IRD systematically spreads misleading and inflammatory charges against progressive organizations and leaders, as well as employing jingoistic patriotism and "wedge issues" like homosexuality to promote dissention and division.

The IRD's secular political patrons have contributed millions of dollars to attacks on progressive religious leaders. The backers include the Bradley, Randolph, Smith Richardson, and Olin foundations, as well as ultra-conservatives Adolph Coors, Richard Mellon Scaife, and Howard Ahmanson. The truth is that without wealthy right-wing patrons to foot the bills, the IRD would soon be out of business. But the question remains: How could Richard Mellon Scaife, Adolph Coors, the Bradley Foundation, the Olin Foundation, and other secular political benefactors be persuaded to fund a multi-million-dollar crusade for a quarter of a century against mainline churches and the NCC?

Think about this: While the forty-five million members of the mainline Protestant churches affiliated with the National Council of Churches (NCC) account for only about a quarter of the U.S. population, approximately half of the members of the U.S. Congress identify themselves as members of these communions. The influence of mainline Protestant church members is disproportionate to their number, and, remarkably, extends to many progressive and moderate leaders in politics, business, and culture. Much of the prevailing ethos of American culture has been shaped by the leadership and membership of these churches.

Unlike today's Roman Catholic Church where debate and dissent are discouraged, these churches are heirs to forms of governance that are representative and transparent. It is the openness of these denominations that the radical Right exploits to turn them into battlegrounds in the culture wars. The Right's attacks on mainline Protestant churches and their leaders are meant to discredit these democratic bodies in order to impose rule by strict dogma and autocratic control while simultaneously neutralizing their social justice tradition. This tactic is often on view when conservative "renewal" factions in the mainline denominations, in alliance with the IRD, foment internal dissent and division.

Moreover, these denominations are some of the largest economic players in the United States, with hundreds of billions of dollars in collective assets, including real estate and pension funds. A hostile takeover of these churches by the Right would represent a massive shift in American culture, power, and wealth for a relatively small investment. If this sounds far-fetched, one need only consider how right-wing groups during recent decades have taken over second largest American Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

What can be done? Progressive Christians need a long-term plan with sufficient funding to build an infrastructure to support the work of the most visionary and thoughtful in their communities. They need state-of-the-art publications to build an effective counter to right-wing distortions and lies about the Christian message. They need to articulate a new vision of who progressive Christians are and what the Holy Spirit is calling them to do.

The problem is that even now, after decades of being mercilessly bashed, many progressive Christians are only beginning to grasp that they are in a "war of ideas" with right-wing true believers. Most problematic of all is the fact that philanthropists who should and could help in this fight have been either absent or largely ineffective. If Scaife, Ahmanson, Olin, Coors, Bradley, and their like achieve a hostile takeover of mainline Protestantism and the dismantling of the NCC, they will have muted an important part of America's social conscience and significantly diminished its capacity for civic discourse. The soul of the church and its positive influence in the life of the Republic are at risk. ■

Reverend Andrew J. Weaver, M.Th., Ph.D., is a United Methodist pastor and clinical psychologist living in New York City. He is associate publisher of Zion's Herald and a contributor to Hardball on Holy Ground.

JEWISH RENEWAL AND AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

(continued from page 60) removes Jewish Renewal from the sphere of Jewish theology. How can a movement be Jewish and not embrace particularism and monotheism? Jewish Renewal argues that its worldview is not a new religion but rather is deeply embedded in the Jewish kabbalistic tradition if we read it with unapologetic eyes, that is, unafraid that it will undermine sacred doctrine.

As scholars of Kabbalah have noted, theomonism is in concert with certain kabbalistic and later Hasidic traditions. Certain forms of Kabbalah were accused of being non-monotheistic by numerous medieval legalists and even by the renowned kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. However, because both Kabbalah and Hasidism have largely been wed to Jewish Orthodoxy (both culturally and interpretively) these subversive tendencies in the tradition have almost always been aligned with accepted Orthodox doctrine and practice (i.e., codified *Halakha*). It is precisely Reb Zalman's willingness to reread these sources outside their interpretive tradition that may be one of Jewish Renewal's most important and lasting contributions to Judaism.

Post-Monotheism

UNDERSTOOD AS A PARADIGM SHIFT within Judaism, Jewish Renewal may be best viewed not as a pantheistic or monistic theology but as a post-monotheistic theology. Zalman's Judaism is not a neopagan pantheism that seeks to retrieve a pre-monotheistic paradigm that was corrupted by the (patriarchal) domination of monotheism. One does find that view among Zalman's contemporaries, particularly in the works of feminists such as Adrienne Rich (especially her early work), Meryll Stone, Riane Eisler, Starhawk, and perhaps most prominently Jenny Kien in

JEWISH RENEWAL AND AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

Reinstating the Divine Woman in Judaism. Nor is Zalman's Judaism an attempt to erase the Divine in a non-theistic practice like Eastern Buddhism or the pantheism of a nature religion.

Rather, the theology Zalman suggests is more constructive than restorative; it attempts to "purify" monotheism rather than abandon it. He abandons what some view as the negative dimensions or consequences of classical monotheism and replaces them with more universalist and tolerant spiritual alternatives while retaining monotheism's basic superstructure. This critique from within is postmodern in its sensibility: it is what I term "post-monotheistic."

Jewish Renewal intentionally moves away from two previous modern progressive Jewish pillars: the commitment to unreflective monotheism and the commitment to non-ritualistic ethical culture as the backbone of modern Jewish religiosity. Renewal's postmodern turn (with deep roots in Mordecai Kaplan's post-*halachic* Judaism of the mid-twentieth century) is to reritualize Judaism, not by restoring traditional *Halachah* but by creating a new *Halachah* infused with a consciousness drawn from a monistic and pantheistic approach.

This attempt to reritualize Judaism is part of Renewal's response to American Reform, Reconstructionism, and even Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's monistic Zionism, all of which seek to confront the new era that simultaneously undermines traditions and supports them. In Durkheimian fashion Reb Zalman argues that communities need ritual but in order to have this new Torah Jews need a radically new metaphysical template that can serve as the engine for ritual devotion. In this sense Reb Zalman is drawing from the Hasidic notion of practice as *avodah* (devotion) and not law. He suggests that this new template can break us free of the kind of particularistic and hierarchical confines that classical monotheism suggests, and perhaps requires. Arguably, Kook's pantheistic monism is a precedent here, but for Reb Zalman as I understand him, Kook was too confined to a nationalistic, territorial renaissance and thus too particularistic to cater to a multicultural *cum* post-ethnic American or diasporic society.

A Leap "Outside"

REB ZALMAN'S LEAP "OUTSIDE" monotheism opened new vistas for Jewish theology and practice. His break with the particularism of Jewish monotheism enables Zalman to renew Judaism's universal mission by creating a "halakha of/for the gentile." While Israelite monotheism posits a universal God, in Judaism that God is one who chooses and elects one people (Israel). Hence monotheism can be, and has been, a weapon to discredit other claims of revelatory truth. One can even go further to argue that radical monotheism naturally functions that way. Monotheistic religions, even those that are ostensibly "universalistic" (e.g., Galatians 3) are wed to the notion of exclusion.

That exclusionary aspect of monotheistic religion does not travel well in the twenty-first century's multicultural and flattened world. As David Miller, reading Nietzsche, argued in *The New Polytheism*, classical monotheism cannot easily bear the weight of the "poly" nature of contemporary experience. Jewish

Renewal's post-monotheism, on the other hand, accommodates postmodernity by envisioning a God who is an integral part of all human civilization, and all of humanity has a specific responsibility for that relationship. Reb Zalman's sincere belief in theological pluralism, his rejection of exclusivist notions of election, and his celebration of other's claims to part of the truth that is One all reflect and invite a significant revision of Judaism's monotheistic roots in a postmodern world.

Like Reform, Jewish Renewal uses Jewish nomenclature to describe the global project of building a better world. However, it is making a more radical theological claim than classical Reform (one more aligned with the now forgotten radical reformer Felix Adler). Using kabbalistic imagery, Reb Zalman puts it this way: "The *malchut* of the past has collapsed; the *malchut* of the old paradigm no longer works or is what we really want [italics added]. We are involved in *binyan malchut ha-sh'chinah* [constructing a space for a new dwelling of the divine]; we are trying to help the Earth rebuild her organicity and establish a healthy governing principle." This illustrates one of the major shifts in Jewish Renewal from traditional Judaism and especially from traditional Judaism's response to the Holocaust (see my previous essay in *Tikkun*, March/April 2006.) Maintaining and reconstructing the past are no longer the goals. Survival alone is insufficient. The God that is (re)created in Jewish Renewal is no longer the God of classical monotheism, nor is it the "return of the gods" in Nietzschean fashion or the new spirituality of neopaganism but a post-monotheistic God who is both one and many, close at hand and within one's reach. Unveiled from the secret cloak of Jewish doctrine, Renewal's God becomes the kabbalistic God of humanity. Jewish Renewal is a yet unwritten chapter in the history of American spirituality. While it invokes the names of the Baal Shem Tov, the Seer of Lublin, and Nahman of Bratslav, it is just as influenced by the voices of Emerson, Whitman, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, Felix Adler, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Thomas Merton, the Beats, and others in the American spiritualist tradition.

An exploration of Jewish Renewal requires going deep into the subversive spirituality of the American frontier and not only into the Hasidic masters of the Jewish Pale of Settlement who, in the end, chose conformity over alienation. New Age religion is not simply the context out of which Jewish Renewal emerged. The trajectory of American spirituality, New Age religion being its latest manifestation, is the wellspring of Renewal's project and identity. In the final analysis, Jewish Renewal is as much an American Judaism as that of Mordecai Kaplan or Isaac Meyer Wise, and as much an American religion as the spirituality of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. We are just beginning to understand Jewish Renewal—what about it is "Jewish" and what about it is "new." ■

This is the final installment of Shaul Magid's series on Jewish Renewal. 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 (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

The sociologists (the new high priests of Judaism since the bankruptcy of theology) have jumped on the bandwagon and have declared that Jews today have fluid and fragmented identities that are not marketed to by the existing synagogue structures.

Implicit in Gandhi's charge to *be the change* is the understanding that one cannot intervene in the superficial symptoms of a problem and expect real change to occur. One must radically change the system.

