

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

(tē-kūn) To mend, repair, and transform the world. JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2007

A CENTENNIAL FORUM

Heschel

FOR A NEW
GENERATION

Hope ^{is} Back!

Democratic victories
in Congress give
Spiritual Progressives
a powerful opportunity
to influence public
discourse in the
next two years.

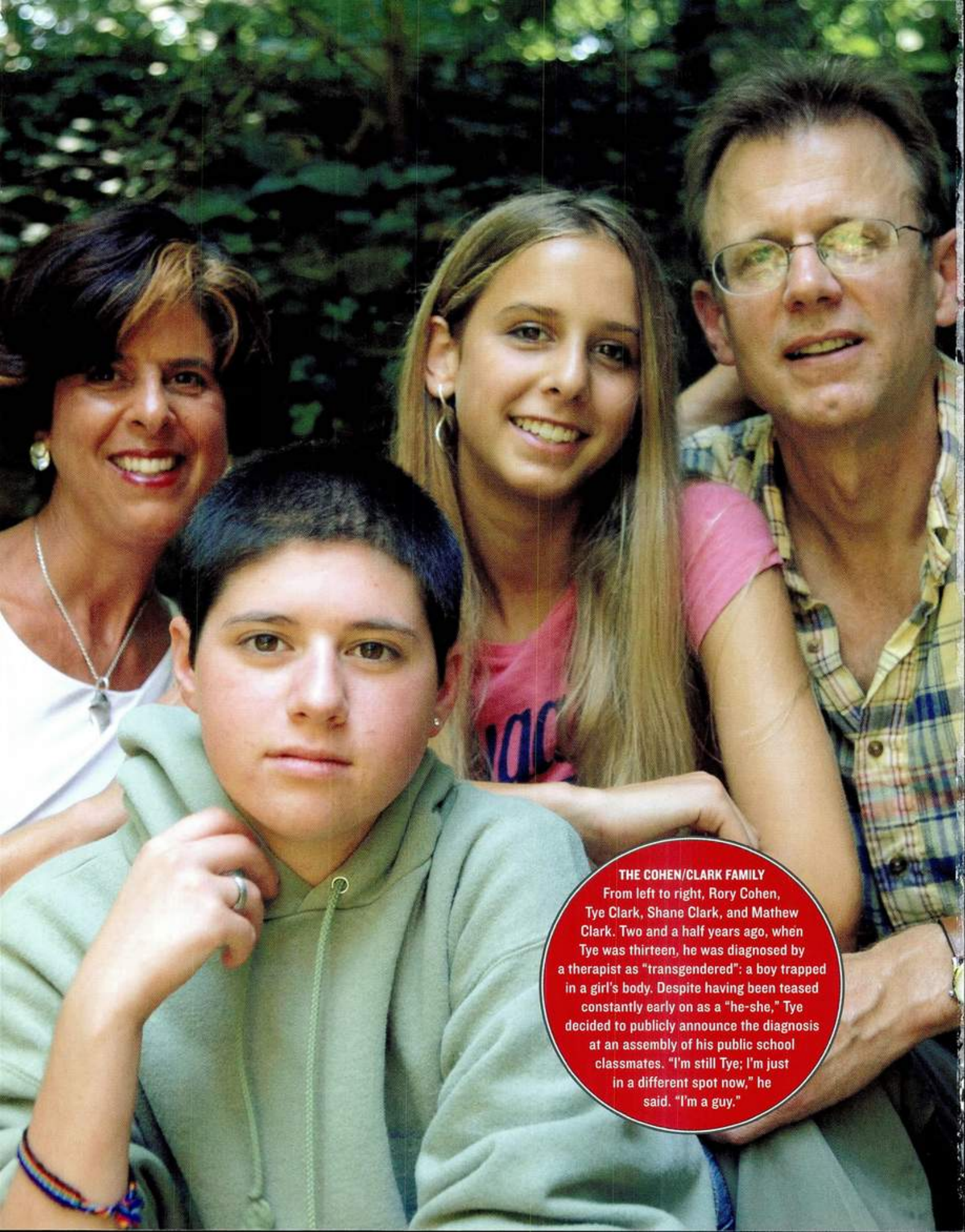
BY MICHAEL LERNER



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Jimmy Carter: Palestine, Peace, and Apartheid
Najib Mahfouz | The Missing Katrina Story
Is Monogamy Necessary? | Jean-Luc Godard



THE COHEN/CLARK FAMILY

From left to right, Rory Cohen, Tye Clark, Shane Clark, and Mathew Clark. Two and a half years ago, when Tye was thirteen, he was diagnosed by a therapist as "transgendered": a boy trapped in a girl's body. Despite having been teased constantly early on as a "he-she," Tye decided to publicly announce the diagnosis at an assembly of his public school classmates. "I'm still Tye; I'm just in a different spot now," he said. "I'm a guy."

work for peace and understanding among all people. I share your love of the Jewish people and desire to have the ethics of Torah be at the center of our lives, not just in how we talk and what we believe, but in how we act among ourselves and with the "other." I pray that we will find ways to respect our differences and see those differences as strengths, heralding a time when diversity and pluralism becomes the only sensible response to a world that has lost its way.

Thank You.

TERRY ROSENBERG
(No address given)

WHO'S TO BLAME?

WHILE I AM CERTAINLY NO defender of Hezbollah, as I am no defender of any political or military organization that uses violence to achieve

its selfish aims, I take exception to Mitchell Plitnick's article: "Two Very Different Wars" [*Tikkun*, September/October 2006], in that it presumes that "Hezbollah initiated this latest round of madness in the Middle East". He goes on to insist essentially, that Hezbollah was not provoked by the Israelis, and that it decided to "engage Israel". Generally, I believe that it is always dangerous to assume who started any particular conflict, as the reality on the ground is most often more complicated than we realize and the conflict is often ongoing. However, I would urge Mr. Plitnick to research further and assure himself (and his readers) that Israel didn't launch the first assault upon Lebanon, in its desire to stamp out Hezbollah.

On the other hand, it does us little good to pursue who actually started the "latest round of madness." I will add that it is not wise to follow the mainstream media's take on who provoked who, as historically this has consistently proven to be flawed, though everyone takes it for gospel truth.

The beginning of "more constructive international diplomacy" that Mr. Plitnick prescribes as one of the keys to solving the crisis, I believe, begins with handling such a situation between two such warring parties as even handedly as possible and not being too quick to define who started what. In true peacemaking, this would mean extending such even-handedness straight down to the issue of disarmament. After watching, for decades, Israel's

continuing brutality towards its neighbors, is it not important, if one is to speak of disarmament, to consider the disarming of Israel?

At any rate the entire article smacks of holding Hezbollah as chiefly responsible and giving after-the-fact blame to Israel for its "unjustifiable" "response", as if Israel is not a chief provoker here. I think that is a mistake.

CHRISTOPHER
LUTTER-GARDELLA
Minneapolis, MN

Mitchell Plitnick Responds:

Christopher Lutter-Gardella's admonishment to avoid putting stock in the mainstream media is on target, but misplaced. In my job, I monitor international, alternative, Hebrew and Arabic media on a daily basis. I relied on these

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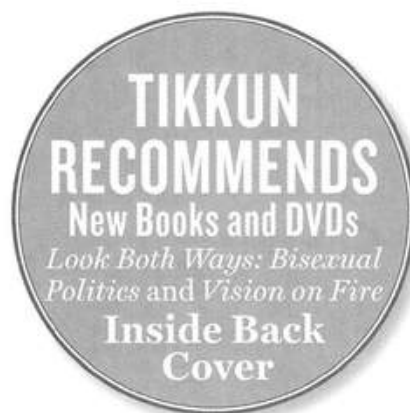
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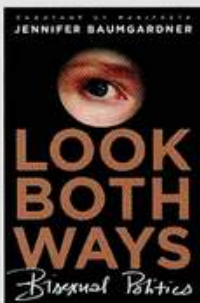
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LOOK BOTH WAYS: Bisexual Politics

By Jennifer Baumgardner. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007

REINVENTING THE PERSONAL IS the political narrative that's been the staple of feminist writing since the 1960s, in *Look Both Ways* social critic Jennifer Baumgardner turns her discerning eye to bisexuality. Contending that increasing numbers of women are coming out of the closet of single-gender relations to embrace their own diversified desires, *Look Both Ways* documents an emerging sexual consciousness that builds on the feminist dream of a better world. According to Baumgardner, bisexuality is the hallmark of contemporary feminism. We couldn't agree with her more.

**GOD'S WAR: A New History of the Crusades**

Christopher Tyerman. Oxford University Press, 2006

IF THERE IS ONE THEOLOGICAL word associated with the War on Terror, it's *crusade*. At a time when the word is commonly invoked by both Americans to describe their fight against "Islamofascism," and jihadists to pejoratively characterize Western colonialism, Christopher Tyerman's mammoth history of the Crusades could not be more relevant. Arguing that the era spanning the period of 1096 to 1500 was fuelled by a culture for whom war was an expression of worship, social discipline, and Christian charity, *God's War* raises the unsettling question of whether we are indeed living through an equally dark and primitive moment in history.

**THE UNCOMFORTABLE DEAD**

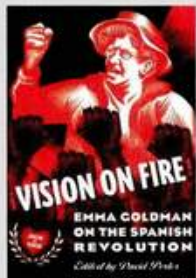
By Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Subcomandante Marcos. Akashic Books, 2006

AS LATIN AMERICA CONTINUES to turn Left, Mexico's increasing levels of social strife take on newer and more complex interpretations—particularly when read through the prism of its highly politicized cadre of fiction writers. Penned by legendary revolutionary intellectual Subcomandante Marcos and novelist/historian Paco Ignacio Taibo II, this experimental murder mystery frames the Mexican search for social justice in stunningly clear relief. Moving from Chiapas to Mexico City, *The Uncomfortable Dead* reads like a Rough Guide gone terribly wrong—in all the right political ways. Highly recommended.

**VISION ON FIRE: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution**

Edited by David Porter. AK Press, 2006

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE that seventy years later, the Spanish Civil War remains a subject of intense debate. Rightly called "the most thoroughgoing social revolution in history" by *Vision on Fire* editor David Porter, the conflict witnessed the most comprehensive political achievements by workers to create an anarchist society. Who better to interpret these events than Emma Goldman, who made repeated trips to Spain to document this struggle. Seamlessly weaving together radical polemics and reportage suited for first-time readers of the subject, *Vision on Fire* is a perfect introduction to Goldman's renowned work.

**POLEMICS**

By Alain Badiou. Verso Books, 2006

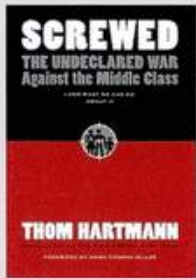
BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION, French moral philosopher Alain Badiou ought to be as popular a public intellectual as Slavoj Žižek. Though Badiou is a profoundly insightful and sophisticated Marxist in the tradition of Louis Althusser, perhaps the problem lies in the fact that despite his explicit engagements with politics, his English-language publications have been limited to high theory. With *Polemics*, however, Badiou breaks his own mold, grappling with the realm of what he calls "metapolitics," while taking to task public misconceptions of the Iraq wars, Kosovo, and China's Cultural Revolution. Stunning.

POLEMICS

SCREWED: The Undeclared War on the Middle Class

By Thom Hartmann. Berrett-Koehler, 2006

THE MAJOR DEFICIT IN MOST LITERATURE on neo-liberalism is its tendency to overlook the consequence of such economisms for Americans. Though speaking in a language entirely distinct from such work, Thom Hartmann's *Screwed* is perhaps the only popular analysis of this ideology's transformation of American civil society. Focusing on the tragic plight of the country's rapidly shrinking middle class, the charismatic talk show host mounts an entirely convincing attack on the ruthlessness of laissez-faire economics and the threat it poses to democratic politics.



Readers Respond

PRIMARY EDUCATION

THANKS TO ANNE TRUBEK for her account of learning by living intimately with her developing child [*Tikkun*, November/December 2006]. I also had powerful learning experiences when I was a mother of young children.

I'd like to suggest that the classmate's question about what the Chanukah story has to do with Jesus Christ offers a teaching opportunity. It is the story of how the Jews saved the Temple and their religious practice so that when Jesus was born, his mother Mary could take him to the Temple.

For example, in Luke 2:23-24, it is stated "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

EDNA E. HEATHERINGTON
Baltimore, MD

BACK FROM EXILE

CONGRATULATIONS ON Ben Naparstek's tribute to Hannah Arendt [*Tikkun*, November/December 2006]. Yet, how sad to see such a diverse group of schol-

ars acknowledging the significance of her work after so many years of mean-spirited criticism. Like Spinoza, she was banished.

As it so turned out, Arendt ended up being right about the militarization of Israeli society, along with many other equally important things. So, she had an affair with Heidegger. Name one Jewish philosopher in the second half of the twentieth century who didn't.

K. LEVIN
Berlin, Germany

MAKING PEACE

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR your new year's blessings [*Tikkun*, September/October 2006 High Holidays Supplement].

Several years ago I held very right-wing views about our country, and Israel. I believed that most liberals, including you, were very naive about the political situation both here and in Israel. Especially after the second Intifada began, it appeared that any efforts toward negotiations or appeasement with the Palestinians were fruitless. Although I was not a student of history, whatever little I understood about how Jews settled in Palestine (and the events that eventually led to the establishment of the State of Israel) convinced me that we were the victims of people who hated us, who would never acknowledge

our right to exist, and would continue to use our willingness to compromise as a strategy for destroying us.

A couple of years ago, I fell in love with a man who gently but persuasively has helped me to see that the story of Israel is far more textured and nuanced than I believed. With great patience and a deep understanding of history, religion, and politics that he cultivated over years of study, he systemically challenged my views and enabled me to shift my perspective.

I understand now how easy it is for someone who receives most of their education from either the media,

or the loud and seductive voices of political or religious speakers within our communities, to be swayed by right-leaning arguments. It is far easier to see through the lens of right and wrong, victim and perpetrator, good and evil. If only the dichotomies were that simple. The situation in Israel is a complex one, and only a serious inquiry that incorporates history, sociology, religion, psychology, and politics will be sufficient to enable the average person to be able to make an educated assessment, rather than an emotionally superficial one.

I applaud your efforts to

From Tikkun.org

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

My understanding is that the neocons who pushed for the Iraq invasion had first presented the idea of ousting Saddam to Israel many years ago—under President George Bush senior—and were turned down, then accepted the idea when presented by George W. Bush. I would love to know the truth. —NO NAME GIVEN

Tikkun Replies:

According to Sidney Blumenthal, in 1996, then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commissioned Richard Perle, Douglas Feith et al. to help draft a manifesto against the peace process. Titled *A Clean Break*, Blumenthal contends that the document contains the roadmap for the present administration's Mid East policy. *A Clean Break* can be found at: <http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm>

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

sources for the background of the article in question.