Continuity is one of those superficial symptoms. Large swaths of the adult Jewish population have made a decision not to affiliate with the Jewish community. Let's respect that decision and leave them alone. Why are we always interested in the folks who really don't want to be at the party?

The real issue facing the Jewish community—and the one that needs to be addressed with all earnestness—is the issue of hierarchy and egalitarianism. The regnant model of Jewish institutions, and especially synagogues, is a hierarchical model where the rabbi is the leader (and often the CEO). How can we effect democratic change based on a strong belief in participatory democracy when our basic religious institutions are based on a hierarchical structure?

There is a different model. I am part of a prayer community in Los Angeles called the *Shtibl* (literally “small house” in Yiddish, and referring to small, usually Hasidic, prayer spaces). Six years old now, it was founded on the complementary notions that prayer, learning, and political and social action are part of a seamless web; that decisions should be consensus based; and that membership should be based on participation in the life of the community and not on a dues structure. To be a member of the *Shtibl* one must commit to performing tasks that range from setting up the chairs to learning Torah to coordinating a social justice event. The membership requirements articulate the idea that we see the *Shtibl* as having permeable boundaries.

Since the *Shtibl* has no rabbi (a few members do have ordination from various seminaries), the responsibility for the community—from paying the rent to deciding the halachic direction to engaging in social justice action—falls on the membership as a whole. Since one can fulfill part of one's membership requirement by either teaching a class or taking a class, there is built-in motivation for study—but there is not a built-in hierarchy of teachers and students, leaders and followers.

Shtibl is neither the first nor the only group of its kind. Consensus-based *chavurot* started back in the 1970s; *Havurat Shalom* in Boston, the oldest of these at thirty-plus years, still exists. There have been, however, relatively few consensus-based egalitarian prayer communities. In part this comes from the fact that it takes a lot of work on everybody's part, not just the rabbi's.

The promise of the *Shtibl* and other communities like it is not that they will attract all those unaffiliated Jews. Some might find appealing the fact that high holy day tickets are free, others might be turned off when they find out that in return for the tickets they are expected to volunteer to set up or clean up or teach or read Torah. The real promise *chavurot* like *Shtibl* offer is a model of a holistic community whose commitment to egalitarianism and whose desire to own their own faith commitment is not left at the door of their synagogue.



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THE DEATH OF THE REPUBLICAN IDEAL

(continued from page 30) Napoleon became the first European monarch to end Jewish suppression, granting Jews the same rights as any citizen in all his lands. Brooking widespread anti-Semitic sentiment, Napoleon declared, "I will never accept any proposals that will obligate the Jewish people to leave France, because to me the Jews are the same as any other citizen in our country. It takes weakness to chase them out of the country, but it takes strength to assimilate them." It was, alas, a piece of French heritage lost on the Vichy regime during World War II.

There was, of course, a catch—one that has defined a fundamental Republican principle ever since. That catch had to do with assimilation. For Napoleon, the Jews—always seen as separate and suspect tribe—were an insignificant population; fewer than 40,000 were then living in France. But the Jews would prove useful as an instrument through whom a new idea of citizenship could be implemented throughout the Republic. Four years later, on July 23, 1806, Napoleon called together a special gathering of 111 rabbis and prominent Jewish leaders. The famous deal was straightforward: *as French citizens—everything; as Jews—nothing*. Like any other believers, they could pray and worship as they wished in their own private spaces, but they would receive no collective recognition or support from the state. As individual citizens of the French Republic they would be without religion, as all other citizens. "My desire," Napoleon declared, "is to have a conciliation between their religion and their responsibilities in *becoming* French..." Though the history of Republican France has hardly been spotless in living up to its promise—best exemplified by the Dreyfuss Affair and the Vichy deportations—there was nowhere else in Europe at the opening of the nineteenth century where Jews saw themselves as so free as they did in France. As the Austrian diplomat Metternich-Winneburg wrote in September of 1806, "All Jews look on Napoleon as their Messiah."

It is against that principle of religious and cultural invisibility before the Republic that Alain Finkielkraut reads the recent riots—and still more importantly, the popular reaction to the rioters. In his bill of indictment he cites an angry incident some years ago at a soccer match between France and Algeria when hyper-excited *beurs* (the word used for young French of Algerian descent, similar to *chollos* for Mexican Americans) booed the singing of the "Marseillaise" and broke onto the field waving Algerian flags. "And then there are the lyrics of the rap songs—very troubling lyrics," he told *Ha'aretz*. "A real call to revolt. There's one called Dr. R, I think, who sings: 'I piss on France, I piss on De Gaulle' and so on. These are very violent declarations of hatred for France."

Finkielkraut is surely correct in identifying a deep current of rage among the young Muslims. But what he fails to mention is the still-raw memory of France's Algerian relations: of De Gaulle's prosecution of the Algerian war and the wanton slaughter of thousands of Algerians on the streets of Paris in 1961, their bloody bodies floating down the Seine (a story suppressed at the time by the newspaper *Le Monde*); the abandonment of those Algerians who defended France and were

left behind to be shot or imprisoned by the new Algerian regime; the failure of the French government to provide any aid to the Algerians or the "pieds noirs" who returned to France with no jobs, no homes, and no prospects; and the ongoing unemployment rate of 40 to 60 percent in the minority African and North African suburbs. All these fueled the autumn 2005 explosion. It was the very incoherence of the riots, their evident *lack* of either coordination or ideology, that demonstrated their visceral, uncontrolled rage.

What distresses Finkielkraut—and should distress him—is that unlike his 1968 generation of *enragés*, who also tossed Molotov cocktails at police squadrons, these rioters showed no sign of wanting to reform, reconstruct, or reformulate the Republic. They have grown up not as loyal dissidents within the Republic, but as subjects of the Republic, reminded daily that they are not really French, not really the inheritors of the Judeo-Christian heritage that built *la civilisation française*, and—like Native Americans in the 1950s—found themselves characterized as little more than savages who should be thankful for the civilizing hand of the Republic. It is also well to remember that the 1968 revolutionaries were indeed the elite of the French elite. At that time fewer than 5 percent of French youth entered a university—their profile bears as much resemblance to these minority rioters as a tortoise does to a supersonic Concorde. The difference between the rioters of 1968 and those of 2005 could not be more stark—even without the shadow of religious animosity.

Yet for Finkielkraut, and a significant array of Jewish former '68ers who abandoned Marxism in the 1970s and came to be known as the Nouveau Philosophes (most notably Bernard Henri Levy, Alexandre Adler, André Glucksman, and Jean-Claude Milner), the religious shadow cannot be forgotten. Finkielkraut's best known book, *The Imaginary Jew*, chronicles his intellectual and theological journey: As a young man he saw himself primarily as a secular French citizen; later, he found in Judaism a mechanism of internal self-revelation; ultimately he became an intellectual whose obligation to history is to preserve his ancestors' collective memory and register his people's relentless struggle to exist.

For the Jews, survival, while never secure, had found its best guarantee under the Republican bargain through which not only Jews but also all other ethno-religious minorities had relinquished recognition by the Republic. If these "Arab" newcomers to France were to succeed in their war against the Republican ideal—whether by wrapping their school-girl daughters in head scarves or by organizing self-protective Muslim islands where the mosque becomes more important than the *mairie*, or city hall—then the bargain the rabbis had struck with Napoleon would be broken and the security of contemporary Jewry lost. Imperfect as it was, that deal still had provided the basis upon which France saved 75 percent of its Jewish population during World War II.

Equality and integration, Finkielkraut argues, has already given way to a new orthodoxy of victims and victimizers, of

privileged and unprivileged minorities, of acceptable and forbidden speech to describe each. As Zionism was equated with racism at Durban, defining the existence of an Israeli state as race oppression, so the impoverished, excluded, torchbearing young Muslim becomes equated by the liberal media with the virtuous victim. Ultimately he finds the liberal media more disgusting than rampaging young Muslims. By characterizing the riots as the result of racism and exclusion rather than wanton savagery manipulated by an Islamic master, the media elite, including many Jews, are in Finkelkraut's view complicit in the ongoing destruction of Western democracy itself.

"When an Arab torches a school, it's rebellion," Finkelkraut told *Ha'aretz*. "When a white guy does it, it's fascism. I'm 'color blind.' Evil is evil, no matter what color it is. And this evil, for the Jew that I am, is completely intolerable." Alain Finkelkraut chooses his words carefully. When he uses words like "pogrom" or "evil" to characterize France's ghetto street violence, he understands precisely the resonance of his speech. Endorsing a law passed in the National Assembly last year requiring schools to teach the benefits of French colonialism on its overseas subjects, he knew exactly to whom he was playing. "We don't teach anymore that the colonial project also sought to educate, *to bring civilization to the savages*," he said (emphasis added). It was the kind of sentence nobody but a Ku Klux Klan member could have said in the United States.

Watching on our television screens the burning of European embassies by mobs of Muslims enraged over a set of newspaper cartoons mocking Mohammed, it would be easy for us to nod in agreement with Finkelkraut. That has surely been the dominant message of Fox, CNN, and even much of the liberal media. Yet close observers of this winter of Muslim discontent, witnesses who walk the streets of those unhappy towns and neighborhoods across the Middle East, report a rather different account. Whether in Gaza, Beirut, or Tehran, where the most intense assaults took place, a much deeper conflict was already underway over the fate of each people's concrete, material future. Just as the burning of South Central Los Angeles in 1991 was only peripherally about a hard luck victim named Rodney King, so too is it an easy solipsism for Finkelkraut and the like to read into the autumn riots or the winter assaults an unyielding war of civilizations.

For the moment they are still a relative minority among French intellectuals, but their polemics claim more and more attention in the media. As Daniel Lindenberg, a historian and the author of *Return to Order*, said recently, "The tragedy is that now in France you've got Dieudonné [an openly anti-white, anti-Jewish French Caribbean comic] on one side and Finkelkraut on the other. These people are in the process of pitting each community against the other. Worse: they are creating the divisions." ■

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EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY, THEN AND NOW

(continued from page 45) magnetic force of the sexual drive can be seen as attracting consciousness to matter, facilitating both its embodiment and the development of an incarnational process that transforms both the individual and the world. Furthermore, the recognition of the spiritual import of physical pleasure naturally heals the historical split between sensual love (*eros*) and spiritual love (*agape*), and this integration fosters the emergence of genuinely human love—an unconditional love that is simultaneously embodied and spiritual.