Yes, Israel had, since its 2000 withdrawal, held several Lebanese prisoners, routinely overflowed Lebanon, and failed to provide Lebanon with maps of mines that its forces left behind. It was for these reasons that Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah announced, several times and months before the actual event, that Hezbollah intended to capture an Israeli soldier.

Nasrallah said that had he known what Israel's response would be he would not have launched the attack. True or not, (and it seems questionable, given Israel's actions in Gaza only weeks before), it makes it clear that a decision was made by Hezbollah.

In fact, the Arabic, and particularly the Lebanese press

was replete with criticism of Hezbollah for plunging Lebanon into war. It was the first time there was official condemnation from any Arab governments of an attack on Israel. That Israel's brutal response drowned all of this out doesn't change these facts. Israel may be a "chief provoker," but no one is served by dismissing Hezbollah's own accountability.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

IN JOEL SCHALIT'S *A Desperate Embrace* [Tikkun, September/October 2006] he states that Israel attacked Lebanon in response to a cross-border attack. Most of the U.S. media has also continually said or inferred that there was a cross-border attack, and that they (the three Israeli troops) were captured in Israel! Yet,

the following article http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/israeli_soldiers.html says that the soldiers were captured in Lebanon. What really happened?

MATTHEW NEVILLE
(No address given)

Joel Schalit replies:

Much to my surprise, we've received a lot of letters asking the same question since the second Lebanon war ended in the middle of August. From my editorial vantage point, what's troubled me the most about these queries is the subtext of the question being asked: whether the public was lied to or not about who actually started the war.

Why? Because it suggests a refusal to accept the possibility that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were not adequately pre-

pared for such an event, and that its infantry did not perform as well in combat as they should have. I also wonder, given the extent to which the public has been informed that the IDF knew well in advance that Hezbollah was planning on such an action, if such questions reflect an anxiety about the possibility that the IDF allowed the attack to happen in order to have an excuse to attack Lebanon.

To be precise, Hezbollah attacked Israel and captured two Israeli soldiers on Israeli territory. The Israeli government, the Israel Defense Forces, the Lebanese government, and Hezbollah agree on this "version" of the story. Based on the countless independent reports we received from our sources, Tikkun concurs with this assessment. ■

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Current THINKING

A Conversation with Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter needs little introduction. The first American president to sponsor a peace initiative between Israel and its Arab neighbors, Carter brokered, in 1979, Israel's most comprehensive peace agreement to date with Egypt, which included a full withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Though he suffered much criticism at the hands of Republicans while in office, Carter was perhaps the most progressive president in the postwar U.S., having strengthened numerous social programs—including social security—and appointing record numbers of women to office.

Since leaving the White House in 1981, Carter has devoted himself to humanitarian causes. Between founding Habitat for Humanity, which builds houses for the needy, establishing the Carter Center to further the promotion of democracy and human rights, monitoring elections around the world, serving as an international mediator, and writing numerous books on faith, politics and most recently,

the Arab-Israeli conflict—*Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*—Carter is a spiritual progressive in every sense of the term.

Tikkun spoke to the 83-year-old Sunday School teacher (yes, he does that too) on the eve of his new book's publication.

TIKKUN: What inspired you to write this book?

JIMMY CARTER: For the last thirty years, my goal has been to find some way to have peace for Israel and its existence accepted by all nations including its Arab neighbors. Of course, I did the best I could when I was President. I've been distressed lately to see no progress made, and so, quite reluctantly, I decided to write this book. I hope that it will at least stimulate some debate in this country, which is rarely seen.

TIKKUN: What are the forces in this country that could be mobilized to achieve a more balanced approach toward the Middle East?

JC: When I was in the

White House, support for Israel was just as strong in Congress as it is now. Jacob Javits and Hubert Humphrey, along with five major players in the U.S. Senate, were my allies. They saw a possibility of ending the persistent wars—there had been four wars in twenty-five years before I became president primarily centered around the military strength of Egypt. It turned out that Sadat was willing to accommodate my hope that we could have a peace treaty, which we have, and no word in that peace treaty has been violated since April of 1979. So, a cadre of Congressional leaders could say, "Look, we support Israel, we love Israel, and the best thing we can do for Israel is to bring about some accommodation between Israel and its neighbors based on existing international law, the Camp David Accords, the Road Map for Peace, the Oslo Agreement, on UN 242" and so forth. That's one hope that I still don't think is too remote.

Right now, though, it would be almost impossible

to get any candidate for President or any particular members of Congress to be willing to do that. One of the things that's missing is any voice in the Jewish community who dares to be at all critical of anything that the right wing in Israel does. I don't know how to break that barrier. I think that within the global community, including Russia, the European Union, the United Nations, and hopefully the United States, there is an inclination to promote peace.

The other thing is that ever since I started negotiating with Rabin and then Begin, a substantial majority of Israelis have been in favor of swapping Arab land for peace. That element may be dormant right now, but it is potentially waiting to be aroused. Among some of the more enlightened Arab leaders—and I would include King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia and also in Jordan, among others—there is a rational approach to Israel's right to exist within its own legal borders, modified by negotiation. The elements are there if we can marshal them together.



TIKKUN: You've come out with a book whose title mentions "apartheid." Was your choice in terms one that you thought would help jumpstart the discussion?

JC: Yes. I chose that title myself. I always emphasize that I hope that peace will prevail and that apartheid will not be the permanent choice. In the last few years, I have been throughout the West Bank and Gaza. We have monitored the last three Palestinian elections—the only three Palestinian elections—and in the process I've taken between forty and sixty of my associates through what I'll call Palestine, and

we've covered the entire area. So we're familiar with what's going on.

What precipitated my willingness to write this book were the imposition of the [separation] wall on Palestinian territory, the confiscation of Palestinian land, and the dividing of the people on a permanent basis. I hate to say this, because I don't want to alienate you, but in some ways what is happening now between Israel and Palestine is worse than what happened in South Africa. But, in the book I make it clear that I am not referring to racism as a basis, but as a desire of a minority of Israelis to

occupy, confiscate, and colonize Palestinian land.

TIKKUN: My one reservation about using the word "apartheid" is that it suggests that the policy is directed against an entire people based on their racial identity.

JC: I counteract that in my book by saying that I am not referring to a racist division but a geographical division of the land.

TIKKUN: As you know, Arabs have the vote in Israel.

JC: I'm not talking about inside of Israel at all. I am just talking about the occupied territories. If I had

chosen the title "Peace in the Middle East," I am not sure it would arouse as much attention as the one that I chose. It was deliberately provocative because I think that there needs to be a debate about it. I don't really care how intense the debate gets. There just needs to be an assessment of what is there now.

TIKKUN: If there were a Democratic presidency and a Democratic Congress, would we be in a better or a worse position in relationship to changing American policies toward Israel?

JC: I think better. I really think better even if it's a Republican. The best President to actually try to implement the basic premises in my opinion was George Bush senior. It was not Clinton. I've read Rabbi Lerner's assessment of Clinton and Barak's relationship with Arafat and what was proposed was a completely unacceptable set of principles. One of the ones that I don't think Rabbi Lerner mentioned was that if the Palestinians accepted Clinton's proposal it would be the culmination of the application of all previous United Nations resolutions including 192 and 244 and 338, and that's something that no Palestinian could accept. I was intrigued with, in Rabbi Lerner's book, his map of the settlement outposts. It's one map that I wish I'd put in my book. ■

Jimmy Carter's Palestine Peace Not Apartheid is available from Simon and Schuster.

Hope is Back!

*How to keep the Democrats from blowing it once again, version 2006–2008
(Don't forget the antiwar uprising of 2006)*

BY MICHAEL LERNER

THE ELECTIONS OF 2006 WERE A GREAT VICTORY for hope, and a powerful endorsement of the work that spiritual progressives have been doing these past two years. By educating the public about the ways that the Religious Right was actually distorting the best aspects of the religious and spiritual inheritance of humanity, we managed to convince many religious and spiritual people to rethink their politics, as well as persuade many secular people to overcome their cynicism and start to vote. Dr. Robert P. Jones, Director and Senior Fellow of the Center for American Values in Public Life reports that the so-called “God gap”—the twenty-point advantage Republicans have held for a decade among Americans who attend religious services once a week or more—has been virtually cut in half, down from twenty-two points in 2004 to twelve points in 2006, according to the National Election Pool (NEP) exit polls covering U.S. House races nationwide.

Liberals and progressives have grounds for hope. Yet in a society that has so systematically driven *social* hope underground and reduced it to personal lifestyle (hope for “success” in making money, accumulating goods, sex, sports, lottery, vacations, and family life), people’s willingness to open to the possibility of a better society, much less to saving the planet from war and environmental disaster, is extremely tenuous.

Unfortunately, the Democrats may once again undermine this moment of hope—and the result will be a return to the cynicism and despair that have paralyzed so many Americans for the past twelve years. Because of so many previous betrayals, most Americans have a limited capacity to sustain hope without having at least some national leadership willing to articulate and validate the importance of the enthusiasm that they momentarily feel. If, instead, what they get back from the liberal and progressive leadership is a technocratic *politics as usual*, they will quickly retreat to a disinterest in politics that will leave the Democrats without the energized political base

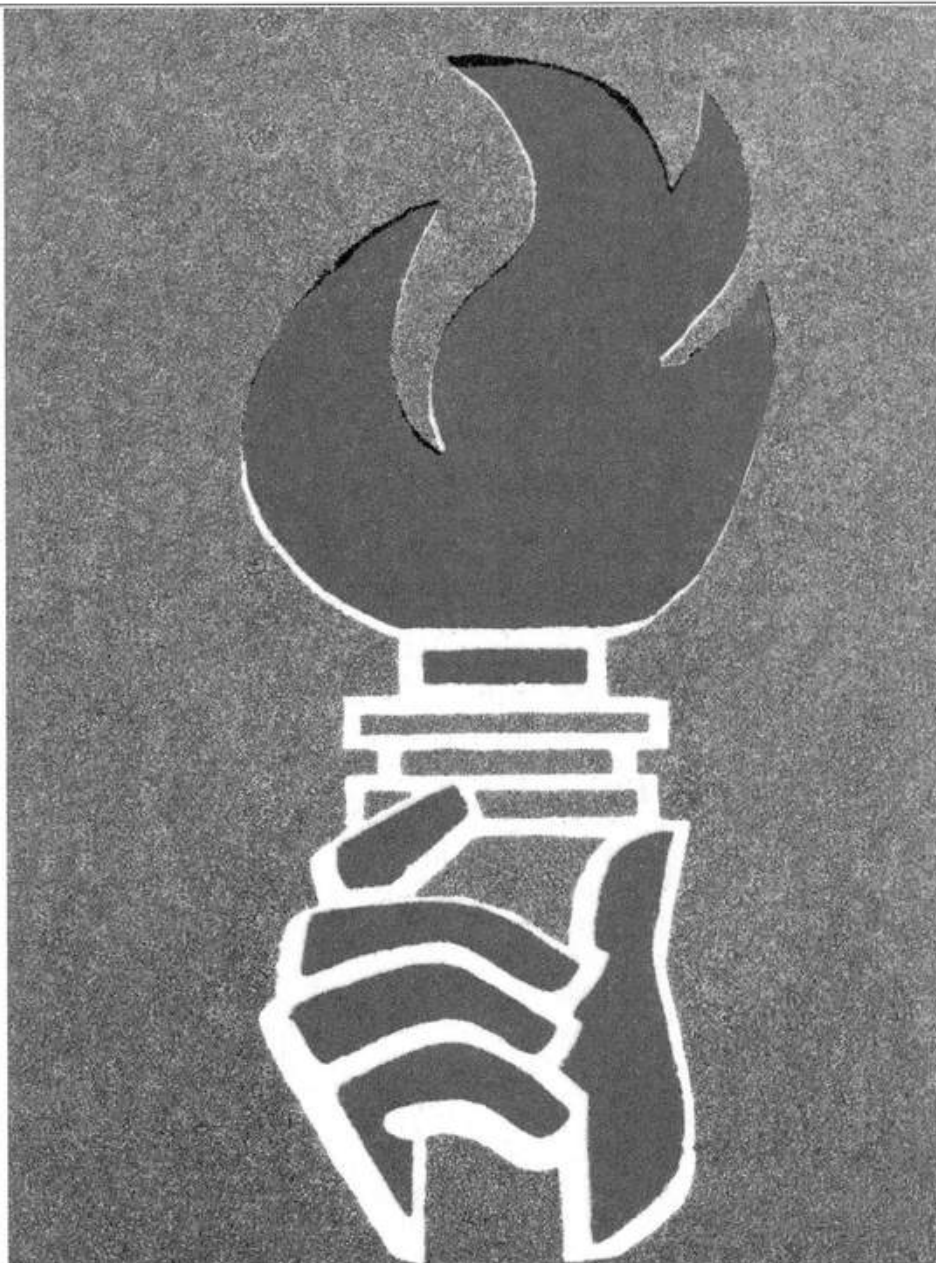
that they need to accomplish the overly cautious program articulated by Nancy Pelosi immediately following the November elections.

What most people in liberal and progressive politics don’t seem to understand is that social hope is the primary and fundamental necessity not only for winning an electoral victory, but for making it possible to transform election victories into sustainable programs.

For many liberals and progressives, politics has looked increasingly glum ever since the Clinton administration—coming to power on the foundation of a politics of meaning that spoke about the need for ending the selfishness and materialism of American society—abandoned those ideas and presented a health-care plan that was designed to be centrist, yet played to the self-serving interests of insurance companies and health-care profiteers and ended up being such a bureaucratic monstrosity that few of us could enthusiastically support or even understand it, leading many people to abandon the Democrats for a right-wing Congress in 1994.

The disillusionment was not about Clinton himself, who continued to embody a promise of something transcendent—a vision that there could be more to life than the spiritual and emotional deadness that his actual policies reflected. The failure of the Democratic-controlled Congress in 1993 and 1994 to pass any kind of health plan, and its willingness to bicker about which Congressional committees would get credit for any plan that got passed, reminded Americans just how petty the struggles for power could be among Democrats. What died with Clinton’s health plan was a sense that there was a possibility of people transcending the ethos of selfishness and narcissism promoted by Presidents Reagan and Bush.