5. The urge to create: Most religious traditions are "reproductive" in that their practices aim to replicate either the enlightenment of their founder (e.g., the awakening of the Buddha) or the state of salvation described in purportedly revealed scriptures (e.g., the *moksha* of the Vedas). Spiritual creativity was then regulated by such predetermined unequivocal goals. Embodied spirituality, in contrast, seeks to cocreate novel spiritual understandings, practices, and expanded states of freedom in interaction with immanent and transcendent sources of Spirit.

The creative power of embodied spirituality is connected to its integrative nature. Whereas through our mind and consciousness we tend to access subtle spiritual energies already enacted in history that display more fixed forms and dynamics, it is our connection to our vital/primary world that gives us access to the generative power of immanent spiritual life. Put simply, the more that all human dimensions actively participate in spiritual knowing, the more creative spiritual life becomes.

6. Grounded spiritual visions: As we have seen, most spiritual traditions posit the existence of an isomorphism between human beings, the cosmos, and the Mystery. From this correspondence it follows that the more dimensions of the person that are actively engaged in the study of the Mystery, the more complete his or her knowledge will be. This "completion" should not be understood quantitatively but rather in a qualitative sense. The more human dimensions that creatively participate in spiritual knowing, the greater will be the *dynamic congruence* between inquiry approach and studied phenomena and the more *grounded in, coherent with, or attuned to* the nature of the Mystery will be our knowledge.

It is likely that many past and present spiritual visions are to some extent the product of dissociated ways of knowing. For example, spiritual visions that hold that body and world are ultimately illusory (or lower, or impure, or a hindrance to spiritual liberation) arguably derive from states of being in which the sense of self mainly or exclusively identifies with subtle energies of consciousness, getting uprooted from the body and immanent spiritual life. From this existential stance, it is understandable, and perhaps inevitable, that both body and world are seen as ultimately illusory or defective. However, when our somatic and vital worlds are invited to participate in our spiritual lives, making our sense of identity permeable to not only transcendent awareness but also immanent spiritual energies, then body and world become

EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY, THEN AND NOW

sacred realities that are recognized as crucial for human and cosmic spiritual evolution.

7. In-the-world nature: We are born on earth. I passionately believe that this is not irrelevant, a mistake, or the product of a delusional cosmic game whose ultimate goal is to transcend our embodied predicament. Perhaps we could have incarnated in more subtle planes of reality, but the fact that we did it here must be significant if we are to engage our lives in any genuinely wholesome and meaningful manner. Although it may be valuable at times to go beyond our embodied existence in order to access essential dimensions of our identity, to turn this move into a permanent spiritual *modus operandi* can easily create dissociations in one's spiritual life.

If we live in a closed and dark house, it is natural that we may feel pushed periodically to leave our home in search of the nourishing warmth and light of the sun. An embodied spirituality invites us to open the doors and windows of our body so that we can always feel complete, warm, and nurtured at home even if we may want at times to celebrate the splendor of the outside light. The crucial difference is that our excursion will not be motivated by deficit or hunger, but rather by the meta-need to celebrate, cocreate with, and revere the ultimate creative Mystery. It is here in our home—earth and body—that we can develop fully as complete human beings without needing to “escape” anywhere to find our essential identity or feel whole.

8. Re-sacralization of nature: When the body is felt as our home, the natural world can be reclaimed as our homeland as well. This “double grounding” in body and nature not only heals at its root the estrangement of the modern self from nature, but also overcomes the spiritual alienation—often manifesting as “floating anxiety”—intrinsic to the prevalent human condition of arrested or incomplete incarnation. Nature is then discerned as an organic embodiment of the Mystery. To sense our physical surroundings as intrinsically sacred offers natural resources for an ecologically grounded spiritual life.

One does not need to hold a spiritual world view to recognize the miracle of the natural world. Imagine that you are traveling throughout the cosmos, and after eons of dark and cold outer space, you find Gaia, the blue planet, with its lush jungles and luminous sky, its warm soil and fresh waters, and the inextricable wonder of embodied conscious life. The earth is the only place in the known cosmos where consciousness and matter coexist and can achieve a gradual integration through participating sentient beings. The inability to perceive nature as paradise is simply a consequence of our collective condition of arrested incarnation.

9. Social Engagement: A complete human being recognizes that, in a fundamental way, we *are* our relationships with both the human and nonhuman world, and this recognition is inevitably linked with a commitment to social transformation. To be sure, this commitment can take many different forms, from more direct active social or political action in the world to more subtle types of social activism involving distant

prayer, collective meditation, or ritual. While there is still much to learn about the actual effectiveness of subtle activism, as well as about the power of human consciousness to directly affect human affairs, given our current global crisis, embodied spirituality cannot be divorced from a commitment to social, political, and ecological transformation—whatever form this may take.

10. Integration of matter and consciousness: Disembodied spirituality is often based on an attempt to transcend, regulate, and/or transform embodied reality from the “higher” standpoint of consciousness and its values. Matter's experiential dimension as an immanent expression of the Mystery is generally ignored. This shortsightedness leads to the belief—conscious or unconscious—that everything related to matter is unrelated to the Mystery. This belief, in turn, confirms that matter and Spirit are two antagonistic dimensions. It then becomes necessary to abandon or condition the material dimension in order to strengthen the spiritual one. The first step out of this impasse is to rediscover the Mystery in its immanent manifestation; that is, to stop seeing and treating matter and the body as something that is not only alien to the Mystery but that distances us from the spiritual dimension of life. Embodied spirituality seeks a progressive integration of matter and consciousness that may ultimately lead to what we might call a state of “conscious matter.”

Ultimately, embodied spirituality seeks to catalyze the emergence of *complete human beings*—beings who, while remaining rooted in their bodies, earth, and immanent spiritual life, have made all their attributes permeable to transcendent spiritual energies, and who cooperate in solidarity with others in the spiritual transformation of self, community, and world. In short, a complete human being is firmly grounded in Spirit-Within, fully open to Spirit-Beyond, and in transformative communion with Spirit-In Between.

Perhaps as human beings gradually embody both transcendent and immanent spiritual energies—a twofold incarnation, so to speak—they will realize that it is here, in this plane of concrete physical reality, that the cutting edge of spiritual transformation and evolution is taking place. For then the planet earth may gradually turn into an embodied heaven, a perhaps unique place in the cosmos where beings can learn to express and receive embodied love, in all its forms. ■

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Culture

BOOKS | FILM | MUSIC

Nadine Gordimer At Eighty-Two

BY BEN NAPARSTEK

AT EIGHTY-TWO, NADINE Gordimer remains identified with her muscular political novels that chronicle the depredations of apartheid. Yet while her antiapartheid fiction won her the Nobel Prize in 1991, Gordimer insists that there was nothing more liberating for her creative consciousness than apartheid's demise. "Life began, opened up, after the fall of apartheid," she says. "Apartheid was limiting on our experience. Now we're free to think of anything, to enter all different relationships, to explore our feelings about them and our prejudices. We have far more subjects than ever before."

But as Gordimer's fourteenth novel, *Get a Life*, attests, the personal and the political remain no less entwined in her explorations of racially integrated South Africa. The desecration of the environment—once neglected by activists because of the greater urgency of fighting racial segregation—provides Gordimer's theme. Her protagonist, Paul Bannerman, is a thirty-five-year-old conservationist, campaigning to block the development of a "pebble-based" nuclear reactor. Paul's wife Benni is an ambitious advertising executive on the payroll of the corporations his team of ecologists is battling against. When Paul is struck with thyroid cancer, he undergoes treatment that makes him radioactive—a threat to all who come in contact with him. Gordimer explains, "he becomes the



one who is producing the very form of destructive power that he is fighting in the social and political field."

Gordimer, who always resisted propagandizing, acknowledges the nuances of the case for nuclear reactors. "We know that they are dangers. On the

other hand, we desperately need more sources of electrical power, and fossil fuel resources are going to run out." Two years after *Get a Life* was completed, the plans for the pebble-based reactor haven't been abandoned. "The last amount of money needed hasn't yet

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“All revolutions, unfortunately, bring abuses of the human values that they’ve espoused. But out of every revolution comes something that advances our idea of human freedom and dignity.”

quite come. One day it’s on hold, the next day it starts again, but it’s there.”

A longtime friend of Nelson Mandela, Gordimer is internationally recognized as one of the most vocal and tireless critics of apartheid. Yet she remains modest about her role in breaking the back of the apartheid regime, insisting that she wasn’t a genuine revolutionary. “I had friends who spent long times in prison and who suffered the privations of exile, which I didn’t. I didn’t go as far as that in the actions that I took against apartheid.” Together with her late husband, a Jewish refugee from Hitler’s Germany, Gordimer sheltered persecuted firebrands in her home and helped to bring the liberation struggle to international attention. “We learned to disregard all the good training we had from our parents about telling the truth. One became an accomplished liar. If one was questioned, one said: ‘Oh no, one hadn’t seen so-and-so for years.’”

Raised in a goldmining town fifty kilometers outside of Johannesburg, Gordimer endured an isolated childhood after her mother removed her from school because Gordimer was thought to have a heart murmur. “I didn’t have young companions. I was writing as a child, so I had some interest in privacy, but it was terribly lonely.” Gordimer is unwilling to discuss the less benign psychological motives which she’s suggested were behind her mother’s need to have her only daughter near her. “She’s long dead so let her rest in peace.”

As a child, Gordimer never imagined that her writing would lead to a career. “It seemed to me that you had to be in Europe to be a writer. Everything that I read came from Europe.” She laments that the origins of her career lay in the privilege of her white upbringing. “I had the use of the local public library, which was closed to black people, and the only

real training a writer has is reading.”

Gordimer first became aware of the gulf which separated her from her parents’ attitudes when the family was awoken one night by the sound of police searching their black maid’s room for illegally brewed alcohol. “It occurred to me, how was it that my parents didn’t say, ‘How could you walk onto our property without a warrant?’ They just assumed that anybody had the right to go and disturb a black woman in her quarters.” That incident spawned her first published short story, which was accepted by a rarefied literary journal, whose editors were unaware that the writer was fifteen years old. “The absolute freshness and thrill of it I don’t think could be compared to [winning the Nobel].”