If health care were really, as Clinton started to say in the months before the 1994 midterm election, simply a new “market-oriented” plan to play to the self-interest of the health care profiteers, if all that counted were “looking out for number one,” then people who had been attracted to the possibility of a



implementing changes inside the U.S. government, America's Right was faced with a Left that had no coherent worldview. This is why conservatives were able to build a huge power base without worrying that the shabby ideas that they were advocating would be significantly challenged in the public sphere. Clinton called this "governing from the Center"—but there is nothing "centrist" about letting the market-place mechanisms replace governmental policies as the way to care for people; it's the old right-wing solution, now adopted by the Democrats.

Meanwhile, once the Right took power in 2001, they simply dismantled most of the programs that the Clintonians had put in place. **Winning legislative battles must always take second place to winning the minds and hearts of Americans—because if you don't win the minds and hearts, the legislation can quickly be undone after the next election or two.**

Bill Clinton was good at looking out for himself, and his charm remains a powerful force, because he remains so very alive, radiating the life energy that made him a sexual being, reminding people of a part of them that aspires to break out of their own confines in some way. But the politics he advocated— from trade agreements in which the U.S.

world based on mutual caring—despite their cynicism and doubts that it could really happen—felt that they had once again allowed themselves to be humiliated by hoping that something else besides self-interest could be the basis for our public life. Some simply stopped bothering to vote. Others switched to the Republicans, because they had the advantage of being honest about their belief that politics is only about the promotion of individual self-interest (hence the New Right's libertarian-influenced call for limited government and the reduction of taxes).

Clinton supporters thought that they were being so clever—adopting right-wing rhetoric on key issues, but then sneaking through various administrative decisions that would actually implement a progressive politics. Why fight about a worldview, they reasoned, if they could make things happen inside the halls of power? But this was pure illusion. While they were

benefited by dumping our agricultural products on the Third World, to an assault on welfare, to a test-oriented approach to schooling in order to keep Americans "number one" in the global economy—were all variants of the ethos of "looking out for number one."

Should it be any wonder, then, that radical individualism is the hegemonic ideology of contemporary American politics? We learned it from Clinton.

Social hope disappeared before 9/11. The Clinton years made Americans passive. Private fantasies (You wish to be a millionaire? You want a life makeover? You want to survive the dog-eat-dog world of "reality T.V. shows"?) replaced visions of a society based on justice, peace and generosity.

Yet the vision of narrow self-interest was taken to an extreme by the Bush administration. Using the massive dose of fear generated by 9/11, the Bush administration was able to

build upon the ideological failures of the Clinton period.

Had the Democrats built an alternative worldview in the 1990s, they might have been prepared to counter the right-wing extremists who took power in the first years of the twenty-first century. For example, had the Democrats prepared the country for the notion that our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet, and that people fighting against us might have reason to be angry at us (even though nothing can or should ever excuse terrorist attacks like that of 9/11), they would have been in a position to resist the pressure for war, which emerged as the only strategy for dealing with “the war on terrorism.”

Given their lack of an alternative worldview, it's no surprise that Democrats nominated John Kerry in 2004 and might nominate another candidate for president in 2008 who has no moral clarity about why the war in Iraq was wrong and why it cannot be won through clever military maneuvers (by us or by any force we replace our military with in Iraq).

No sooner had the Democrats taken the Congress than the debate emerged about what had happened in Iraq and why. Though candidates on the campaign trail reported clearly that it was the war in Iraq that had been decisive in switching “moderates” and Republicans to the Democratic fold, the inside-the-beltway spin masters and their array of sycophants at newspapers and television stations around the country were unwilling to part with their conventional wisdom. So instead of taking the war seriously, America's press joined with establishment Democrats to make it seem as if there had been no mandate on the war, but only a mandate for the much more narrow vision of “change” that Nancy Pelosi had articulated in the early summer of 2006. The Democrats, she told the world after the victory in November, would focus on making it legal for the government to negotiate for cheaper drugs, providing some expansion of health coverage (not a single-payer universal plan), providing more security for immigrant workers, and raising the minimum wage. All fine, and we support every such move. But they are timid in their own terms, and they totally neglect the war in Iraq.

What the Democratic leadership seems unwilling to pay attention to is what actually happened in the fall of 2006. There was a popular democratic uprising against both parties, as the American people cried out for an end to the war in Iraq.

Please remember that it was not the Democratic Party that put the war on the agenda in September and October. Rather, the candidates of both parties found that they had no choice but to address the war, because while they tried to “stay on message,” their constituents would have none of it and demanded that they address the war.

To understand the deep significance of this progressive anti-war uprising of 2006, we need to go back to the aftermath of the Vietnam War. In the period 1975-2005, a sustained offensive had been waged by the political Right to convince Americans that the hope that they momentarily experienced in the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s had really been

an illusion. The 1960s were “really” about sex, drugs and rock-and-roll—a period of wild self-indulgence. There had been no sudden rise of hope, only a carnival of self-interest and narcissism. Similarly, they argued, the anti-war movement had not been about solidarity with the people of Vietnam whose lives were being valued, but only a self-interest movement on the part of privileged Americans who didn't want to end up among the 58,000 dead and hundreds of thousands wounded and for that reason resisted the draft.

The great power of the media and the political Right was the ability to convince people that this was the “true” account, and even people who had been involved began to misremember their own experience and accept this version of history.

Why? As I describe in much greater detail in my book *The Left Hand of God*, we have conflicting voices in our heads that pull us both toward hope and toward fear. At any moment when people go for their highest ideals and momentarily overcome their fears, those fears and tendencies toward narrow self-interest have not been eradicated, and are still there. In each of us there is a deep yearning for loving connection and mutual recognition, for a world of meaning and higher purpose, and for a morally and spiritually coherent life and a community within which to live such a life. But there is also a set of voices that tell us that these yearnings are purely our own, and may even represent some level of infantile or adolescent fantasy or even individual pathology, and that to be a realistic and rational adult these yearnings should be repressed and we should learn to be fearful of the others who surround us.

Anyone acting out of idealism is likely to have an element of self-interest and an array of self-doubting voices that tell them not to believe in their own goodness. These messages that we all give to ourselves tell us it is foolish and naive to trust in the idealism of others because every one else is also just out for self-interest. As a result, any social change movement is going to be filled with a range of people with varying levels of commitment, hope and fear. Among those will be: A) people who are deeply committed, willing to take huge steps above the level of self-interest at which most people in the society remain stuck, and yet even these people will remain ambivalent, plagued by self-doubt; B) people who are mostly committed, but who are very, very conflicted; C) people who are only very partially into the movement, but may agree with it on a few issues and want to be helpful, but have not in any way gotten to the point of being willing to take risks for the ideas that they support; and D) people who know that they like being with others when the others are seized by idealism, and so are happy to be in that situation, but haven't given much thought to the issues, have never been exposed to a serious presentation of the movement's ideas, and in any event are more interested in their own immediate fulfillment than in believing in the possibility of larger social change.

A smart and successful movement must make room for all of these, and take a compassionate attitude toward the various

levels of ambivalence. Unfortunately, the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s were not smart in this sense, and allowed a “political correctness” dynamic to emerge in which people were constantly putting each other down for not being committed enough, not being willing to take enough risks, and still having within their own consciousness elements of ego, self-interest, racism, sexism, homophobia, “white-skin privilege,” and various other maladies. And, of course, the criticisms were often true. But the point is that they were delivered without compassion, and hence in an extremely destructive way that pushed millions of people away from these social change movements.

It was the self-destructive perfectionism and lack of compassion for self that opened people to misremembering their own moments of idealism. As a result, they were unable to stand up to or develop a coherent alternative narrative when the “mainstream” Democrats and Republicans joined with the Right in denigrating the sixties and reducing the whole

rational thing for people to do is to work out their own best path to advantaging themselves—so hippie becomes yuppie. Younger people who were not old enough to be involved in the 1960s (if even born) learned the media’s message: there was no transcendence of self-interest, and the very people who were claiming to change the world ended up being purely self-indulgent middle-class professionals or business people. So much for the possibility of social movements. And then you get Reagan and you get the past twenty-six years of right-wing economics and politics.

Thus, the amazing thing about the antiwar uprising of 2006 was that it *will* be much harder (though never underestimate the inventiveness of right-wing commentators) to reduce it to the self-interest categories that were used to minimize the idealism of the 1960s and 70s. There is no draft on which to blame domestic opposition to the war. Americans are not being shown killed in large numbers—the dead and wounded Americans in Iraq are roughly one-twentieth of

DEMOCRATS COULD NOURISH the upsurge of hope that accompanied the mass uprising against the war in Iraq by voting to end funding for the war. If they appear equivocal and merely opportunistic, despair will reemerge and Democrats may blow their moment.

era to self-interest. So then the very people who had been involved, who had momentarily but powerfully committed themselves to principles of justice and peace and goodness that show the possibilities of human solidarity, suddenly forgot that they had been able to do that, and their self-doubts silenced them. Instead of pointing out, for instance, that the largest anti-war demonstrations took place after the draft had been eliminated, that 50,000 people had been arrested May 1, 1971 in civil disobedience in Washington D.C. when none of them faced the draft, and that the white Civil Rights demonstrators who challenged segregation not only in the South but in its soft-yet-pervasive form in Northern cities were not doing so primarily to advance their own needs, the former activists of the 1960s and 1970s, aware of their own imperfections that the battering from the left-wing political correctness insisted upon, were unable to respond to this external assault from the Right.

Seeking to heal themselves from that battering and from their own self-loathing, taught to focus on their own “shadow” side à la Jung by their own growing interest in psychotherapy or spiritual growth, many activists of that era became increasingly self-blaming and hence unwilling to acknowledge that there was anything besides self-interest or inner pathology that had previously guided them into radical politics and rebellion against the status quo. And, of course, if it’s all about self-interest, and if nothing else is really possible, then the only

those killed in Vietnam. The stark reality is that the revulsion to the war is based largely on the killings that it has sparked between Iraqis and the widening understanding that this is a civil war that was provoked by the way the U.S. intervention took place. And the beautiful part of this reaction is that Americans in the 2006 elections showed that they cared about the lives of Iraqis, not just Americans! It was this same caring about others that was the foundation of outrage about Katrina until, as Drier shows in this issue, the media arbitrarily dropped the issue from its attention. The truth is that when Americans are informed about something that is hurting others unnecessarily, and there is something that can be done, they want to do something to end the pain. In short, the abiding secret that is the major foundation for progressive politics is this: Americans have a strong ethical instinct, a fundamental goodness and caring and generosity, that can be tapped whenever they feel safe to show it. Usually that takes a natural disaster like a hurricane or flood or earthquake or mass starvation, but in 2006 they showed it by insisting that their elected representatives end the killing in Iraq.

This is an extremely hopeful moment, precisely because the American people went beyond the contours of “realistic politics” as it had been presented to them, and insisted upon something more. But those moments of hope are already being denied and downwardly re-imagined by the politicians and spin masters to fit into their pre-existing

plans. So instead of Democrats acting like they have a mandate for a new vision of politics, they instead talk as if their mandate is for "bipartisanship" and "governing from the Center" and a bunch of other empty ideas that will squelch the moment of hope and disarm the idealism that made this victory possible.

The first and foremost issue is to end the war in Iraq. The media has joined with the Pelosi forces of the Democratic Party to dismiss immediate withdrawal as impractical and "extreme," though that is precisely what most antiwar activists have been calling for these past years. The Democratic Party leadership said the same about Vietnam through much of that war.

There is nothing extreme about the plan to have troops removed by June of 2007, a plan detailed by George McGovern in his book with William R. Polk entitled *Out of Iraq*. The plan is coherent and practicable. The only thing that makes it seem "extreme" is that the Democrats fear taking a principled stand,

the courage to cut the funding for the war and to refuse to pass any military budget that does not instruct the President to bring the troops home by June 2007. In that case, Bush could essentially thwart the will of the American people and leave some significant military presence there till the beginning of the next president's term.

Why would he do such a thing?

There are two answers. One is that he simply believes that in the future as America's power declines, he will be remembered as the one president who fought till the end for his vision of a democratic Middle East. Compared with those Democrats whose highest principle is compromise, there is something to admire in a person who stands up for what he believes in. But there is a second and far more ominous reason. Bush and Cheney may be setting up the country for an even more reactionary regime in the not-too-distant-future. Imagining that it can keep a military presence of some sort in Iraq until the next president takes over, the Bush/Cheney

WE MUST DEMAND of the anti-war movement and of the pro-peace forces inside the Congress that they move beyond "Out Now" and include as equally central to their public discourse the insistence on the Global Marshall Plan.

and so want to talk about "repositioning" our troops to the borders of Iraq, ready to be called back the moment the supposedly democratically elected government fails—which it almost certainly will, because how democratic can elections be when they are held under the supervision of a foreign occupying force?

Ending the war is not going to be an easy struggle, even after the 2006 election, given the apparent lack of commitment on the part of the Democratic Party leadership and the prevalent perspective among liberals that the way forward is not to argue against the morality of the war, but instead to try to work "with" the Bush administration to "find solutions." That might make sense if Bush were able to say clearly and unequivocally that the war was now counter-productive. It would be fine if the Democrats were to say, "Ok, President Bush, you've won the war. It's time for you to declare victory, acknowledge that there will be a civil war for years to come unless the people of Iraq decide to end their struggle peacefully, so we are allowing the U.N. to come in and do what it can to conduct a plebiscite about whether the three communities wish to stay together as one country, but in the meantime, we are leaving, having accomplished all that we can possibly accomplish." If it's a face-saving way to leave that Bush is looking for, this is one plausible alternative.

But President Bush may be counting on the lack of backbone of the Democrats. He may easily and, unfortunately, probably correctly, estimate that the Democrats do not have

wing of the political Right may be able to then blame "the loss of Iraq" on a liberal/progressive movement that has "stabbed America and democracy in the back." It was this kind of rhetoric that accompanied the rise of fascism in Germany after the defeat of German troops in World War I, and it is conceivable that the same path might be followed here by people who are unwilling to go down in history as having lost yet another American war.

All the more reason why we should insist that the end of the war happen under Bush's presidency, rather than under the presidency of a liberal or progressive who succeeds him in office. But to win that battle, the anti-war movement needs to change from a movement that is against the status quo, to a movement that has a positive vision of what it is actually *for*.

There is a tragic flaw in any "Out Now" strategy. That strategy seems to play at once to idealism and to "screw the rest of the world, let's just take care of ourselves" America-first-ism that is the opposite of idealism. And that gives the moral high ground to the Right, who can then claim that its ethical concern is with what happens next to the poor people of Iraq abandoned to the vagaries of inter-religious war. And since the fate of Iraq after the U.S. troops leave is likely to be a continuation of the current violence, the Right will have much to point to.

Here is precisely why the liberal and progressive forces need to hear from the spiritual progressives. We must demand of the anti-war movement and of the pro-peace forces inside

the Congress that they move beyond "Out Now" and include as equally central to their public discourse the insistence on the Global Marshall Plan (point No. 7 of our Spiritual Covenant with America, detailed in my book *The Left Hand of God*). Simply stated, our demand is that the U.S. take the lead (by example, actually doing this ourselves) in taking 5 percent of the GDP for each of the next twenty years and dedicate it to a sophisticated plan (i.e. not just dumping the money into dictatorships or give-aways, but a plan that would work to build the capacities of each society) to end global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, inadequate health care, and repair the damage done to the earth's environment by 150 years of irresponsible industrialization by both capitalist and socialist nations).

We should make clear that what the Iraq war has done is once and for all prove that superior military might does not generate superior security. On the contrary, our war in Iraq has become the training ground for a new generation of terrorists, a significant number of whom have been recruited in response to the devastation caused by the U.S. in Iraq. The strategy of domination over others as a path to security does not work in the twenty-first century. Instead, we need a strategy of generosity. As the U.S. (and hopefully the other G8 countries) demonstrate that we are capable of giving back, of caring for others not solely because it is in our self-interest, but also because we actually care about the well-being of others (as so many Americans actually do), we will be far more effective in providing homeland security than we will be spending trillions of dollars on our military and on brilliant new technologies to search out and kill people we suspect of being terrorists.

A good place to start the Global Marshall Plan is to take a few countries and let them be the first recipients of this support. I propose those places be: Iraq, Palestine, Haiti, Jamaica, Bangladesh, Mexico, New Orleans (and other centers of poverty in the US), and South Africa. In each case, we would have to work out a detailed plan for how to get the monies and support into the hands of NGOs and others who would not siphon it off to elites and their friends, to ensure that it went into the building of infrastructure, education and training of the poor, and housing for the poor. For example, in Iraq we would probably have to take one area at a time—I suggest we start by totally rebuilding Fallujah, and publicly apologize for the terrible crimes committed in our name by the occupying forces (including razing cities to the ground, rapes, torture, etc.). The only troops that might remain would be those protecting the construction of new housing and infrastructure for the Iraqis. This is one example. But to ensure that what we are advocating is not compromised, we must make it clear that our goal is to wipe out poverty in every place on earth within the next twenty years, including the U.S. If OUT NOW were inextricably bound to GLOBAL MARSHALL PLAN NOW, the idealism of the 2006 election could be sustained.

It is the vision that is central. We need to resist all the "practical" advice that tells us to shrink the vision to what is "realistic." The very essence of the Global Marshall Plan is that it breaks the discourse of "realism" and talks a visionary language. It is a central part of what we at the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) call "a strategy of generosity," rejecting a strategy of domination. And, that generosity must be done in ways that are smart. The giving must be environmentally and culturally sensitive, it must be invited by the countries in which it is functioning, and it must not involve a stupid dumping of money as though that were sufficient when it actually is counter-productive. The goal is to empower people to help themselves, not to make them passive recipients of a fund that will run out in twenty years. But that empowerment will be backed by a strategy that builds housing and schools and medical clinics, provides tools and training, and demonstrates that caring for others is not only good for the recipient, but is good for those who give, fulfilling in us our own need for spiritual purpose to our lives. At the same time, we have to build the Global Marshall Plan in ways that allow us to learn from the indigenous wisdom of peoples whom we are helping, recognizing that we often have as much to learn as to give, and that our project is not based on cultural arrogance but on a genuine desire to be part of a process in which we benefit as well as provide.

The Spiritual Covenant with America (which you can read at www.spiritualprogressives.org) has eight such planks. Together they constitute a vision of hope, which, were there a political force that consistently fought for them, could sustain the hopefulness of the American people.

How do we expect to get the leadership of our country to start thinking in these terms? The first step is to build support for these ideas within whatever political party you are in. So, for example, if you are a Democrat, a Republican, a Green, or whatever other party, you'd go to your party, find out how to establish a caucus, or if there are no clear rules, simply announce that you, as a registered member of that party, are creating the Spiritual Caucus.

The first item on the agenda of a Spiritual Caucus within your political party will be the Global Marshall Plan. We hope that you will attend the state conventions of your political party this year, and run to be a delegate in 2008, and use the opportunities created to advocate for the Global Marshall Plan in particular and the Spiritual Covenant with America in general.

As a first step in bringing this to the attention of the American people, we will be asking people in the spiritual and religious communities to dedicate Saturday, April 28 and Sunday, April 29 to the creation of a Peace Demonstration, Peace Teach-In, or Peace Sabbath dedicated to advocacy for the Global Marshall Plan. We may call it Generosity Sunday. Instead of having demonstrations led by angry people who spew words of hatred against the government, we need to have spiritually infused demonstrations in every community in our country, led by people who say not only Out Now, but Global Marshall Plan Now, that is, who have a positive vision of what

we are for rather than a purely negative vision of what we are against. Let Nichola@tikkun.org know if you are ready to help organize such an event in your area. And let her know if you'd be willing to have a group of friends or coworkers come to your house to watch an NSP video about our vision of the

world—and about building this kind of peace movement—and then encourage them to join NSP and work with you on building Generosity Sunday.

Hope is back. Don't let that light go out—it's been gone for so many years. It needs to be carefully tended.

Editorial Reflections

A.J. Heschel

IN THIS ISSUE OF TIKKUN WE COMMEMORATE THE 100th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who died thirty-three years ago. I am very happy that Ed Kaplan, Heschel's biographer, picked up on my suggestion that we create a conference in Heschel's honor—it will be held at Brandeis U. on March 11-12. Heschel did not teach in the Seminary College when I was a student there, so we arranged regular private meetings in which I was able to study with this great mystical/spiritual theologian, and under his guidance for four years I learned a new language that has been at the core of *Tikkun* Magazine and now at the core of the Network of Spiritual Progressives since their beginnings. In many ways, I've come to see the NSP as the political direction that Heschel would have taken had he lived: a politics that puts "awe, wonder and radical amazement at the grandeur of creation" at the center of our vision of a New Bottom Line that emphasizes love, kindness, generosity, caring, ethical and ecological sensibilities. This, in my view, is what it means to take Heschel seriously—not merely to study his words, but to join in his path, and to take seriously his invitation to "pray with our feet" by acting as partners with God in the healing of our world.

Articles vs. Editorials

WE DON'T PICK OUR ARTICLES ON THE basis of our agreement with their content. I often find myself angered or even outraged at an article that I pick for publication in the magazine. In my view, free speech requires that we print views that are often not heard elsewhere (and for that reason, we don't load you up with the kind of views about U.S. politics, Israel, or American culture you can read in mainstream American or American Jewish publications or that pour out at you from CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox or even the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, or the *American Prospect*). So, for example, I don't agree with Jorge Ferrer's article about polyamory in this issue, but neither do I agree with the secular tone of many of our writers. If you want the *Tikkun* perspective, read our editorials. But don't read our articles and assume you know by virtue of the fact that we publish them that we agree with them. We agree with John Stuart Mill—truth emerges from the free interplay of ideas.



Israel At it Again

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT AFTER THE AMERICAN public had given Bush a powerful rejection in the 2006 elections, Prime Minister Olmert met with our lame duck president and publicly supported his Iraq policy, which has been repudiated by almost everyone else in the world? Instead of using his time to go to Gaza and ask forgiveness for the Israeli Army's shelling of Beit Hanun, killing seventeen innocent civilians, Olmert was here to give support to the reactionary president who had been repudiated by 80 percent (some estimates have it as high as 87 percent) of the Jewish vote in 2006. What was this guy thinking? The most plausible answer: Olmert needs politically to have another war with Hezbollah, Syria or Iran in which he comes away with something like a victory, and he wants to have Bush and the Pentagon solidly behind that effort. So instead of looking for a path to peace and a final settlement agreement, he's looking for a commitment of the latest military technology to be used in such a struggle in 2007 or 2008—and why should Olmert care about the post-Bush age when he himself will only survive if he can pull off something spectacular militarily to win back the hawks in Israel to his side. And that, precisely, is why he keeps refusing to negotiate with Syria for peace, as Syria repeatedly seeks in the past few months. ■

Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun.

The Road to 2008

Unity08

BY GEORGE VRADENBURG

THE BOTTOM LINE OF THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS: the American people do not like the way their representatives in Washington are managing their country—from Iraq, to large fiscal deficits, to personal, ethical, and financial lapses. The electorate told the U.S. government that Washington seems more focused on hurting the other guy, or on ideological purity, or on maintaining personal power than on solving the problems of everyday Americans. The results of the elections demonstrate, as columnist Joe Klein argues, “why the center is the new place to be.”

I believe that the time has come for a third party positioned in the sensible center, and committed to pragmatic approaches to the critical issues confronting the American people.

Imagine a nominating process for President and Vice President where the choices of candidates and political programs were made in a convention “open” to all registered voters anywhere in the country.

In today’s system, party candidates are chosen primarily by a handful of party activists in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Candidates position their program to thread the gauntlet of “the base” then have to “move” to the center in order to appeal to the broader American populace.

This nominating system does not produce honest debate about hard issues. The voters in “the base” in early nominating states either have to vote their true beliefs, and end up nominating someone not likely to appeal broadly to the American people, or guess at which candidate is more likely to appeal to the middle and thus make a calculated but dishonest vote (e.g. Howard Dean versus John Kerry). And candidates are forced into the “I voted *for* before I voted *against*” dilemma of appealing to the base and potentially to the center at the same time.

Structuring a nominating process that compels candidates to invest heavily in appealing to very narrow voting blocs and to shift their position once nominated makes us voters feel manipulated and the candidates feel inauthentic to us, as if expertise in “positioning” for the nominating gauntlet were the test of a potential president, rather than one’s political program for governing.

The disruptive Internet technologies of the twenty-first century that have become central to our social and commercial

lives may offer a way out of this manipulative and unrepresentative nominating process.

An Internet-powered party called Unity08 is organizing a nominating process by which any registered voter can become a delegate to an online nominating convention in 2008, where Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates will be chosen. The issues and political program of Unity08 will be selected online by convention delegates in the run-up to the convention, based on an honest process of polling and debate. The rules will require that the candidates for President and Vice President be of differing parties. It is expected that millions of Americans will participate in this process of selecting candidates and a political program.

As a result of the organizing work already in process, the Unity08 slate will have fifty-state ballot access; a very substantial campaign fund financed by a large number of small donations; and an Internet-enabled on-the-ground team of party organizers.

The entire nominating process, in effect, will be “owned” by millions of Americans serving as online delegates to the Unity 08 convention. While the outcomes of such a people-owned process are unpredictable, one would expect that the selection would be broadly representative of the aspirations of the millions of Americans expected to participate—not the choice of a few activists in early nominating states.

There are two important shifts in American political demography that make this third party effort serious and significant. The first is the plurality of Americans now self-identify as “independents,” without committed allegiance to either party. Party loyalty is breaking down. Second, in the last decade the Internet has become a highly trusted means of social engagement and economic commerce. With the advent of MoveOn.org and broad-based political fundraising in the 2004 election year, these new communications technologies have become a source of political empowerment, not just political information.

Who would have thought that this Republican would be saying “power to the people”—2008 is the year! ■

George Vradenburg is co-publisher of Tikkun. He is a contributor to Unity08.

Word to the Mothership

BY JOEL SCHALIT

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS THAT EVERY EDITOR lives for. Arriving at the end of one of the busiest years in our history, the initial results of our first-ever readership survey made it clear that our subscribers approved of what we've been doing. Overwhelmingly, readers indicated that they're satisfied with the new editorial division of our content, and how it is reflected in the re-designed edition of the magazine we debuted last March. For what is arguably the most ideologically experimental political periodical in the U.S., receiving this kind of affirmation from our readers was truly gratifying. Unlike any other publication of its kind, *Tikkun* has always been willing to take enormous editorial risks, even if it meant being ahead of the so-called curve. To learn that we are more in sync with you than we believed confirms that we can indeed trust our intuitions. That in itself is a huge relief. Every periodical has to *periodically* reinvent its own wheel to stay relevant, and you've told us that we've done so correctly.

From this editor's perspective, the key appears to have been how we divided our features section into our historic areas of specialization: Spiritual Activism, Politics and Society, Israel/Palestine, and Judaism. By making these editorial categories more distinct, our readers indicated to us that they better understood the whole of the magazine. This was something of a revelation, because over the years, we've found our audience to be relatively divided. Some people read the magazine only for its Israel/Palestine reportage, others solely for its spiritual writings. Now, it appears, there's a greater appreciation for how all of the material fits together. This does not mean to suggest that our readers didn't indicate their own content priorities in the survey results, because they did. Sure enough, many of the same divisions amongst our readers still strongly persist. Nevertheless, our editorial eclecticism appears to be more understood than it has been in the past, and those segments of the readership that we've always encountered to be less inclined toward a specific kind of content have indicated that they accept the connections we're drawing.

Given the highly compartmentalized character of progres-

sive politics in the U.S., I could not resist but be moved by the metaphor that this implies. Our readers have told us of their interest in religion *and* Middle East politics— topics that constitute two of the most important areas of concern in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, amongst U.S. progressives, they have not always coincided. Though there are many leftists in the United States engaged in faith-based activism to end the Arab-Israeli conflict (witness the Christian Peacemaker Teams courageously working in the Occupied Territories), this specific constellation of interests has been more typical of right-wing, religious Americans than our largely leftist readership. Similarly, many of our Jewish readers who come to *Tikkun* because of the unique character of our Israel/Palestine coverage, tend to self-identify more as secular than religious. Yet, very few of them strenuously objected to our interfaith religious content as we assumed they would. What surprised me the most was the similar level of appreciation shown to our Jewish and Israel/Palestine coverage by our self-identified Christian and "spiritual but not religious" readers. One thing we've always been worried about was that our non-Jewish audience found this material off-putting due to its culturally specific nature. Evidently, this was not the case.

Surprisingly, the one content category that a significant number of readers said they wanted to see more of was culture. This is an especially significant request for two reasons: First, because our Culture section takes up nearly a quarter of *Tikkun's* pages; Second, because progressive periodicals tend to deemphasize cultural coverage, traditionally limiting such reporting to book reviews, and in certain instances, politically charged films such as *Borat* and *An Inconvenient Truth*. Our response to this has been to strike what we believed to be a better balance between cultural and political writing, while encouraging explicitly political readings of books, films and music that fall within our areas of interest. In this issue, Shai Ginsburg's meditation on Jean-Luc Godard's legendary 1976 film *Ici et Ailleurs* is exemplary in this regard. Check it out. ■

Joel Schalit is managing editor of *Tikkun*.