A member of the African National Congress (ANC) long before it became a legal organization, Gordimer never experienced any conflict between her independence as a writer and her political allegiance. Her 1994 novel, *None to Accompany Me*, dramatized the struggle for ascendancy within the new government—between those returning from exile, and those who had languished underground or in jail. Each believed that they suffered the most and were therefore the more deserving of political power. “I got no reproach from the ANC about this. My lordship wasn’t questioned.”

For a brief time, Gordimer and her husband considered going into exile. It was the early 1980s when the blacks in the liberation movement felt it necessary to split with their white fellow travelers. “It was something that I understood—there was no hard feeling between me and such people, and we retained our personal relationships—although it saddened me. One began to feel, ‘What am I doing here, living the white life, privileged whether you like it or not?’” Realiz-

ing that Europe and America wouldn't feel like home, they considered moving to Zambia, which had recently become independent and was making strides: "But then it came to me that there one would be a foreigner, and one wouldn't really have commitment to what was happening, so we stayed."

During the transition of power, Gordimer was put forward as a parliamentary candidate by an ANC youth group. But she declined the calls to run for office in the new political regime, recalling the Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg, who entered the Italian parliament only to feel wasted. "I thought I would be of much more service to the world doing what I know how to do—writing, contributing to literature, to what people turn to for a different view of life. Even the wonderful Vaclav Havel is still a better writer than a president."

Gordimer describes her political convictions as socialist rather than Marxist, but she displays no fashionable disdain for communism. "All revolutions, unfortunately, bring abuses of the human values that they've espoused. But out of every revolution comes something that advances our idea of human freedom and dignity, so I don't think one can dismiss them. The South African communist party was nonracial long before anyone else. They contributed a great deal of brave people to the liberation struggle. Without them, apartheid would have gone on even longer."

While indisputably the reigning matriarch of letters on the African continent, Gordimer isn't an easy icon for feminists. She traces her reputation—as an antifeminist—to the controversy she sparked by withdrawing her novel *The House Gun* from the 1998 Orange Prize—a British award restricted to women writers. "I don't see how there's sex in the talent or the creativity that makes you into a writer. Next thing you'll have special prizes—God knows, maybe some exist already—for people who are gay or lesbian. As writers we're all trying to make sense of life. Whether we do so from a slightly different point of view, depending on our sex, I doubt very much.

Writers have this ability to enter other identities—across gender, across age."

It angers her that South Africa remains synonymous with the worst aspects of its history in the eyes of the world. "How much longer are we going to be identified only with apartheid? When you compare us with the countries...around us, I can't see why we should still be regarded with respect to

something that we overcame without civil war. It's very arrogant of the outside world to judge us after we've only had just over a decade to deal with the horrors of neglect we inherited." ■

Ben Naparstek is a law student, literary journalist, and broadcaster based in Melbourne, Australia. He writes for the London Times, Sydney Morning Herald, and Jerusalem Post.

[BOOKS]

Zohar, The Literary Masterpiece of the Kabbalah

BY DAVID S. ARIEL



THE ZOHAR: Pritzker Edition (Volumes 1, 2, and 3), Translation and Commentary by Daniel C. Matt. (Stanford University Press, 2004, 2006).

THERE IS SOMETHING sublime about a singular devotion to a lifetime ambition. Such was the case with the late thirteenth-century Castilian kabbalist, Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon, the primary author of the Zohar, the literary masterpiece of Kabbalah. His goal was to stimulate his contemporaries to read Torah—the Five Books of Moses—not for its narrative meaning but in a new *kabbalistic* way that would help shift their consciousness from the mundane towards intimacy with the divine and ultimately achieve unbounded, mystical awareness of God. For de Leon, the Zohar is a guide to how to overcome the barriers of time and place that separate us from the immediacy of God, just as Moses did at Sinai.

Now, Daniel Matt, one of the leading American scholars of Kabbalah, has realized his own lifetime ambition of making sense of the uncanny text of the Zohar. Matt first told me of his hopes when we were graduate students togeth-

er at Brandeis University in 1975. Matt had decided that the study of Jewish mysticism would be his path: "What I really want," he told me, "is to study Zohar for the rest of my life." Matt was truly able to realize his ambition years later when he was contacted—while on the faculty of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley—by Margot Pritzker. Pritzker had begun to study Zohar more than a decade ago using a dated and inadequate English translation. Pritzker, whose husband is chairman of the Hyatt Corporation, decided to commission a new English translation and on the advice of several leading scholars in the field turned to Daniel Matt. After appropriate reluctance to assume such a daunting task, Matt agreed. He has now embarked upon the project of producing a twelve-volume translation, which is likely to take fifteen years. As the first three volumes of *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* demonstrate, no one is better suited to this task than Daniel Matt.

Unfolding of Revelation

THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTENTION OF Zohar is that divine revelation did not end when Moses received the Torah at Sinai. The divine mysteries are continuously available to the mystic who is

capable of penetrating the levels of meaning hidden within the text of the Torah. The divine mysteries, however, cannot be accessed through traditional Torah study; the Torah text is a mystical tapestry that defies conventional interpretative methods.

Zohar explains that “each verse of Torah speaks of worldly things, but hints at the divine.” For example, we should not read Torah literally as stories about human events, but rather as mysterious and veiled hints about the inner workings of God and the relationship of the divine to the world. This notion of Torah is different from the conventional idea that Torah is a book to be read like other books. One does not, according to Zohar, “read” the Torah; one searches out the hidden or secret meanings. These meanings correlate to the inner workings of God—the *Sefirot*—their dynamics, and the secrets of how God is related to our world. Zohar stresses that “Torah speaks in the language of the sons of man, speaking of lowly matters that hint at higher matters.”

In this sense, Zohar is the ultimate antidote to Jewish fundamentalism—the view that the entire Torah is a fixed, inviolable text revealed by God to Moses at Sinai, that every word is literally true, and that all subsequent laws and practices are implicit within the words of Torah. Judaism has always had a more expansive view of Torah, but none as expansive as that of Zohar. In explaining the mystical view, one Kabbalist wrote: “All the words of Torah hint at the divine mystery: If all the oceans were ink, all people were scribes, and the heavens and earth were parchment, we would still be incapable of writing even one iota of what could be said about each and every verse of Torah.” Zohar’s mission is to turn the impenetrability of Torah into a bright, shining light of mystical illumination.

The Divine Mysteries

SO WHAT ARE THE SUBLIME MYSTERIES of the Torah? According to Matt, Zohar tells us that the ideal human state of

Zohar is the ultimate antidote to Jewish fundamentalism—the view that the entire Torah is a fixed, inviolable text revealed by God, and that all subsequent laws and practices are implicit within the words of Torah.

affairs is an almost erotic intimacy with the divine, cultivation of unbounded mystical awareness, and strengthening of the primordial connection between our souls and God. In Matt’s view, the Torah depicts a state of humanity that has fallen from grace—we lost our oceanic, unbounded mystical consciousness in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose to eat from the tree of rational, worldly knowledge rather than maintain their mystical, otherworldly innocence. As Matt says, “The original sin lies in losing intimacy with the divine, thereby constricting unbounded awareness. This loss follows inevitably from tasting the fruit of discursive knowledge; it is the price we pay for maturity and culture. The spiritual challenge is to search for that lost treasure—without renouncing the self or the world.”

It is that last point—our need to regain mystical consciousness without losing ourselves or the knowledge we have worked so hard to achieve—that is Zohar’s truest and most difficult mission. It is the study of Zohar, Matt says, that helps us to live in the world while preserving mystical consciousness. The mystical, zoharic understanding of Torah is the prime vehicle for lifting the individual beyond mundane knowledge to higher, mystical consciousness.

The main task of the mystic, then, is to learn *how* to understand Torah. Zohar coined the acronym *PaRDeS* (Garden or Paradise) as a mnemonic device that takes the first Hebrew letter from each term referring to four methods of interpreting Torah: literally (*peshat*), the plain or literal meaning of the text; allegorically (*remez*), the veiled meaning which the text hints at but does not make explicit; morally (*derash*), the *midrashic* or homiletic interpretation that is derived from reading between the

lines of Torah; and Zohar’s preferred mode, mystically (*sod*), the esoteric or mystical meaning.

PaRDeS: Four Ways to Study

Peshat: The approach of *peshat* is to define the plain sense or literal meaning of the text. The *peshat* meaning is the goal of the classical Jewish interpretive tradition and its major contributors including Rashi, Nahmanides, and others. Today, *peshat* includes the techniques of biblical linguistics that help to develop a clear analysis of each passage. It utilizes the findings of archeology, which provide data from ancient Near Eastern cultures. For example, the comparative studies of ancient Near Eastern creation myths show that several of the Genesis narratives are retellings of common myths from a monotheistic perspective. These studies highlight the uniqueness of Israelite religion, its borrowings, and its difference from then-contemporary civilizations.

Remez: Remez employs “hints” and allegory to derive new and extended meanings from unlikely Torah passages. This technique is found especially among those biblical interpreters who wanted to reconcile secular knowledge with Jewish tradition. For example, Jewish philosophers who favored this technique interpreted the narratives of the biblical patriarchs allegorically as representing the destiny of the soul in this world and in the afterlife. This made it possible for them to preserve the Torah as a source of higher truth while introducing new theories beyond the plain meaning of the text.

Another technique employed by practitioners of *remez* is the use of *gematria*, an analogy between two words based on the numerical equivalence of the Hebrew letters of each word. If two words have equal numerical significance,

practitioners of *remez* can attribute a deeper significance and analogy between the words. For example, the rules for the Sabbath which appear in Exodus are introduced by the phrase, "These are the things (*elleh ha-devarim*) that the Lord has commanded you to do" (Exodus 35:1). The practitioners of *gematria* noted that the numerical equivalence of "these are" (*elleh*) is thirty-six. They add to this the following values: "the" (*ha*) counts as one word and "things" (*de-varim*) as two since it is plural. Together, the sum equals thirty-nine. For *remez* practitioners, the verse thus hints at the thirty-nine classes of labor that are prohibited on the Sabbath.

Derash (or *Midrash*), which means to "search out," is the product of Jewish literary analysis of textual passages. This technique employs rules of interpretation that focus on the comparison of similar expressions in different passages and draw on other logical techniques including inference, induction, deduction, and contradiction. *Derash* sought to develop extended meanings of individual words or phrases based on these rules in order to derive ethical teachings or halachic rulings. *Derash* also employed literary analysis in order to supply meaning to cryptic biblical passages. When a biblical passage would puzzle the reader or raise questions without apparent answers, the reader could employ the technique of *derash* to find an answer.

Frequently, *derash* became the basis for elaborate and fanciful excursions into folklore, legend, and anecdote. For example, the biblical account of the patriarch Abraham who left his father's house did not supply any detail about the conditions of his upbringing. Therefore, the midrash filled in the missing pieces by supplying a fanciful story about how Abraham was the son of an idolmaker. One day, he was moved to destroy the idols in his father's workshop but panicked when he realized that his father was about to catch him in the act. He placed the hammer in the hand of the one remaining idol as his father walked in. He told his father that the

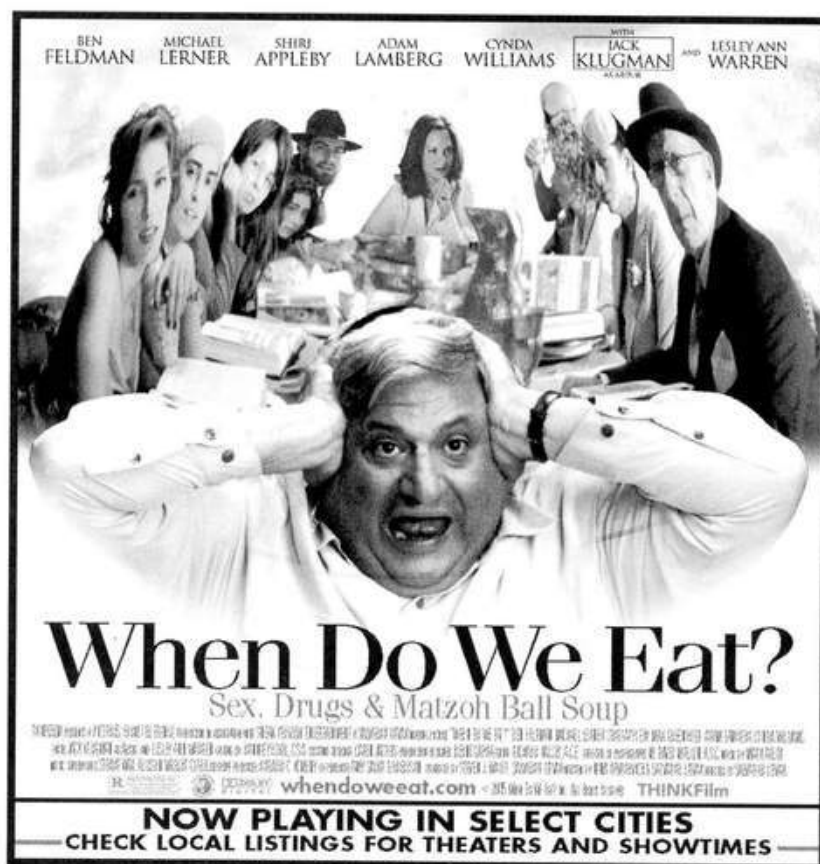
surviving idol destroyed the others. When his father scoffed at this absurd notion, Abraham pointed out that the very absurdity of the answer proves the folly of idolatry. This legend is typical of the attempt on the part of midrash to fill in the holes in the Torah text.

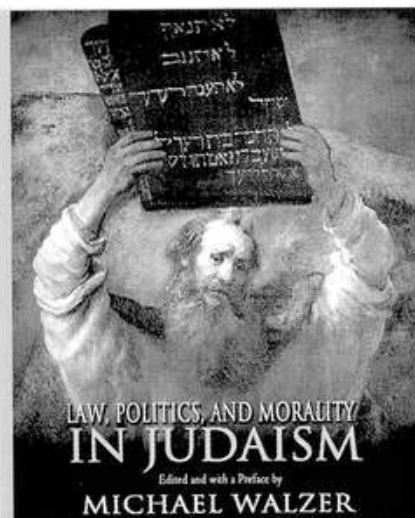
Sod is the technique employed by Zohar to indicate that each word or combination of words corresponds to God's inner qualities (the Sefirot) or to processes within the world of the Sefirot. Sod is the symbolic technique of uncovering the hidden allusions in the words of Torah through mystical insight. Kabbalists studied Torah, or decoded Torah, because it was a window to divinity. They were not concerned with the plain meaning of the text but with the *sod*—the metatext of Torah. This metatext was the version they believed existed within God and represented a higher reality than the apparently mundane events recorded in Torah. Zohar is the codebook (or *sod* book) that uncovers the metatext of Torah.

How Zohar Works

ZOHAR USES THE TRADITIONAL FORM of midrash to convey the *sod* meaning. It often works as follows: A biblical verse is introduced. However, the whole verse may not be reprinted, because readers are assumed to know the rest of the verse by heart. Often, the part of the verse not cited is the very basis for the interpretation that follows, which creates a real difficulty for a novice.

Next, a question or problem raised by the verse is identified as the subject of the unfolding midrash. However, sometimes this guiding question or problem is left unstated, and the reader must supply it as the key to what follows. The reader gets some help if a second verse is introduced. When that occurs, the reader must ask: what is the relationship between the two verses? Is there a contradiction, a term that appears in both but with different meanings, or some other interpretive challenge or question raised by the apposition of the two verses? The reader must identify





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Some kabbalists say that there are at least seventy valid interpretations of Torah. Others say that there are 600,000 faces to Torah, one for each adult male who stood at Sinai, each of whom heard the voice of God in a slightly different way.

the question or problem being raised because this is the key to understanding the midrash that follows.

An explanation of the first or second verse might follow and additional views may be introduced. Then, there is a conclusion that refers back to the original verse and ties the midrash together.

For example, one midrash in Zohar opens with a verse from Genesis: "And God said: Let the earth bring forth a living soul after its kind" (Genesis 1:24). Then, a second verse is introduced: "Not like these is the portion of Jacob, for the creator of all is He" (Jeremiah 10:16). The apposition of these two verses sets up an implied problem. The implicit question is: if God is the creator of all, how can Torah say that it is the earth itself that brings forth the soul?

The key to the sod interpretation—and the solution to the midrashic problem—is the kabbalistic principle that Torah speaks of worldly things but hints at the divine. Therefore, the interpretive key is that "earth" refers to a Sefirah, an aspect of God, and not to the created ground. "Jacob" refers to the Sefirah that creates souls, which is also called "the Creator of all." This Sefirah creates souls and transmits them to the Sefirah called "earth," which then delivers the living souls into the world. The contradiction between these two verses is resolved through the midrashic method, and the sod interpretation neatly wraps it up.

A Life's Work

THIS EXPANSIVE VIEW OF TORAH HAS its roots in classical, pre-kabbalistic midrash. Several midrashim suggest that each individual must understand Torah according to his own capacity, just as our ancestors did at Sinai. As our capacity increases, so does our understanding of Torah. Meaning shifts, in-

creases, and changes as our capacity grows. Kabbalah takes the notion of multiple meanings even further. Some kabbalists say that there are at least seventy valid interpretations of Torah. Others say that there are 600,000 faces to Torah, one for each adult male who stood at Sinai, each of whom heard the voice of God in a slightly different way.

Another midrash teaches that before we are born, a divine, primordial light shines from one end of the universe to the other and infuses our souls with divine wisdom, saturates our souls with Torah, and illuminates the entire Torah within us. We are not born as a blank slate but as vessels filled to capacity with divine wisdom. But when we are born, an angel, as it were, taps us on the philtrum (the indentation above the upper lip) and causes us to forget the Torah. Life then becomes a process not of learning, but of relearning Torah. This same light of divine wisdom within each one of us leads us to our personal relationship with Torah, according to Zohar.

Gershom Scholem once said, in the spirit of Zohar, that each Jewish soul has its own unique mystical path by which to read Torah, in the sense of it being a living body and a true manifestation of the divine word, a path connected with the root of each person's soul in the upper worlds, which he, and he alone, is able to reveal. This is the clarion call of Zohar, the call to embrace a singular devotion to a lifetime ambition of achieving unbounded, mystical awareness of God through Torah. And providing entry into this universe is the towering achievement of Matt's translation. ■

David S. Ariel is president of Siegal College of Judaic Studies, and author of *Kabbalah, What Do Jews Believe?* and *Spiritual Judaism*.

[BOOKS]

Stories that Heal the Soul

BY ESTELLE FRANKEL



THE LIGHT AND FIRE OF
THE BAAL SHEM TOV, by
Rabbi Yitzhak
Buxbaum. Continuum,
2005.

ELIE WIESEL ONCE wrote that "God made man because he loves stories!" If so, then God must be happily reading Yitzhak Buxbaum's new book, *The Light and Fire of the Baal Shem Tov*.

This latest offering by one of the most prolific contemporary scholars of Jewish mysticism masterfully evokes the magical-mystical world of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the eighteenth-century Jewish renewal movement, Hasidism. The Besht, as he is known, was a religious revolutionary whose teachings on love, joy, and simple devotion continue to influence all Jewish denominations to this day.

As a practicing psychotherapist, I am particularly interested in the Besht's use of storytelling in his work as a healer. Spinning seemingly simple tales about horses and crops with profound kabbalistic teachings embedded in them, the Besht lovingly planted stories like magic seeds in the soul of his listeners, who would sooner or later receive their hidden message.

In his first encounter with Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye, for example, the Besht used story-medicine to heal a tormented soul: "Listen closely," said the Besht, "I was once driving a coach with three horses—one brown, one black, and one white—and they were not able to neigh. A gentile peasant called out to me from his coach, 'Slacken the reins!' I slackened the reins, and once again the horses were able to neigh. Do you understand what I'm saying?" (p. 138) Hearing this simple tale evidently had a profound effect

on Yaakov Yosef, who instantly intuited its message: in order to serve God with love, he needed to learn how to use the energy of his animal soul rather than suppress it through fasting and excessive asceticism, as had been his practice.