Time to Harness the Jewish Peace Vote

BY MITCHELL PLITNICK

IN A SHARP REVERSAL OF RECENT TRENDS, 87 PERCENT of Jewish voters voted for Democrats in the recent Congressional elections. The previous rightward Jewish drift was written about extensively, and few doubted that it was connected to the rise of neo-conservatism to power in the GOP, with its fanatical support of Israel.

So how do we interpret this reversal? Clearly, the misadventure in Iraq played a big role. Recent polls have indicated that nearly 40 percent of Americans believe that the so-called "Israel Lobby" played a key role in bringing about the American invasion of Iraq (see http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/publish/article_237.shtml for a fuller explanation of the Lobby and Israel's role in Iraq), raising some fears of increased anti-Semitism. However, Jews have been ahead of the rest of the U.S. in opposition to the Iraq war from the beginning, and this has certainly played a part in the shift away from the Republicans.

It would be a mistake to believe that Israel is not a key question for the majority of Jewish voters. Yet despite the fact that the Olmert government, as well as the major Jewish political movers and shakers in American politics, supported the Bush administration's policies toward Israel, Jews still voted for a change.

Clearly, Israel is still important to most Jews. Nevertheless, the increased hopelessness of the situation in the Middle East, as well as the intense and ultimately fruitless violence of the past summer in both Gaza and Lebanon, has raised concerns about U.S. policy toward Israel. Is it sincerely well-intentioned towards the Jewish state, or is the Bush administration leveraging its alliance with Israel for America's own strategic interests?

Earlier in the year, significant Jewish opposition to the draconian "Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Bill" was important in preventing the bill from becoming law, despite strong support from AIPAC. Jewish opposition came not only from groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and Tikkun; it also came from Brit Tzedek v'Shalom (BTvS), Americans for Peace Now (APN), and the even more moderate Israel Policy Forum (IPF).

While this summer's fighting increased Jewish solidarity with Israel, it also brought waves of Jews flocking to peace groups. American and Israeli leadership were deaf to these Jewish cries for change. The U.S. not only blocked an early attempt at a cease-fire that Israel was willing to consider, but, as *Yediot Ahronot* reported on October 5, 2006, the Bush administration also forbade Israel from exploring peace talks with Syria. The Olmert government continues to pound Gaza despite the repeated admonishment from Israeli military leaders, who say that such tactics will neither retrieve Israel's captive soldier nor stop the stream of Qassam rockets flying out of Gaza.

Recently, there have been reports that IPF, APN, and BTvS have courted some very big financiers in the hope of setting up a pro-Israel lobby that would also be pro-peace, and serve as an alternative to AIPAC. One can hope that such a thing will come to fruition, but more is needed.

The Jewish peace movement in the U.S. is in danger of missing an opportunity with this new Congress. We remain unprepared to act in the realm of real politics. Of course, Democrats have never been much better than Republicans when it comes to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Still, with a new Congress, a mandate for change and the clear sense among voters—Jewish and non-Jewish—that the Middle East is a key policy arena, there is a real opportunity for progress before us.

More and more Jews are seeking a way to change American policy. More and more Jews realize that unless the rights of Palestinians are respected, Israelis can never be secure; they know that the Occupation is wrong, and must end in a way that allows Palestinians to build a sustainable future. It's long overdue for Jews to organize a powerful lobby in Washington that says, loudly, that Jewish values dictate that the rights of all people must be treated equally—only on this basis can a better future for both Israelis and Palestinians be realized. ■

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

SPIRIT Matters

Selections from forthcoming books, articles, and talks



FIRE IN THE BONES

Essay by Alastair McIntosh. Originally published in Third Way magazine, September 2006.

There's a terrifying line in one of Adrienne Rich's poems that gets to the nub of what it means to be a spiritually informed activist for change in the world. Probably moulded by her Jewish and Protestant family origins, she says, "I stand convicted by all my convictions—you, too."

I use this with students to whom I teach spiritual activism in the human ecology masters programme at Strathclyde University. It's a phrase that quickly sorts out anybody for whom activism is just a fashion accessory. Relative to the mainstream values of the world, the beautiful vision for change readily becomes what Ben Okri calls "a *burden*, an unbearable exposure of collective cowardice and sloth and smallness of spirit in an era of malice, an era of failure." It is so easy to despair and stop trying, especially as we know we can never do enough. But that is precisely why an appeal to something greater than our small selves becomes imperative. Indeed, that is what can carry us beyond ego, beyond even compassion fatigue. Our challenge is to face the burdens of the world, yes, but to participate in transforming them. In Christian understanding, this is the way of the Cross. It shifts the violent worship of death that characterises "Empire" into a living expression of love.

But how do we open to the grace of such transfiguration in the daily life or our activism? What attitude can we elicit or even pray for in order to try and not burn out, sell out or cop out?

TROUBLERS OF THE PEACE

In my own work, I invariably find that when a new focus for activism breaks in on life it's like an unwanted child. You get busy doing all manner of things, then yet another challenge hammers on the door. Of course,

none of us has to attend every fight we're invited to. There's a necessity for discernment and discipline about what we do or do not take on. But I've noticed that often this very process of discernment can be what leads to a radical re-ordering of one's priorities.

During the 1990s I participated in two major campaigns near the Hebridean Isle of Lewis, where I grew up. One brought about land reform on the Isle of Eigg, and the other thwarted corporate plans for the biggest roadstone quarry in the world that would have been in the National Scenic Area on the Isle of Harris. But throughout this period I was also getting repeated challenges from urban friends. "What about helping us to stand our ground and rebuild broken communities?" they would ask. "It's all very well doing your stuff on little Scottish islands where you've got a nice comfortable sense of belonging. But what about us, whose forbears got pushed off the land and have lost our anchor points of identity? What about communities marked not by scenic beauty, but by vomit on the pavement, graffiti on the walls and drug addiction up dead-end alleys? What about urban life and death on our native reservations?"

At first I tried to keep these voices at arms length. "I do rural regeneration," I'd tell them. "You do the urban stuff if that's your wont." But then the very process of discernment—the very act of sitting down briefly each day and simply asking, "What does the deep Spirit of Life seek of me now?"—all that starts to open out new patterns of reality that introduce their own imperatives. For my wife and I, this led to us moving two years ago to Govan, the onetime shipbuilding area of Glasgow; a place where the industrial tide has gone out, leaving behind a community where many are bereft of work and meaning.

Such life changes often come from being touched by a kind of fire. It can come from others, from circumstances, or from within us. This was something that Jeremiah understood very well. In my work I've often found myself being drawn to this prototypical spiritual activist at difficult times. His motivation came from a

place that was far beyond his little ego self because he was grounded in something much greater.

JEREMIAH'S BLASPHEMY

Even more than many of us today, Jeremiah cursed the way that activism messed up his life. The commentary in the authoritative HarperCollins Study Bible describes his complaint (Jeremiah 15 & 20) as being "the most blasphemous in the Bible." His choice of words, according to the scholars, effectively accuses God of deceiving, seducing and overpowering him into becoming an activist. Indeed, the word translated as "overpower" has Biblical resonances of rape.

"I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me," Jeremiah laments. Even "my close friends are watching for me to stumble" (20:7,10, NRSV). Well might we observe the resonance with Jesus' later words: "I come to bring not peace but a sword.... A person's worst enemies will be the members of their own family" (Matthew 10:34-36).

But what shines through in this text is that it is Jeremiah's ability to see God's alternative reality that carries him on. It shows him that the "peace" of which he is the disturber is but a false peace, predicated on violence. To say nothing would be silence as the voice of complicity.

In ways about which mainstream religion preaches few sermons, Jeremiah reveals the dilemma of coming alive to spiritual vision. To "name, unmask and engage the Powers that Be," as Walter Wink puts it, is dangerous and isolating. How much easier to join the sleeping and slowly die. And that, of course, is why Jesus found it necessary to implore his followers: "What I say to you I say to all: *Keep awake*" (Mark 13:37).

WHOLLY FIRE

The thrust of Jeremiah's testimony is simultaneously social, ecological and religious (12:1-13). He bears uncomfortable witness not out of masochism or spiritual glory seeking, but from divine imperative. Speaking of God, he explains, "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' then within me there is something *like a burning fire shut up in my bones*; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9).

And there's a hallmark of the spiritual activist. The "fire" in question is God-centred passion. In shamanistic literatures of the world this viscerally emerges from the belly, the head or even the very bones. Jeremiah's burden is crushing, yes, but he bears it because it is a *precious burden*. God, no less, tells him that this is so. "God," the deep Spirit of Life, instructs him, "If you utter what is *precious*, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth" (15:19).

What is the nature of this spiritual fire? Let me offer a suggestion. I remember once being on an Ignatian-style

retreat near Inverness. We'd be given short scripture passages upon which to meditate for hours. One day mine really bugged me: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). All day long I wrestled with a muscular notion I'd gained, doubtless from too many Hebridean fundamentalist sermons as a child, of Christ the Victor angrily drawing hellfire down on his wayward vassals. The passage seemed to sum up the whole problem of spiritual abuse within a particular strain of Christianity. What was particularly troubling is that this was coming neither from Paul, nor Churchianity, but from words attributed to Jesus himself.

Suddenly, late in the afternoon after four days in contemplative silence, a kind of illumination broke in. I found my consciousness viscerally entering what old hippies would fondly call a "trippy" state! Through my mind's eye, the whole world started to quicken with an inwardly visible perception of the animating love that moves "the sun and other stars." And I saw, with epiphanic wonder, that the "fire" in question—the fire that Christ would have us kindle—is none other than *the fire of love*!

The story is told of the Desert Fathers that Abba Lot asked Abba Joseph what more he could do over and above observing his monastic rule. Abba Joseph replied, his hands lifted to heaven with fingers that looked like lighted candles, "Why not become wholly fire?"

In his commentary on such texts the French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, magnificently squares the theological circle as to the nature of spiritual fire. He surmises: "The fire of hell is the fire of love that gives remorse a terrible clarity." Such was the nature of Jeremiah's fire, for such were the leadings of the love to which he placed himself in service. This is why prophetic witness so often forces activists to stand and take a stand in Hell on Earth. Sometimes this is where God most needs the "angels."

BEYOND EGO AND NIHILISM

Modernity still professes to believe in itself. But postmodernity has lost that faith. The resultant vacuity at the heart of much public discourse today at least offers one advantage. It gives activists who are in touch with something "essential," something God-given, a charismatic edge. It might be stretching hope too far to suggest that postmodernity's deconstruction has ploughed a fallow field ripe for sowing fresh seeds of grace. And yet, this is a tantalising possibility, and possibly an explanation as to why it is starting to be possible to bring spirituality into public discourse. Major organisations that have done this in recent years include the World-wide Fund for Nature, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the United Nations Environment Programme and even the World Bank.

As demand awakens in our culture for psychospiritual

literacy, it is useful to offer a very simple model of human psychic structure. Imagine a pyramid of three layers. The apex, like a little light on top of a ship, is the ego—surrounded by its field of consciousness. This is the conscious “me.” It likes to be on top of things—in control—and so masquerades as “rational.”

The middle part is the “shadow,” surrounded by the personal unconscious. The personal unconscious is all those parts of our individual life experience that shape us in ways of which we are but dimly conscious. The shadow is a constellation of all those parts of ourselves that ego would deny. It’s the alter-ego of, say, Alastair: the potential rapist or swindler within him, the child that still hurts and “acts out” but he doesn’t quite know why, and his little cruelties to others that he hides from himself (but perhaps not so effectively from his colleagues and wife!).

This “shadow” is the cutting edge of psychospiritual growth. We have a choice. We can either leave it as sewage to fester and leak, until the smell rises from the basement up the stairs and into the living room. Or we can set about composting it, creating rich new soil that can give life. As Jung put it, “Ninety percent of the shadow is gold.” But that gold has to be worked for and refined, which is why we can’t grow spiritually unless we allow ourselves to awaken and experience the trial by fire of being “exercised.” Both New Age spiritualities and mainstream churchianity often shun this. Depoliticised, they body swerve applied mysticism and perhaps wallow instead in a sewage-masking miasma of bells and smells.

Lastly in our psychic pyramid is the deep or the great *Self*. This is the soul; the psyche’s central organising principle. It rests in the “collective unconscious,” formed from our shared potential and experience. Ultimately it is the Christ within, Buddha nature, or in Hindu thought, Atman (individual self) as Brahman (universal Self). This is Paul’s “membership one of another.” It is heavenly interconnection through love as the “communion of the saints.”

Such a model suggests why to be a spiritually engaged activist is to engage both immanently *and* transcendently with Life. The articulation of outer political concerns demands an equal counterpoint of inner work, opening to the grace that draws ego, shadow and Self into right relationship in a process of continual spiritual psychotherapy. The failure of many activists to take this on, especially in ego-driven realms of politics, is the reason why so much activism implodes into schismatic organisational dysfunction.

Theologically, the implication is that true and sustainable activism is concerned with both personal and societal “salvation”—a word that means to “salve” or heal. This process does not destroy the ego as our face on outward reality. Rather, it gradually *resolves* the ego into the right relationship with the Self: thus, as Paul put it, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gala-

tians 2:20). The ego, deepened by reconciling the shadow (including “sin”) of its own alter ego, mellows and rests into the Self, where “All my fountains are in you” (Psalms 87:7). In Christian language, the immanence of Jesus, the male who died on a cross, becomes realised or “raised” in transcendental newness as “*Jesus Christ*,” in whom there is “neither male nor female.....”, and in the “Alpha and Omega” sustained incarnation of whom “all things were made” (Galatians 3:28; Revelation 22:13; John 1:3).

To develop this further risks betraying mystery with mere words. Suffice to add only that the ordering outlined here matters greatly. It is the ego’s place to settle into the Self, and not vice versa. Where the ordering is reversed, archetypal structures idolatrously inflate the ego. The prophetic degrades to the psychotic, which is why confessional discernment skills should accompany charismatic activism.

CONFESSING THE SHADOW

There’s a cartoon where all the activists march past bearing placards. “No more motorways,” says one. “Stop the War,” demands another. “Down with the corporations,” shouts a third. And finally the guy at the end proclaims, “I hate my dad!” The point is that we so easily project unresolved issues from our personal unconscious into the outer world. The corporation, government or whatever becomes a psychological proxy for the authoritarian parent figure. To refine our activism we therefore have to learn to “confess” our shadow sides. Look into the mirror of, say, the corporation, and each one of us will see ourselves. That’s because corporations are, to a significant degree, emergent properties of our collective consumer choices. Our placards may proclaim, “War in the Gulf: Not in my name!” but frankly we pump complicity in violence every time we pull up at a filling station.

By “confessional discernment” I mean attempting to face up to shadow truths both individually and collectively. This humanises the “enemy” and makes it easier to face realities and search for solutions. That sounds very pragmatic, but to Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* the generation of such empathy is presented as the challenging culmination of spiritual practice. As he says through the *staretz* (or Orthodox mystic), Fr Zosima:

Each one of us is unquestionably answerable for all men and all things on earth, not only by virtue of the collective guilt of the world, but also individually, for all men and everyone on earth. This realization is the crowning glory not only of the monastic way of life, but of every human being on earth.... It is only through this realization that our heart will be moved to boundless, universal, all-consuming love. Thus will each one of us be able to redeem the world and with his tears wash away its sins... (Part 2:4).

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FIELD OF TRUTH

The Hindu gospel, the *Bhagavad Gita*, opens with a sentence translated as, "On the field of Truth, on the battlefield of life, what came to pass, Sanjaya?" Note that the battlefield of life sits in Truth (*Dharma*)—the unfolding of God's reality. And Sanjaya is charioteer to the blind king, Dhritarashtra. His gift is to see at a distance—the same eagle seeing that Jeremiah, John's gospel, and any inspired spiritual activist does. As activists, we are called to *see* the spiritual interiority of external events; we are called, all of us, to prophesy (Numbers 11:29)! Our organizations and networks are our "chariots" as we struggle for justice in the world. We are talking here of participation in nothing less than *incarnation*.

We are left standing not far from Golgotha in solidarity with the poor and the broken of this Earth. We walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but fear no ill. And so our burdens become *precious burdens*. We "become participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4; Luke 17:21). Such, as I see it through my glass darkly, is the theology of spiritual activism.



WORKING FOR TIKKUN

*Excerpted from Loyal to the Sky, by Marisa Handler.
Available February 2007. Reprinted with permission
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It is early 2003. The Bush administration is pounding on the war-drums again, ululating and strutting for oil in Iraq. I attend rallies and marches against the impending war. I bring my friends and my homemade posters, and I look around me and see meticulously lettered signs reading "Zionism Is Nazism." Signs reading "Death to Israel" and "Sharon = Hitler." I see Israeli flags being burned, and it is like a kick to the chest. Up to now, I have rarely experienced anti-Semitism, but I am beginning to recognize it with regularity. It isn't obvious. No one calls me names. I do not think, most of the time, it is even conscious. But it is present in the flavor of the fury directed against Israel.

I do not see such visceral hatred arising in discussions of other conflicts. No one gets nearly so enraged over the slaughter in the Balkans or Rwanda. But when it comes to Israel/Palestine, white kids who have no obvious affiliation to the region burn Israeli flags and hurl invective at Israel, at Israelis, at the Zionist bastards. Occasionally, if you are listening carefully, at Jews.

Meanwhile we in the middle, insisting that a middle exists, hold our ground. The Tikkun Campus Network takes root and flourishes. Our first conference is a success. The Tikkun Community, for which I go on later speaking tours, also grows. As much as my job exhausts me, as much as I complain that I work all the time, I also love it: I love being at the hub, feeling I am making things move, feeling needed, relied upon. I am a leader, it dawns on me in the middle of facilitating a conference call. People are looking to me for guidance, for inspiration. How did I get here again? It strikes me as comical, in a number of ways, that I am working for peace. Most of the time my work for peace feels far from peaceful. Most of the time there is a lot of ego involved. How effective am I, then, I wonder. How helpful is my leadership, when I am so flawed? *Am I helping?* The anger that arises in my work: I thought of it as a side effect, but the more I look, the deeper it lies. When members of my extended family or friends from Israel send out emails lambasting the Palestinians and defending Israeli aggression, I discover myself whipping up impassioned diatribes and then hitting "reply all." *What are my motives here?* How much is anger determining my actions? Anger is natural, given the current state of our world, and anger is powerful. Certainly anger carries a formidable energy with which to wrestle injustice. But social-change work that is driven by anger will only push us further apart.

A local Jewish group organizes a demonstration supporting the U.S. and Israel in their "battle against terrorism." Three thousand supporters, Jews, gather at San Francisco's Civic Center with placards and American and Israeli flags. I take it upon myself to organize a counter-rally, solely of Jews, calling for an end to both terrorism and the government-sanctioned terrorism of illegal war and occupation. There are about forty of us. We carry Israeli and Palestinian flags and signs

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reading "Jews for a Just Peace." As the larger rally marches down Market Street, the city's main thoroughfare, we move to the opposite curb. We stand in silence or sing peace songs in Hebrew and English.

Across the street many people ignore us, but some can't resist. They shout names at us, raise their fists and fingers and tell us we are betraying our own people. If this is indeed betrayal, then it is betrayal of a brittle and anemic dream. I see our activism as loyalty to a broader vision of our own potential. I have instructed everyone in our group on nonviolence, and we stand our ground—even my little brother, although he turns a worrying shade of purple at one point—and we keep singing. About halfway through, my co-worker's parents, who are Israeli and on the other side, catch sight of her in our line. They race across the street and try to drag her over to their side. "You are a disgrace," they tell her, and say they do not want to see her face. I am standing between my brother and my friend, our arms around each other. I am watching the expressions on the faces across the street, the disdain, the fury, the hatred, and I am recalling how I went to services recently, for the first time in ages. I held a prayer book and I sang the hymns and then I stood to say the *Shema*, the holiest prayer in Judaism. I held my right hand over my eyes and recited *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*, as I have countless times since I first learned to speak. But this time the force of the Hebrew words ricocheted into me like a bullet, knocked me over and back into my chair, reduced me to a shuddering sodden mess as my sister bent over me asking, "What's wrong, Mims? Are you okay? What's going on?"

Unlike most prayers in Judaism, the *Shema* is not a prayer that speaks to God. It is a prayer that speaks directly to the Jewish people. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*. The *Shema* is an affirmation of the supreme

unity of the divine. It is simultaneously a call to unity.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. All that we have suffered, all that we continue to suffer, flickering before my eyes in black-and-white eight-millimeter, the jumbled bones in yawning pits, the hills of gold fillings, the teenagers inside tanks, children sacrificed to soaring nails and chewing shrapnel, the habitual shattering of the mundane into the grotesque.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. All the suffering that we grapple with, that we feel and run from and feel and run from, that eats away at our vision so stealthily we do not realize we are peering through a tunnel.

With all your soul. And then all that we do not see, will not see. Do not feel, will not feel.

And with all your might. The other film: the other lives twisted by the quaking black-and-white farce of tragedy. The spine smashed for a pebble, the homes wrecked and rebuilt and wrecked and rebuilt and wrecked, the dust that will not settle, ash that the wind refuses to lift, the children claimed by holy and unholy wars.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

Is that the reason I am on this side of the street? These words, the vision of unity I have chosen? The insularity, the dissociation of our suffering?

You shall teach them diligently to your children.

You shall speak of them when you sit in your home.

Is that the reason? I am deafened by the vitriol of my kin, hemorrhaging at the navel, and I can't remember now. Is that why I am here, standing opposite my own people, with four lanes of traffic and a freighter of rage between us?

You shall speak of them when you walk by the way.

When you lie down.

And when you rise up. ■

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



The Missing Katrina Story

by Peter Dreier and John Atlas

A WEEK AFTER KATRINA HIT NEW ORLEANS in September 2005, staffers from the national community-based organizing group ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) discovered that tens of thousands of displaced homeowners were in danger of losing their homes due to foreclosure by banks. Most of these New Orleans refugees had lost their jobs and were scattered across Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and elsewhere, living in motels, shelters, apartment buildings, and with relatives. ACORN organizers rushed to disaster shelters in Houston, Baton Rouge, and other cities to locate these mainly low-income African-American

In 2002, ACORN
mounted a
successful grassroots
campaign in New
Orleans to enact a
citywide minimum
wage pegged at a
dollar above the
federal wage level.

homeowners and discover why their homes were being foreclosed when lenders had made highly publicized claims of mortgage relief after the hurricane.

What ACORN organizers discovered was dismaying, but not surprising for anyone who has done work in low-income, racially segregated communities. Major lenders had given their middle-class customers ninety days or more to make mortgage payments. In contrast, many of the banks and lending companies that had targeted low-income consumers—called “sub prime” lenders—were offering mortgage relief for only one month.

On September 22, ACORN released a report, “How the sub prime mortgage industry is sandbagging Katrina-affected homeowners,” to expose the industry’s double standard. After *The Wall Street Journal* and other major media publicized the report, ACORN—along with labor unions and consumer groups—demanded meetings with mainstream and sub prime lenders and successfully negotiated plans to prevent foreclosures.

This story offers an important lesson, and raises two questions. The lesson: grassroots organizations comprised mainly of working class and poor people have been a critical factor in catalyzing the rebuilding of New Orleans’ more vulnerable areas. The questions: why is the public unaware of the work of these community groups? And if poor, uprooted people can do so much in the wake of disaster, why hasn’t the federal government done more to rebuild New Orleans’ low-income neighborhoods?

Much still needs to be done. And the answer to these questions has important implications for the millions of caring Americans who extended their hearts, wallets and volunteer efforts that became the lifeblood for thousands of the victims of Katrina.

Katrina brought out some of the best aspects of American society. Tens of thousands of people donated money, food, blood, skills, and other resources to help Katrina’s victims, channeled through dozens of philanthropic groups. But ultimately the rebuilding of New Orleans, especially the areas where the poor live, cannot depend on charity. It will require that poor people and their allies gain a voice in the decisions made about the city’s future. And only strong grassroots organizations — unions and community groups — that understand how to get and wield political power have the persistence and savvy to make that happen.

PART I: **The “Helpless Victims” Myth**

THE CAMPAIGN TO AVERT FORECLOSURES was only one of many victories—large and small—that ACORN and other community-based organizations achieved by mobilizing Katrina survivors to confront banks, insurance companies, and public officials. These achievements by grassroots groups belie the image of Katrina survivors as helpless victims, grateful for any assistance they received from private charities or government agencies.

ACORN did not simply parachute its organizers into New Orleans and other cities after Katrina struck. It had been organizing low-income and working class residents in New Orleans for three decades, and already had a sizable constituency who were used to challenging the authorities. In 2002, for example, ACORN mounted a successful grassroots campaign in New Orleans to enact a citywide minimum wage pegged at a dollar above the federal wage level. After the surprise victory, the city’s business leaders sued, and the wage law was overturned by the state’s right-wing Supreme Court. But ACORN had made a name for itself as a grassroots David willing to take on powerful Goliaths.

Indeed, ACORN is one of three national community groups that built a grassroots base in New Orleans, Houston, Baton Rouge, Jackson, and other cities in the Katrina Diaspora. Local chapters of the two other organizing networks—the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO)—have, along with ACORN and several other community groups, kept up the pressure on the city, state, and federal governments to address the problems facing Katrina survivors.

ACORN, the largest and most effective of these groups, has pushed public officials and business leaders to spend more money on housing, economic development, and the levees; stop home foreclosures; and bring out voters for the elections (including the New Orleans mayoral primary and run-off elections last April and May). It has also organized a large-scale clean-up and gutting program for homeowners, which that has encouraged people to return.

Their efforts to help Katrina survivors, especially those who want to return to the

levels to respond to the natural disaster. It is also a tortured tale of a community abandoned by its elected leaders, and coming to grips with what it lost.

But Lee's documentary, though visceral and heart wrenching, is also emblematic of the misleading media coverage and analysis of the Katrina disaster. Like readers of the *New Yorker* and *Newsweek* pieces that appeared around the same time (August 21 and September 4, respectively), viewers of Lee's documentary never get any sense that there were organized poor and working-class people fighting back—and winning enough victories to keep up their hopes that they might eventually prevail.

For example, in his lengthy *New Yorker* article, "The Lost Year," author Dan Baum describes three Cornell University graduate students in city planning sitting at a table drinking coffee and studying an inventory they had made of the Ninth Ward's assets, an inventory of the businesses, public buildings and parks, schools and social agencies. What Baum doesn't mention is that the students were interns with ACORN, sitting at Loretta's, a praline shop and cafe around the corner from ACORN's office. Or that their "asset mapping" is a technique used by community organizers and urban planners to help identify a neighborhood's strengths that can be drawn on when residents are mobilized for political action. Baum, like others in the media, failed to note that this study was one of several projects done by ACORN's staff, members, interns, and invited planners, engineers, and architects from several universities that the organization recruited to craft a rebuilding plan it could present to public officials to demand that poor and working class families are given the opportunity to return home to affordable housing, living wage jobs, and good schools.

Looking at New Orleans from the Bottom Up

KATRINA WAS NOT AN equal opportunity disaster. There were clear class and race fault lines. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans was not only one of then nation's poorest cities (one quarter of its population was below the poverty line), but its poor people were among the most concentrated in poverty ghettos. Housing discrimination and the location of

government-subsidized housing contributed to the city's economic and racial segregation. According to the Brookings Institution, the area experienced a faster exodus of jobs—as well as middle-class and wealthy families—to the suburbs than in other metropolitan areas. This exacerbated the city's fiscal crisis, and thus undermined its

ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is the largest community organization of low-income and working-class families in the United States, with 220,000 dues-paying families organized into 850 neighborhoods spread across more than 100 American cities. The ACORN family of organizations includes two public-employee unions, two southern-based

take seriously. It had more than 9,000 member-families. In addition to its work on the municipal minimum wage, ACORN's membership has been the engine behind the decade-long struggle to unionize the downtown hotels. ACORN helped elect several candidates to office, including Marlin Gusman, who was elected sheriff in 2004. In the spring of 2005, New Orleans ACORN had been awarded a certificate by the City Council in a special ceremony for its neighborhood work.

Then the hurricane hit and ACORN became unmoored: its members lost, its office flooded, its staff displaced. But because it is a national organization with chapters around the country [see box], it had the resources and flexibility to respond. After the storm and flooding, thousands of ACORN members in cities across the country opened their homes to house evacuees. ACORN's New Orleans chapter soon got back on its feet, aided by reinforcements from as far away as Flint, Michigan. Here's what ACORN has accomplished over the past year:

STOPPING HOUSING DEMOLITION. Within weeks after Katrina struck, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin announced that the city would demolish approximately 50,000 homes in the city's low-lying areas. After holding community meetings, ACORN decided to sue the city to stop the demolition. In January 2006, it won a court settlement requiring that homeowners be notified and given the opportunity to appeal before any action is taken. To mobilize opposition to the city's plan, ACORN plastered "No Bulldozing" signs on homes, trees, and broken fences all over the Lower Ninth Ward. At one point, ACORN activists chased off a backhoe crew preparing to demolish a home.