Stories are a powerful means of communicating profound truths in a way that bypasses the ego's resistance to new ideas—hence their therapeutic value. When we allow ourselves to be moved by a story, we drop down to a place deep inside where we are innocent, unjaded, and open to outcome. As the ego relaxes its guard, transformational shifts can occur.

Buxbaum clearly wishes us to read these tales in this transformational way. And in his unabashedly devotional style, Buxbaum offers us an extremely comprehensive and beautifully written life in stories that read like a devotional biography. However, readers looking to get a more critical, multi-dimensional sense of the Besht as a real person, with his own doubts and struggles, will not find what they seek here. Buxbaum's Besht is more along the lines of the mythic *Adam Kadmon*, the ideal man he became in the religious imagination of his followers. Buxbaum sees his book as a *sefer kadosh*, a holy book, that he hopes people will not just read, but also study as scripture.

I find myself rereading these beautiful tales and being inspired by them, a sign perhaps that Buxbaum has accomplished his aim. And I notice that I keep going back to certain tales, like a child who asks to hear the same story night after night. It is said that children long to hear the same story over and over when it "stores" archetypal wisdom that "re-stores" their sense of fractured wholeness. These Besht tales do just that for me; they restore my hope and faith in

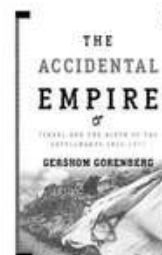
the power of love and simple, wholehearted devotion. They also faithfully transmit the "light" and "fire" of a *tzaddik*—a realized being with the power of a Hindu avatar or *sat guru*, something we rarely find in Jewish folklore.

Reb Shlomo of Radomsk once said, "A person who believes all the miracle stories is a fool, yet one who does not believe them is wicked." Instead of reading this book with a rational, historical eye, take these stories into the heart of your inner-child or inner-*tzaddik* and allow them to awaken your soul and illuminate your life. ■

Estelle Frankel is a psychotherapist and spiritual teacher (in Berkeley, CA) who blends depth psychology with the healing wisdom of Kabbalah. She is the author of Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness (Shambhala). Her website is www.sacredtherapy.com.

[BOOKS]

Capsule Reviews



THE ACCIDENTAL EMPIRE:
Israel and the Birth of the
Settlements, 1967-1977,
Gershom Gorenberg.
Times Books, 2006

DRAWING ON PREVIOUSLY classified materials, *Jerusalem Report* editor and columnist Gershom Gorenberg has written the single most important piece of investigative reporting to date on the beginnings of Israel's settlement project. Documenting how the absence of any explicit policy regarding the administration of the territories captured in June 1967 (the "decision," as stated by Prime Minister Eshkol, "not to decide") led to the establishment of the settlements as we now know them, *The Accidental Empire* calls into question much of what we know as "the facts."

Primarily, however, Gorenberg documents the fallibility of the larger-than-life human beings who created those facts. Among other things, he sifts through a

[TELEVISION/FILM]

Love in Search of Belief, Belief in Search of Love

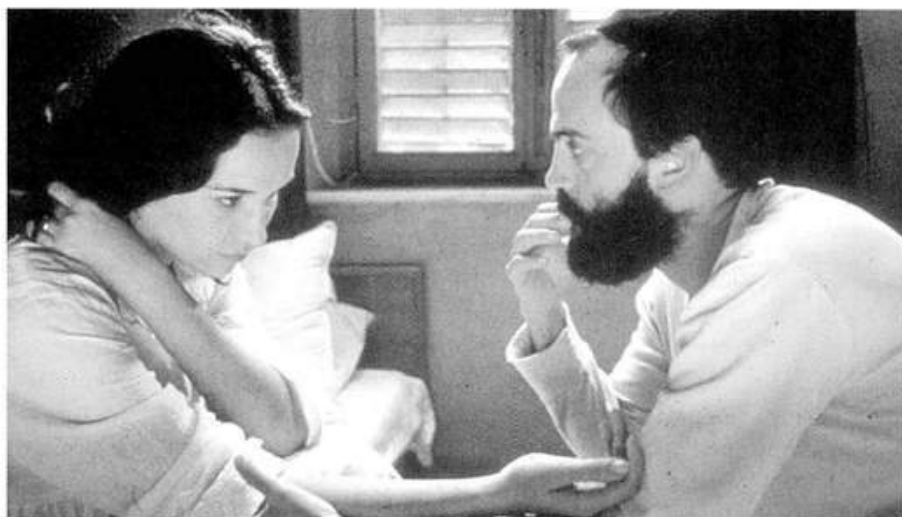
BY SHAI GINSBURG

AT THE CENTER OF *USHPIZIN* lies the question of faith: what does it mean to believe? How does faith shape one's life? What sacrifices does it force us to make?

Ushpizin (2004) is the product of collaboration between director Gidi Dar and scriptwriter Shuli Rand, who also plays the film's main character. It tells the story of Moshe and Malli Bellanga, a couple who become devoutly religious (*'hozrim biteshuvah*) and join the Breslau community. On the eve of *Sukkot*—the feast of tabernacles—the two find themselves too poor to put together a *sukkah* and buy the four species of plants necessary for the celebration. When a local charity leaves a thousand dollars on their doorstep, they take it to be a miracle in answer to their prayers. When Moshe is informed of an apparently abandoned *sukkah*, their holiday promises to become perfect. Moshe rushes out to buy the citron of his desires, the most beautiful and expensive in Jerusalem.

In the meantime, two of Moshe's former associates escape from prison and come looking for him. A blessing to have guests during *Sukkot* (a custom appropriately called *ushpizin*), Moshe and Malli warmly welcome them into their *sukkah*. Unfortunately, the two fugitives take advantage of the couple's hospitality, drinking and smoking, playing loud music, mocking their hosts' Orthodox lifestyle, and questioning the sincerity of Moshe's newfound faith. Could Moshe, a previously violent and angry individual, truly become someone whose life centers upon the love of God?

The havoc created by the Bellanga's guests brings to the fore the main issue that confounds their relationship: Despite their best efforts to live a devout lifestyle, after five years of marriage, the couple still does not



have a child. Moshe and Malli now face a difficult question. Should they maintain their relationship despite the fact that they cannot conceive, or should Moshe comply with one of the most important edicts of religious life, divorce Malli and look for a new wife?

This is not the first time that this heart-wrenching problem has been explored in Israeli film. Amos Gitai's 1999 film *Kadosh* ("sacred") also tackles Orthodox life and centers on a childless couple. Set in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem, the film tells the story of Meir and Rivka, who have been married for ten years without giving birth to a child. Despite the tremendous love they have for one another, the rabbi forces Meir to divorce Rivka, so Meir can marry again and have children with another woman. At the same time, *Kadosh* also follows Malka, Rivka's sister. While Malka is in love with Ya'akov, who has left the Orthodox world for secular Jerusalem, the rabbi decrees that she should marry his assistant, Yossef. Malka now has to choose between her love and her loyalty to her family and community.

Ushpizin portrays a world that revels in the presence of God in everyday life, a

God who works in mysterious ways to reward the faithful and answers the prayers of those who are firm in their belief. Ultimately, it is a world made and ruled by love: the love of God for his creatures, and the love between men and women. In their love for each other, Moshe and Malli reinforce each other's love for God, and their love helps them to overcome the obstacles life puts in their way. *Kadosh*, on the other hand, portrays a world without grace, in which faith is a synonym for chauvinism. Indeed, Gitai shows how faith is used to control and subordinate women to values that not only alienate them, but also undermine their capacity to love. Ultimately, faith destroys the home of Meir and Rivka, ironically undermining the only sacred space available to them.

Consider, for instance, the role that the rabbi plays in each film. In both, he is described as a father figure, a representative of the Law and of God in the community. But in *Kadosh*, the rabbi is also the spokesperson for a militant brand of misogyny. Pressuring Meir to divorce Rivka, he describes women as shapeless matter that receives its true form from men. Moreover, the rabbi asserts, a barren

***Ushpizin* portrays a world that revels in the presence of God in everyday life, a God who works in mysterious ways to reward the faithful and answers the prayers of those who are firm in their belief.**

woman is not a woman: a Jewish woman's only *raison d'être* is to serve her husband, and enable him to study Torah and bear children. For the rabbi, giving birth is the main weapon of the Orthodox community in its war with the secular world; for the sake of victory, the individual must sacrifice their happiness. No concessions can be made for human frailty.

By contrast, *Ushpizin* introduces a completely different image of a rabbi. A bearded figure, dressed in white, Dar's rabbi is a holy man who converses with God and imparts His love to the community. Despite the fact that the couple is barren, the rabbi does not condemn Moshe and Malli's marriage, nor does he attempt to undo it. On the contrary, he serves as a marriage counselor, working to strengthen the bond between them, reassuring the couple of their love of God and each other. God will answer their prayers. While *Kadosh* depicts a community that, in its struggle with a liberated secular world, ignores the emotional well-being of its members, *Ushpizin* paints a picture of a community whose faith in God can bring about a true realization of love.

In one of *Kadosh*'s first scenes, Meir and Yossef are at the yeshiva. Yossef is praying, crying out loud to God to open his heart to love Him and to sanctify His name, while those present study quietly at their desks, oblivious to Yossef's outburst. Suddenly, a Talmudic debate erupts on how to make tea on the Sabbath. Should one put the sugar in first, or pour water into the cup? The true meaning of Yossef's avid religiosity is revealed later in the movie. On his wedding night, Yossef is more preoccupied with the need to fulfill the commandment to procreate than with respecting his wife. The sexual act between them, which begins mechanically, as Yossef "arranges" Malka's body to suit the act, becomes more and more violent, as he futilely attempts to pene-

trate her body. His failure to show love—emotionally and physically—exposes the violence concealed in his words. The more he seeks to love God, the less he is able to love another human being.

Ushpizin's Moshe Bellanga, on the other hand, builds on the Hassidic belief in an immediate, intimate interaction between the faithful and God. In his hours of need, Moshe seeks a secluded space, often in the forest, in which he can address God in private. In these intimate conversations, Moshe expresses profound agitation and anxiety, baffled by the mounting obstacles that prevent him from fulfilling his religious obligations. Why, he wonders at the beginning of the film, does he not have enough money to celebrate Sukkot in a befitting way? For Moshe, this is not a question of "showing off" his religiosity, but of proving his love for God. Thus, exasperated by the behavior of his two guests, Moshe runs to the forest and earnestly implores God, "I do not want to be angry," fearing that anger would come between him and God and tear him away from his faith.