RESTORING THE NINTH WARD. To jump-start the city's recovery effort, Mayor Nagin asked some of the region's business, real estate, and legal powerbrokers to form a blue-ribbon task force to make recommendations. Nagin and the task force froze community activists out of the process. Not surprisingly, this top-down group emerged with a plan to shrink the population of New Orleans. At its core, the plan would sacrifice the neighborhoods that had been hardest hit in order to improve flood protection for the rest of the city. The plan called for restoring the city's affluent neighborhoods, its major businesses, and its tourist attractions—the port, the hotels, the French Quarter, the Garden District, and the Superdome—while paying almost no attention to the plight of the low-income residents, many of them scattered in cities hours away, who comprised the bulk of the city's workforce.

In his *New Yorker* article, Baum described a meeting of over 100 angry homeowners from the devastated Lower Ninth Ward who want to return to their homes. He describes the confrontation between the homeowners and two federal agencies—the Small Business Administration and FEMA—that had failed to provide money for small business loans, or even turn on the electricity so the homeowners could begin to fix their homes. What Baum fails to tell readers, however, is that the meeting was organized by ACORN. These angry residents just didn't spontaneously show up in the same place at the same time to prod the government into action. The meeting was the result of long hours of phone calls, leafleting, conversations on doorsteps, preparation sessions, and designing T-shirt logos and slogans. Without New Orleans ACORN, this meeting, like scores of other meetings and demonstrations organized in the wake of Katrina, would not have happened.

Along with organizing protests, ACORN's New Orleans chapter launched a proactive plan to save these communities by encouraging residents who wanted to return to do so. Beginning in December, ACORN crews and volunteers from across the country began working day and night to repair the homes of member-families in the threatened areas. ACORN's crews tore down moldy drywall, ripped up flooring, and carted decades worth of ruined possessions to the curb; then stored salvageable personal belongings, sanitized structures to prevent future mold growth, and put tarping on roofs to prevent further water damage and deterioration. They got the houses ready for rebuilding. Relying on volunteers and private funding, ACORN's clean-up/house-gutting program has saved nearly 2,000 homes that are now ready for rehab. More than 5,000 volunteers have helped with the project, including students on spring break, and workers from the AFL-CIO, and the Canadian Autoworkers Union.

PROTECTING GOOD-WAGE JOBS. In addition to helping rebuild homes in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, ACORN allied with the AFL-CIO and the NAACP to put pressure on the city's powerbrokers to make sure that local residents were hired to work on the massive federally funded rebuilding projects in other parts of the city. And they lobbied and protested to insist that workers be paid the prevailing, pre-hurricane wages for construction work. President Bush had tried to rescind the federal law requiring union-level wages on government-funded construction, but Congress overturned his decision in the wake of pressure from labor unions and community groups like ACORN.

PRESERVING THE RIGHT TO VOTE. ACORN also went to court to ensure that New Orleans' displaced, largely black population would have access to out-of-state polling places, especially in Atlanta and Houston, for the municipal elections held last April and May. The suit argued that the state's election plans would violate the voting rights of thousands of primarily African American voters displaced from the city after Katrina. ACORN demanded that satellite stations be set up in other states and that absentee ballots automatically be sent to the exiles. The federal judge rejected the demand, but ACORN organizer Stephen Bradberry led a successful campaign to get state officials to open several satellite offices in Louisiana. ACORN, the Metropolitan Organization (the IAF affiliate in Houston), and other community groups registered over 20,000 absentee voters for New Orleans municipal elections.

OBTAINING TAX CREDITS. ACORN staffers recognized that one of the most crucial forms of federal assistance was the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a program that provides an income supplement to low-wage workers—from a few hundred dollars to \$4,000 a year—to help lift them out of poverty. To obtain the benefit, however, people have to file a tax form, even if they don't actually have to pay any taxes. In February 2006, ACORN got funding from the William J. Clinton Foundation to reach out to Katrina survivors in ten cities: Birmingham, Alabama; Little Rock, Arkansas; Atlanta, Georgia; Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, and New Orleans, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas. ACORN also provided on-the-spot tax preparation and helped direct displaced residents to other much needed federal and state benefits programs for Katrina survivors.

CREATING A SURVIVOR'S ASSOCIATION. During the first few months after the hurricane, ACORN organizers fanned out across the South to identify members who had been displaced by Katrina. ACORN held meetings in more than a dozen cities to gauge whether the members wanted to return to New Orleans, or create new lives for themselves in their adopted communities. To maintain their momentum, they formed the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association (AKSA). While organizing to address urgent local problems, the group had a broader agenda: to push the Bush administration and Congress to take bolder and quicker action to assist the Katrina survivors to rebuild their lives and their neighborhoods.

Communicating primarily by cell phone, AKSA drafted a united platform, which they announced to the national press via teleconference. Soon, delegations of ACORN members were on buses to Baton Rouge and planes to Washington D.C. They mobilized public protests, held press conferences with friendly state legislators and members of Congress, lobbied public officials, and engaged in regular negotiations with FEMA officials to ensure that the agency continue to provide disaster housing and other assistance to displaced survivors. Mixing confrontation and collaboration, ACORN's tactics sometimes offended government officials and business leaders, but they proved effective. They won a greater voice for residents in the decisions that will shape the future of their city and their neighborhoods.

PART II: Why the People's Government Didn't Do More

What Government Didn't Do

THE CALAMITY OF KATRINA was a failure of political will. A short catalog of sins include the following:

- The federal government ignored many early warnings that the levees were not sufficiently strong;

■ The federal, state, and local governments failed to prepare and implement disaster plans to evacuate the population;

■ The Bush administration failed to quickly respond to immediate needs such as food, water, and emergency housing when Katrina struck;

■ Bush and Congress failed to provide adequate funding to clean up and reconstruct the region's infrastructure, levees, schools, hospitals, businesses, and homes.

Lee's documentary portrays the Bush administration as uncaring and incompetent. Bush shows up in New Orleans for a press conference on September 12, fifteen days after Katrina hit. Mike Brown tells CNN's Soledad O'Brien four days after the hurricane struck that he was unaware of the lack of food, water, and basic health care at the Superdome. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is shown on a Manhattan shoe-shopping trip while New Orleans drowned. Neither Governor Blanco nor Mayor Nagin comes off looking very competent either. Lee called the Katrina disaster a "system failure." *The New York Times* critic correctly summed up the film's message as "collective failure of will." Everyone was at fault.

This is the framework through which the major media have reported about Katrina. In *Newsweek's* special September 2006 issue on Katrina, reporters Evan Thomas, Jonathan Darman, and Sarah Childres blamed the disaster on (continued on page 58)

Myth and Reality

The Iranian Nuclear Threat

BY STEPHEN ZUNES

THERE IS A FRIGHTENING SENSE of *déjà vu*: Talk of the United States using military force against a Middle Eastern state with a nuclear program that allegedly poses a threat to the U.S. and the global community, and which also happens to sit on one of the world's largest reserves of oil.

Unlike Iraq in 2003, however, Iran really does have a nuclear program. While there is no evidence to suggest that Iran intends to use nuclear technology for purposes other than peaceful applications, concerns that the current civilian program could be a cover for a nuclear weapons development are not unfounded. Underlying these apprehensions is the fact that nuclear power is an

unnecessarily expensive and dangerous means of electrical generation for any country, particularly one that is well endowed with other energy resources.

However, developing nuclear power for civilian purposes is legal under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which has been signed and ratified by Iran, the United States, and all but a handful of the world's nations. Iran is currently not doing anything that goes beyond what dozens of other signatories of the NPT are doing legally. Nevertheless, the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has determined that Iran, by failing to report nuclear research activities back in the 1990s, had forfeited many of the rights afforded to other nations in regard to its nuclear development, such as enriching uranium—a restriction that Iran has rejected and has been violating for the past year.

More than likely, Iran has not yet mastered the technique for turning uranium into uranium gas, which is necessary to reproduce highly enriched uranium. In addition, Iran does not have nearly enough centrifuges to enrich the uranium, either for fuel rods or for weapons, nor has Iran demonstrated the ability to operate cascades of centrifuges on a large scale. Finally, there is no evidence that Iran has developed a design of a missile re-entry vehicle that could carry a nuclear warhead. Indeed, Iran is unlikely to have a single deployable nuclear warhead until at least the year 2015.

In other words, there is plenty of time for a diplomatic solution.

Despite the alleged urgency of this so-called crisis, it is important to note that Iran has had a nuclear program since 1957, when President Dwight Eisenhower signed the first of a series of nuclear cooperation agreement with the Shah, a brutal dictator installed by the CIA following its overthrow of the democratic government of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh four years earlier. Over the next two decades, the United States not only provided Iran with technical assistance, but also supplied the country with its first experimental nuclear reactor, complete with enriched uranium and plutonium with fissile isotopes. Despite the refusal of the Shah to rule out the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons, the Ford administration in 1975 approved the sale of up to eight nuclear reactors with fuel, and in 1976, approved the sale of lasers believed to be capable of enriching uranium.

The *Washington Post* reported that an initially hesitant President Ford was assured by his advisors that Iran was only interested in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Ironically, these advisors were none other than his secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld, his chief of staff Dick Cheney, and the director of nonproliferation at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Paul Wolfowitz—the very advisors of the current administration who have been so alarmist about Iran's nuclear program.

Even if Iran aspires to build nuclear weapons, it would be a mistake to assume that the Islamic Republic would use them for aggressive designs. Indeed, the Iranians may have good reasons to desire a nuclear deterrent.

Origins of the Crisis

IN EARLY 2002, IRAN WAS AMONG three countries (the others being Iraq and North Korea) labeled by President George W. Bush as part of "the axis of evil." Iraq, which had given up its nuclear program over a decade earlier and subsequently allowed IAEA inspectors back in the country to verify the absence such a program, was invaded and occupied by the United States. By contrast, North Korea—which reneged on its agreement and has apparently resumed production of nuclear weapons—has not been invaded. The Iranians may see a lesson in that.

Soon after coming to office, the Bush administration decided to unfreeze America's nuclear weapons production and launch a program to develop smaller tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use. This fact was noted by many foreign states, including potential adversaries such as Iran. In this light, it is important to remember that the only country to actually use nuclear weapons in combat is the United States, in the 1945 bombings of two Japanese cities, a decision that most American political leaders still defend to this day.

Furthermore, the U.S. government is allied with Pakistan, which borders Iran to the



east, and possesses nuclear weapons and sophisticated delivery systems. The U.S. is also a strong ally of Israel, located just 600 miles to Iran's west, which has the capability of launching, with long-range missiles, a nuclear strike against the Gulf state in a matter of minutes.

Potential Scenarios

GIVEN THE DISASTROUS RESULTS of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a full-scale ground invasion of Iran is out of the question: Iran is three times the size and population of Iraq, the terrain is far more mountainous, the people are more united against foreign attack, and—unlike Iraq in 2003—no sanctions have been in place preventing the country from maintaining and strengthening its military arsenal.

Instead, a broad consensus of military analysts and those familiar with Pentagon planning envision a massive air attack, likely in conjunction with the Israelis, targeting research, development support, and training centers for Iran's nuclear and missile programs, with the aim of killing as many technically competent Iranians as possible. To enhance the likelihood of such a successful aerial assault, there would also be attacks aimed at the comprehensive destruction of Iranian air defense capabilities and command and control centers.

Iran would immediately retaliate in a number of possible ways. For example, U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf could become easy targets for Iranian missiles and torpedoes. To counter the possibility of an Iranian attack, the U.S. assault would presumably include pre-emptive attacks against Iranian naval facilities, though this would unlikely be enough to prevent damage to American vessels.

Perhaps a more dire concern would be the situation in Iraq, where American troops are currently operating against the Sunni-led insurgency alongside Iranian-backed pro-government militias. If these militias decided to turn their guns on American forces, the United States would be caught in a vise between both sides in the country's simmering civil war. It can be anticipated that the U.S. would strike Iranian Revolutionary Guards near the Iraqi border, but given how thoroughly infiltrated various Iraqi police and military units are with pro-Iranian elements, there is little the U.S. could do to protect American forces.

The initial phase of a potential air war would continue for days if not weeks, and, assuming some sort of Iranian retaliation, would almost certainly turn into a protracted military confrontation. In other words, this would not be a single series of strikes against a single facility—like the 1981 Israeli attack against the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq—which would be over in a matter of hours; this would be a massive and lengthy military operation.

A U.S./Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would not only be contrary to international law—further enflaming international public opinion against the United States and Israel—it would be very unlikely to succeed in ending Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Many of the facilities are deep underground and dispersed over a wide area, making them difficult to eliminate through conventional weapons. Prior to the midterm elections in November 2006, the Bush administration was seriously considering a first-strike nuclear attack, particularly at the nuclear facilities in Natanz and Isfahan.

In any case, there is almost certainly some redundancy in the current Iranian nuclear program that would enable Iran to reconstruct its program in case of an attack. In addition, if Iran's nuclear facilities were raided, the Iranians would presumably formally announce its withdrawal from the NPT and begin a crash program for nuclear weapons development in a more irrepressible manner.

Such an attack would also be a major setback for the growing pro-democracy movement in Iran. The vast majority of Iranians opposed to the Ahmadinejad regime are also united in opposition to U.S. policy and the threat of a U.S.-led attack, a fact that would allow the regime to mobilize the population and crack down even harder on progressive movements.

There are alternatives, however, between going to war and doing nothing.

Possible Solutions

IT IS UNLIKELY THAT U.S. DEMANDS on the United Nations to impose tough sanctions against Iran will be successful. This comes in part because the United States has blocked enforcement of previous UN Security Council resolutions dealing with nuclear nonproliferation when the violators have been allies, such as UNSC resolution 1172, which calls on India and Pakistan to eliminate their nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable missiles, and UNSC resolution 487, which calls on Israel to place its nuclear facilities under the trusteeship of the IAEA. In fact, the United States not only maintains its close strategic relationship with Israel, but the Bush administration has recently agreed to provide Pakistan with sophisticated nuclear-capable jet fighter-bombers and has signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with India.

Given that Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions are likely focused on deterrence, a negotiated settlement is still possible. This could eliminate threats of a U.S. attack against Iran and efforts to overthrow its government. Such a diplomatic solution led to an end to Libya's nuclear program in December 2003.