It is no wonder, then, that the two films treat their female characters in opposite ways. For Gitai, women are second-class citizens in the Orthodox community, unless they make a conscious effort to escape its oppressive authority. Despite the fact that, following a visit at a gynecologist, Rivka learns that she is fertile, she remains unable to raise the issue. Indeed, while both Meir and Rivka suffer emotionally because of the rabbi's edict, it is Rivka who pays the price. Stigmatized as a divorcee and as barren, unable to overcome her love for Meir, she is doomed to a life of solitude, while Meir retains his position within the community.

Ushpizin presents a different picture of family life, where husband and wife fulfill their designated roles with love and respect for each other. In fact, Moshe

depends on his wife as much as, if not more than, she depends on him. Following yet another mishap with their guests, she finally leaves him, insisting that he should find another wife with whom he could have children. Ignoring Moshe's protests—"only with you, only with you,"—Malli departs, while Moshe becomes helpless, unable to maintain his life. The unity and the love of family are at the center of his faith. It is this love that ultimately provides the substrate upon which God's miracles work, showing His love for the world.

Despite their profound differences, what unites *Ushpizin*'s portrayal of Orthodox religious life with that of *Kadosh* is the seeming irreconcilability of piety with interpersonal love. Even in *Ushpizin*'s fairytale-like atmosphere, where miracles really do come true and childless couples are considered welcome, the most oppressive aspects of tradition continue to wreak havoc on the lives of those who choose to commit themselves to God. Could it be possible to consider not having to make such tradeoffs in order to truly live a fulfilling life of faith? Yes, and Orthodox Jews have found many ways to do so. Nevertheless, they've had to precisely because of the tragedies that both *Ushpizin* and *Kadosh* so beautifully describe.

While *Kadosh* portrays Orthodox religious life as tragic, because it cannot reconcile piety with romantic love, *Ushpizin* puts into relief a religious experience that welds the two together. In a fairytale manner it thus allows its characters to overcome this most oppressive aspect of tradition and to avoid the havoc it wreaks on the lives of those who choose to commit themselves to God. Is it possible to live a truly fulfilling life of faith in the "real world" without having to choose between piety and love? Yes, and Orthodox Jews have found many ways to do so. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of tragedies like the one so beautifully described in *Kadosh* that they have had to look. ■

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



[MUSIC]

Subverting World Music

The Sublime Frequencies Label BY CHARLIE BERTSCH

THERE ARE MOMENTS, LISTENING to Sublime Frequencies compilations such as *Radio Sumatra: The Indonesian FM Experience*, *Choubi Choubi!: Folk and Pop Sounds From Iraq*, and *I Remember Syria*, when listeners lose their place. Instead of feeling transported to the faraway lands of their dreams, they hear this music as the mental wallpaper that it is: colorful, flat, and prone to misalignment. The sensation of being there gives way to the confusion of "Where am I?" And that's precisely the effect label founder Alan Bishop and his collaborators are seeking to achieve.

A member of the long-lived band Sun City Girls, for whom the terms "alternative" and "independent" are more than empty record-store categories, Bishop has carved out an intriguing side career as a purveyor of nation- and region-specific anthologies that defy categorization by genre. Indeed, were Sublime Frequencies' releases not given geographic titles, most Westerners would be hard-pressed to describe them at all. A typical release for the label, like the double album *Radio India*, encompasses everything from news report sound bites to saccharine pop numbers. Some stay

with a particular selection for several minutes at a time. Others, such as the ear-opening *Radio Palestine: Sounds of the Eastern Mediterranean* or *Radio Morocco*, consist largely of short segments, with the emphasis placed less on the bits and pieces themselves than on the cuts between them.

In a recent interview with Ryan Brown for indieworkshop.com (www.indieworkshop.com/interviews.php?id=114)—Bishop explains that the Sublime Frequencies catalogue represents "our private collection in full regalia." This outwardly paradoxical formulation goes a long way toward capturing the label's aesthetic. Its compilations often sound like a stream of consciousness, the record of a particular person's stroll along the radio dial. But, like the interior monologues of a modern novel, this sonic landscape is too dense with interesting content to feel like a raw feed. The hand of the artist reveals itself in the arrangement of material. Although the sounds we hear may come from a private collection, they have clearly been prepared for public consumption. When Bishop speaks of "full regalia," he doesn't mean that the individual recordings in a compilation have been substantially altered, but that they have been selected

with each other in mind. In this respect, he and his collaborators at Sublime Frequencies are like documentary filmmakers who piece together found footage. The end result is a work whose originality is purely a function of montage.

Most fans of so-called "world music" fall into one of two categories: Either they seek a non-threatening experience of the exotic, on par with a familiar meal in an ethnic restaurant, or they truly wish to be educated. Sublime Frequencies is a label for the latter. Yet unlike overtly pedagogic projects—*Rough Guide's* music releases are a prime example—Sublime Frequencies releases carefully avoid invoking a teacher-student relationship. Records like *Folk and Pop Songs of Sumatra: Volume 1* and *Bush Taxi Mali: Field Recordings From Mali* are not presented as scholarly endeavors. Even on the liner notes for the atypical *Broken-Hearted Dragonflies*, which captures the noises made by insects in Myanmar, Bishop goes out of his way to avoid the posture of the objective researcher. After relating a folk legend that, "when the male is finished mating, they make this crazy sound and their chests explode and they drop dead to the ground," he confesses that he has found "no documentation of this story anywhere," but adds that, he is "not concerned with appropriate documentation or scientific evidence. The *idea* is amazing."

Indeed, the label seems happy to promote its collections as an alternative to the scholarly approach. On the liner notes for *Streets of Lhasa*, for example, Steve Barker compares the music on the record to the American artists Harry Smith featured in his famous anthology of folk music. "Straight off the Tibetan Plateau, this is another kind of high lonesome sound, but unlike Dock Boggs and Roscoe Holcomb, Kokomo Arnold and Blind Boy Fuller, these artists will remain 'undiscovered' by academically funded folklorists and uncategorized by

the deadening brand of a matrix number. If you need to hear them again, you're just gonna have to travel." Given that the listener reading these notes is sure to have the CD that they accompany, Barker gives the role played by Zhang Jian, who collected the material, and Christiaan Virant and Alan Bishop, who edited it, a curious spin. To listen to this compilation, he implies, is to travel.

Bishop expands on this notion in the interview. Asked whether Sublime Frequencies releases can facilitate greater cultural understanding, he lashes out at the passivity of most consumers. "For greater cultural understanding, it will take much more than listening to a few songs. People are always looking for the easiest way to do things so that they can resume their recreational agenda. 'Google it, read a paragraph on three websites, BINGO! I'm an expert!'" So long as listeners enjoy the comforts of home, whether that word is interpreted literally or metaphorically, they aren't going to make substantive changes. "Experiences facilitate understanding and the discovery of truth. When the average person is driven enough to experience things themselves instead of depending on others to do it for them, then there's a possibility of greater cultural understanding."

What listeners really need, in other words, is not orientation but *disorientation*. It's impossible not to notice that the Sublime Frequencies catalogue consists primarily of material from Asia and, more specifically, the areas where Islam has been a major cultural influence. Significantly, this is the same world Edward Said focuses on in his landmark 1978 book *Orientalism*, in which he distinguishes between the "brute reality" of the people who inhabit this East and European "ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient." This split matters because of the inequality it betrays. Orientalism derives from a "flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper

hand. . . . The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, with very little resistance on the Orient's part."

Among other goals, Bishop and his collaborators clearly wish to unsettle the stereotypes that hold even well-meaning fans of world music in thrall. But that is easier said than done. Stereotypes are like crabgrass: the minute you think you've rooted them out, they spring back up with a vengeance. On the notes for the fascinatingly diverse *Radio Sumatra*, Bishop writes that "many of the station ID's could be mistaken for American or European networks and much of the music is highly influenced by Western pop, rock, punk, metal, rap, etc. But beyond these obvious comparisons is an explosive musical kaleidoscope, still fresh, somewhat sincere and naïve, and a bit resistant to the grasp of the world's cultural export Moguls." Although the sounds on the record undermine assumptions of both scholarly and consumerist Orientalism, including the neat-and-tidy divide between East and West, Bishop's words come perilously close to reproducing the worldview he wishes to dismantle.

This is one of the more obvious examples of a tension that runs throughout the Sublime Frequencies catalogue. Even the most touchy-feely collaboration between collector and collected still involves a power differential. Somebody wants something and can take the necessary steps to get it. They can fund the research, pay for any required trips, get clearances from the local authorities, and secure the rights to display or distribute what they have collected. Despite the wealth generated by oil economies in the Middle East, most collectors of consequence—everyone from private individuals to government institutions—are still from the West. And, if they collect in the East—anywhere from the Mediterranean to Indonesia—or in Africa, they do so as the bearers of a historical dominance that cannot be wished away by good intentions.

Although Bishop and his collaborators

perform their collecting on a miniscule budget, without the financial and institutional backing of museums or wealthy private collectors, they still participate in an asymmetrical cultural exchange made possible by their own privilege. In the end, their conviction that it is necessary for listeners to leave home must be measured against the realization that, no matter how hard they try to lessen the impact of their travels, they will inevitably bring something *from home* with them on their journey. When Said remarks that the Westerner thought about the Orient, "because he *could be there*," it is precisely this phenomenon he had in mind. The real strength of the Sublime Frequencies project is that it demonstrates how we end up walking in our own footsteps no matter how far we stray from the beaten path. ■

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[MUSIC]

Capsule Reviews



SLUDGE TEST, by Gutbucket. Canteloupe Music, 2006

FEATURING EVERYTHING from heavy metal rhythm guitar

chords to Albert Ayler-like horn bursts, all hurtling forward at a breakneck pace that suddenly stops on a dime, Gutbucket's third album, *Sludge Test*, initially seems like a textbook case of artistic pretense. But strangely, the longer you listen to it, the more relaxed it sounds. Moments that scream "show off" on the first or second listen start to recede into the background. Although acrobatic in their attempt to reconcile musical idioms that go together like plaid and polka dots, they build enough space—and sometimes even silliness—into their compositions to give the record staying power.

Part of this underlying levity derives, paradoxically, from Gutbucket's willing-

ness to give their music the imprimatur of the *shtetl*. The band mines the lode rediscovered by John Zorn, but with even less concern for the sanctity of tradition. At times *Sludge Test* sounds like the work of a punk band playing the wedding and Bar Mitzvah circuit. And those times are the record's best. For Gutbucket, fusion ends up signaling not a desire to produce music that is sophisticated or mature, but rather music that is open to the layering of selves that makes history personal. Proficiency in playing jazz doesn't require turning one's back on the Deep Purple riffs of one's adolescence. Nor does it demand the washing away of one's ethnic heritage. Sometimes the whole *is* greater than the sum of its parts. —Charlie Bertsch



NEW HEAVY, by Dub Trio. ROIR, 2006

THE CROSS-FERTILIZATION of punk and dub reggae is nothing new. As far

back as the late 1970s, British artists such as the Ruts, the Clash, and PiL found ways to incorporate dub-style sound design and remixes in their work, giving punk its first multicultural and experimental artistic sensibilities. Since then, with certain profound exceptions like first-generation hardcore band the Bad Brains and Washington, D.C. indie icons Fugazi, dub has largely taken an aesthetic backseat to modern punk's preferences for appropriating motifs from hip-hop and heavy metal. If dub has reappeared at all over punk's last sixteen years, it is usually in the midst of a hip-hop style breakdown, with the application of a delay or spring reverb to a snare drum.

Enter the world of New York's Dub Trio, and their second full-length album, the appropriately titled *New Heavy*. As much an artistic break from their more experimental-sounding first album as it is from a heavy metal-obsessed contemporary punk scene, *New Heavy* is both an ironic comment on the increasing aes-

thetic conservatism of punk and an accurate description of how Dub Trio is inventing their own brand of in-your-face dub reggae. Laying down power chords to the tune of an at times almost martial sounding rhythm section, alternating between extremely loud traditional reggae arrangements and flat-out hardcore, *New Heavy* is like a nostalgia trip back to the early eighties without being annoyingly retro. If the band simply aimed to resurrect a forgotten subgenre of punk, it most certainly succeeded.

What the *New Heavy* lacks is an identifiable position—not necessarily a defined political one, but some kind of social narrative other than its intuitive ability to reproduce the profound feelings of alienation and urban decay that made classic dub, at its most noir, so endearing to first generation punk rockers. It's not enough just to conjure up the vibe. The music still has to go somewhere. If *New Heavy* is any indication, Dub Trio's next full length album just might arrive at that destination. —Joel Schalit

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The Blade

November 3, 2004

1.

Usually I don't mind that being out of the city now
means still having to endure the drone of planes,
traffic on the ubiquitous highways, mowers and pumps;
they've become almost a part of the music of nature,

but this morning, the builder's men clearing the woods
facing our house, the roar of their truck hauling away
the old oaks and the screech of the blade of their dozer
scraping the stony soil, seem beyond bearing.

2.

Though I know all too well it's the lost election,
the sense not only of disappointment but betrayal,
of realizing a campaign could succeed by relying
entirely on fear-mongering, slander, and lies.

And beyond that a foreboding: always before,
whatever party of regression has been in ascendance,
the under-voices of conciliation and reason
were audible somehow: can anyone claim that now?

3.

In Spain, during the reign of Franco, I blundered
into a rally the tyrant had arranged for himself. A butcher,
who'd jailed them for decades in a dark ages of army
and church, the people couldn't cheer him enough.

For a moment, when the swarming mob surged,
I was lifted from my feet and swept toward a line of tanks:
frightening, that mass of bodies heaving against me,
pulling me down, that having to fight not to fall.

4.

So far off on a hill I can't hear him,
a farmer is plowing his fields for the spring wheat.
Just across though, the excavators hammer
and grunt and whine, unfurling a fog of diesel

that fumes out over the stumps and slashed earth,
and hangs there, as though the ground itself
was afire.

It thins when the wind shifts, but still my eyes sting,
and my mouth still tastes of oil and lead.

—C.K. Williams

Say "NO" to the Religious Right

They've distorted the message of the Bible, God, and religion—to justify war, torture, domestic spying, erosion of civil liberties, homophobia, reducing aid to the poor while cutting taxes for the rich, packing the federal judiciary with right-wing ideologues, and more. They blame independent women, gays and lesbians, and reproductive rights for eroding the family, and secularists and civil libertarians for "stealing Christmas" and undermining communal values.

Many secular people are "spiritual but not religious." They are joining with progressives in existing religious communities to build a Spiritual Left to counter the Religious Right. We can speak to millions of Americans whose lives are made miserable by the culture of materialism and selfishness that surrounds them, but who have rarely heard America's spiritual crisis addressed in a progressive way. A Spiritual Left could be one of the most effective ways to break the power of the Religious Right—but we need your support to make it happen.

Here are three things YOU can do:



THE NETWORK
OF SPIRITUAL
PROGRESSIVES

1. Come to the Spiritual Activism Conference, a founding gathering for the Network of Spiritual Progressives, May 17-20, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Speakers Include: **CORNEL WEST**, author of *Democracy Matters*; **BENEDICTINE SISTER JOAN CHITTISTER**, author of *Job's Daughters: Women and Power*; **CONGRESSWOMAN LYNNE WOOLSEY**, chair, Progressive Caucus, U.S. Congress; **RABBI MICHAEL LERNER**, editor, *Tikkun Magazine*; **REV. JIM WILLIS**, editor, *Sojourners* magazine;

CINDY SHEEHAN, mother of U.S. soldier killed in Iraq; **RABBI BRIAN WALT**, chair, Rabbis for Human Rights; **ROBERT THURMAN**, president, Tibet House and author of *Inner Revolution*; **KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL**, editor, *The Nation*; **WILLIAM SINKFORD**, national president of the Unitarian Universalist Association; **ARUN GANDHI**, grandson of the Mahatma; **CHRISTOPHER HEDGES**, author of *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*; **CHARLENE SPRETNAK**, author of *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven*; **ARCHDEACON MICHAEL KENDALL**, Diocese of NY, Episcopal Church, USA; **BOB EDGAR**, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; **ABDUL AZIZ SAID**, International Peace and Conflict Resolution, American University; **PETER GABEL**, chair of the Spirituality and Politics Institute, New College of California; **HARVEY COX**, author of *When Jesus Came to Harvard* and of *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century*; **REV. JOAN BROWN CAMPBELL**, former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ and now director of Religion at the Chautauqua Institute; **MICHAEL J. GORMAN**, Dean of The Ecumenical Institute of Theology, St. Mary's Seminary; **REV. GLEN HAROLD STASSEN**, progressive Evangelical theologian and author of *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*; **MARIE DENNIS**, director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; **REV. TONY CAMPOLO**, Evangelical minister and author of *How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel*; **HARRY KNOX**, Human Rights Campaign; **MICHAEL BADER**, psychoanalyst and author of *Arousal*; **JANET CHISHOLM**, Episcopal Peace Fellowship; **REV. AMA ZENYA**, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oakland; **REV. PAUL SHERRY**, former national chair, United Church of Christ; **REV. JAMES WINKLER**,

chair, Board of Church and Society, United Methodists of America;

RABBI STEPHEN JACOBS, of Kol Tikvah synagogue; **ENOLA AIRD**, director, The Motherhood Project at the Center for American Values; **BILL MEADOWS**, president, The Wilderness Society; **RABBI DEBORA KOHN**, rabbi of Reutlinger Center for Jewish Life; **RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW**, chair, the Shalom Center; **REV. OSAGYEFU SEKOU**, chair, Clergy and Laity Concerned about Iraq; **REV. PENNY NIXON**, author of *Queer Spirituality*; **SHEIKH KABIR HELMINSKI**, Sufi mystic; **DAVID BECKMANN**, chair, Bread for the World; **REV. ROBERT HARDIES**, pastor of All Souls Church; **REV. LOUISE GREEN**, pastor of All Souls Church; **HOLLY NEAR**, a leading troubadour of social change; **SVI SHAPIRO**, professor of education, University of North Carolina; **REV. LYNICE PINKARD**, co-founder of City of Refuge, UCC, in San Francisco; **STACY BANNERMAN**, author of *When the War Came Home: The Inside Story of Reservists and the Families They Leave Behind*; **JEFFREY KUAN**, Prof. Old Testament, Pacific School of Religion; **JONATHAN GRANOFF**, chair, American Bar Association Committee on Arms Control and National Security; **BARBARA COOMBS LEE**, chair, Compassion and Choices; **ROSHIE BERNIE GLASSMAN**, chair, Zen Peacemakers; **THEA LEVKOWITZ**, chair, Partnership for Religion and the Environment, Wash. Association of Churches; **MICHAEL POSNER**, president, Human Rights First; **REV. DEBORA JOHNSON**, Religious Science minister; **RALPH WOLF**, chair, Western Association of Schools and Colleges; **CARRIE NEWCOMER**, singer; **JOHN DEAR, S.J.**, author, *Living Peace*; **MARY DARLING**, professor of communications, Spring Arbor University. (For more information, look between pages 16 and 17.)

2. Join the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Your membership will send an important message: the Right does not speak for the millions of Americans who care about their spiritual lives and don't want them dictated by the Religious Right. Help us undermine the climate of hostility to religion in the liberal and progressive culture—and thereby win millions of people who feel condescended to by the contemporary Left over to a peace and social justice agenda they can believe in.

3. Read the new book *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* by Rabbi Michael Lerner.

"Rabbi Lerner has written a book that sends a clear call to everyone who cares about the future of America to take part in the transformation of our history into something of beauty, meaning and justice—a work that, whether we think of it that way or not, is intrinsically sacred." — Los Angeles Book Review

Lerner outlines a politics of meaning that connects traditional liberal values to what have been inaccurately defined as conservative concerns. The Left Hand of God serves the vital purpose of articulating a progressive religious alternative to the conservative flavor of religion that has dominated American politics and society for the past 30 years." — Washington Post Book World



The Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP)

More info or to register for the conference:

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