A related initiative could call for the United States to end its opposition to the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free-zone for the entire Middle East and South Asia, where all nations of the region would be required to give up their nuclear weapons and weapons programs, and open up to strict international inspections. Iran has endorsed the idea, along with Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and other countries in the region. Such nuclear-weapons-free-zones already exist for Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, Antarctica, and Latin America.

Thus far, however, the Bush administration has rejected such a call, insisting that the United States has the right to decide which countries get to have such weapons and which ones do not, effectively demanding a kind of nuclear apartheid.

Not only are such double standards unethical, they are simply unworkable: any effort by America to impose a hierarchy of haves and have-nots in the region would simply fuel rebellion from the have-nots.

The only realistic means of curbing the threat of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is to establish a law-based, region-wide program for disarmament, by which all countries—regardless of their relations with the United States—must abide.

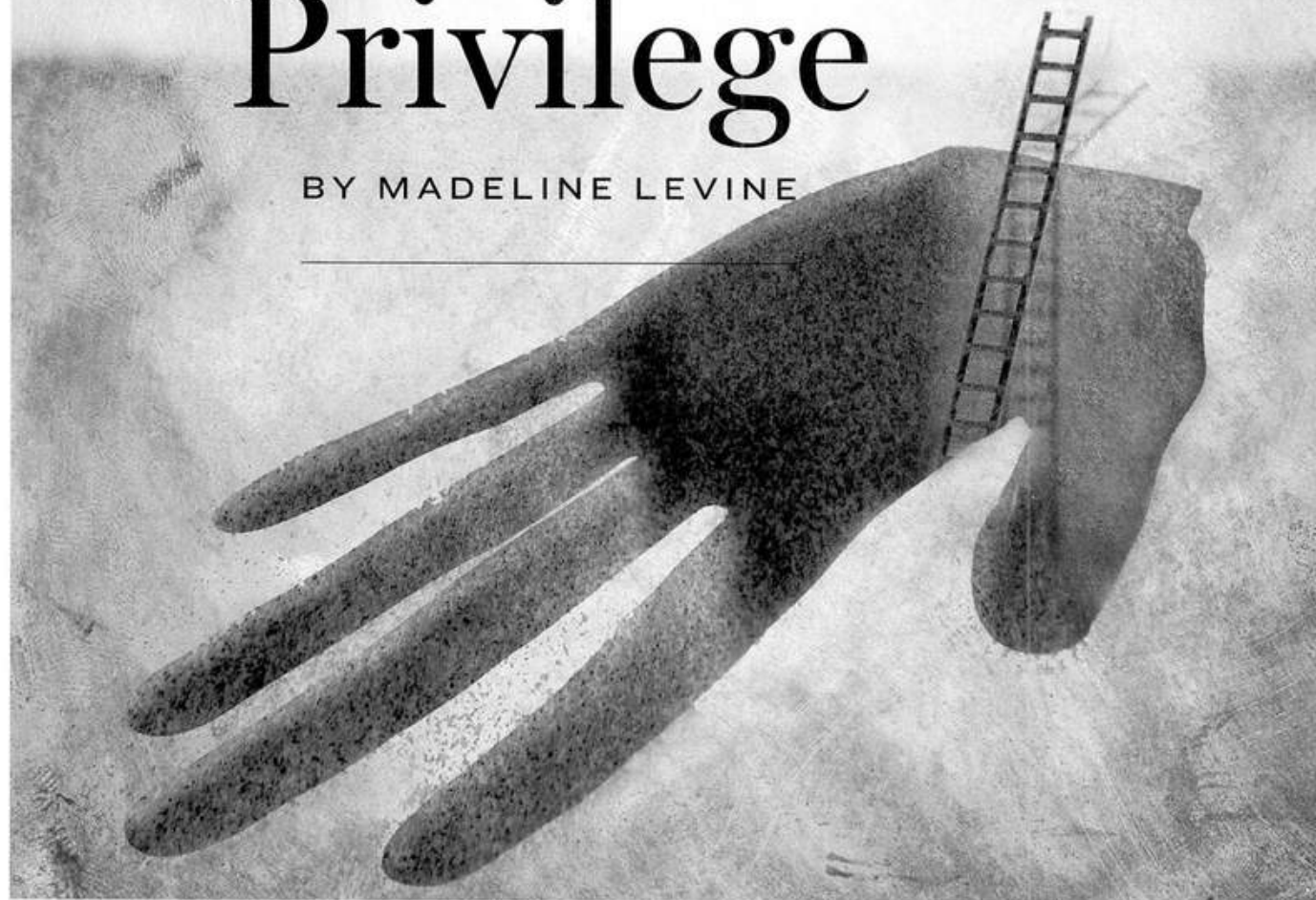
And, ultimately, the only way to make the world completely safe from the threat of nuclear weapons is for the establishment of a nuclear-free planet, in which the United States—as the largest nuclear power—must take the lead. ■

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How Materialism Hurts Our Kids

Privilege

BY MADELINE LEVINE



OUR COUNTRY HAS A NEW GROUP of “at-risk” kids. They don’t belong to the group traditionally considered “at-risk” - inner city kids growing up in harsh economic circumstances. Surprisingly, they belong to the upper middle class, to parents who have comfortable incomes and high levels of education. Current research tells us that it is children of privilege, children long assumed to be protected from elevated rates of emotional problems that are, in fact, evidencing the *highest* rates of emotional problems of any group of kids in this country.

These numbers remind us that there are myths at both ends of the socio-economic spectrum. Many of us assume that the economic and social challenges of poverty are so severe that parenting skills and child development are compromised. Alternately, many assume that in families where parents are financially secure and highly educated, both parenting skills and child development are enhanced. Research tells us that neither assumption is correct. In fact, pre-teens and teens from affluent homes have the highest rates of depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse of any group of children in this country.

There is something unsettling and paradoxical about this fact. After all, these same youngsters are the recipients of both high levels of parental involvement as well as extensive educational, extra-curricular, and recreational opportunities. Is it possible that some combination of money, opportunity, and involvement is having a toxic rather than a protective effect on kids? And if so, what can parents do to make sure that being privileged works toward healthy emotional development rather than against it?

Troubled Kids

ADOLESCENCE HAS LONG BEEN THOUGHT OF as a period of heightened confusion and unhappiness. In fact, adolescents are no more likely to be clinically depressed (as opposed to normally conflicted) than any other age group. So when researchers find that 22 percent of girls from affluent families are clinically depressed—that's three times the national rate—and that somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of teens from privileged backgrounds have significant psychological symptoms, we have, according to the definition used by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) in Atlanta, reached an "epidemic."

This epidemic should disturb all of us, no matter our background. Kids from affluent homes, *because* of the educational and financial opportunities available to them often grow into positions of leadership and authority. Our future doctors, lawyers, CEOs, and policy makers need to be emotionally robust and to have well-defined sense of right and wrong. Mental health problems compromise good decision making.

Ironically, I began to realize the depth of this epidemic—and to write the book that became *The Price of Privilege*—when I met a girl who was particularly adept at hiding her illness from friends and family. Allison was a seemingly typical new patient in my practice made up largely of the daughters and occasionally the sons of well-to-do parents in Marin County, California. She was a well groomed and polite fifteen-year-old who walked into my office with the kind of confidence I often see among my young patients. But Allison's distress was easy for me to read. She was wearing the kind of T-shirt that those in the business of adolescent mental health instantly recognize as a "cutter's T-shirt," a shirt with the cuff pulled low to hide the wrist and a hole for the thumb. These T-shirts are often worn by young girls trying to camouflage the cutting that they do on their wrists and forearms.

When I commented on Allison's T-shirt, she willingly showed me what she had done to herself only hours earlier—taken a razor and incised the word "EMPTY" into her forearm. Allison's "EMPTY" helped crystallize my thoughts about what exactly I had been seeing in my office for the past several years—kids who for all the world looked fine on the outside, but were bleeding underneath. Kids who looked like they had everything, but in fact had none of the things that are necessary to anchor a healthy sense of self: a sense of authenticity, of purpose, of being loved for who they are and not simply how they perform. For Allison, as for many of my young patients, the development of a sense of self was stalled.

Perplexed Parents

ALLISON'S PARENTS, LIKE MOST OF THE PARENTS in my practice, are involved, concerned, loving, and very demanding. They tend to motivate Allison with material goods like expensive pocketbooks and designer jeans. They are very proud of their child's academic and athletic accomplishments, but seem to have little understanding of Allison's distress. They are more than a bit angry that after all they've done, their daughter appears ungrateful. However, they are also terribly worried about Allison's cutting and escalating depression, and are hoping that with some therapy and "a little medication," she'll get back to her old self. In fact, Allison does need help—help understanding why she has given up on herself, why she feels so empty, and why she is so reliant on external praise and recognition to feel good about herself.

Yet to help Allison, as in so many of these cases, her parents also must be helped. These privileged parents need to learn some of the basic tenets of child development: that a sense of self is crafted from the inside out; that parental love cannot be conditional on performance; and that emotional availability—not simply car-time racing from one activity to the next—is what helps kids develop a robust sense of self as well as a reliable repertoire of coping skills that help them to navigate through the inevitable challenges of life.

Unfortunately, good intentions are not the same as good parenting skills. Parents today focus too much on what they can do for their children and on what they can give to their children, instead of concentrating on being available for their children. In the words of one of my astute patients: "It's amazing that my mother can be everywhere and

nowhere at the same time.” The levels of anxiety we have about whether our child will get into the right preschool, the right elementary school, the right high school, and ultimately the right college, used to be reserved for issues of life and death.

Whether our child gets into this school or that simply is not that important. Research has consistently shown that the college one attends has *no* relationship to how happy one will be in life, nor for that matter does it correlate with how much money one will make. Our tremendous preoccupation with grabbing the brass ring, competing with those around us, and winning at all costs, has sent a clear message to our children—that what matters most in life is competition, individualism and the things we accumulate. Instead, we should be teaching our children the values of cooperation, reciprocity and connection. We need to turn our attention from the surfaces of life and let our children know that what we really value is the substance—how we value ourselves, how we treat others, and our ability to walk in someone else’s shoes.

Children learn by watching and imitating their parents. This should not be news to anyone. Before we can teach our children good values, we have to gut check our own values.

The Problem is not Money—It’s Materialism

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT CHILDREN OF PRIVILEGE are experiencing unacceptably high rates of emotional distress is a good beginning, but it doesn’t address the cause of these problems. It is not money per se that stalls emotional development. Rather, researchers have found a number of variables that appear to be driving the high rates of depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse among upper-middle-class kids.

1. *Kids are excessively pressured.* Voltaire said, “The enemy of the good is better.” When kids sit weeping in my office because they received a B instead of an A on an exam, or when a child is too afraid to go home, anticipating his father’s disappointment when he finds his son has been cut from the varsity team, we have made it clear that our kids are only as good as their last performance. This makes for anxious kids who can’t attend to the normal challenges of growing up because they are so worried about maintaining parental approval, often at all costs.

2. *Kids feel disconnected from their parents.* Research shows that upper-middle-class kids feel more disconnected from their parents than children from any other socio-economic group. It takes time and effort to accumulate money. Often we lose sight of exactly whom we are providing for. Every child, in the safety of my office, says that they want more, not less, time with their parents. Children don’t need “stuff,” they need us: they need our inviting, listening presence.

3. *Materialism causes problems.* Materialistic kids have higher rates of emotional problems, fewer friends, and poorer grades than non-materialistic kids. Money is not what ratchets up rates of psychological problems; rather it is the culture of affluence—a culture that values things more than people, competition more than cooperation, and individuality more than reciprocity. All things being equal, affluent parents are more likely to capitulate to the culture of affluence, because their money makes this a readily available default setting.

It’s not unusual for me to see a mother and daughter together in my office. Here’s a typical visit. The girl is the queen bee at school—she’s beautiful, bright, and sets the trends among peers. To her great surprise and chagrin, she’s just been dumped by her third boyfriend. She doesn’t understand that the reason none of her boyfriends hang around for long is because she is so exhaustingly self-centered. As she cries in my office, her mom wraps an arm around her and says, “Don’t worry, honey, we’ll go shopping, you’ll feel better.” That’s a parent who means well but who is not doing well for her child.

Every time we use a material thing as a way to calm a child, we rob that child of the opportunity to manage negative or unhappy feelings. Unhappy feelings are inevitable in life, and our kids need to learn how to navigate their way through challenges, disappointments, and unhappiness. We need to be teaching emotional resilience and self-management skills, not consumerism. We can suggest that the child call a friend, go for a walk, write in a diary, talk to a trusted teacher, and most importantly think about why

she's having trouble holding on to her boyfriends. Teaching skills for managing unhappy feelings are good for a lifetime; designer outfits are only good for a season.

Materialism and Me-firstism

SOLVING PROBLEMS BY BUYING STUFF is one of the more obvious manifestations of materialism. But it's not the only one. When parents push kids to be perfect, they are also engaging in a more subtle form of materialism.

Part of a parent's job is to encourage their children and to set the bar high. We should have substantial goals for our kids; we want them to do well, and we want them to learn the skills that lead to confidence and healthy self-esteem. Yet how we encourage our children makes a big difference.

In the real world, we value both competition and cooperation. But kids coming into my office tell me about stealing other people's papers and cheating on the SAT. There is a lost sense of integrity and values. These kids are engaging in a kind of competitive behavior that doesn't acknowledge the humanity of the people they are competing against. It is a kind of competition that turns people into things, relationships into commodities. What we want our children to aim for in school, in relationships, and later out in the world, is a "win/win" attitude. But kids who are encouraged to adopt an "every man for himself" attitude, come to see others, not as people like themselves, but as obstacles to be overcome. The ultimate form of materialism is when even people become objects.

What Kids (and We) Need

KIDS NEED PARENTS WHO LOVE THEM for who they are, not what they do.

That's true for all of us. Some days are better than others. I'd hate to have my husband come home on a day when I've had a tough time writing and hear him say, "You didn't write well today, so I'm not interested in you." We all need to feel that the core of who we are is dear to the people who love us.

So many kids experience love as conditional, and that makes them incredibly vulnerable to depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. These kids are often forced to forgo the myriad of developmental tasks they face—learning self-control, frustration tolerance, what genuinely interests them, what their talents are, how to talk to the opposite sex, etc.—as their anxiety about pleasing their parents makes them spend disproportionate amounts of time and energy on maintaining their parents' approval. There is a big difference between performance and true learning. Performance is outer-directed; its goal is to please others. True learning is inner-directed. Inner directed children are driven to learn, not because of grades, medals or even parental approval, but because they gain real satisfaction from the process of learning.

The stunningly high rates of emotional problems among America's most privileged kids is due in part to paying too much attention to what doesn't matter, and too little attention to what does. Make sure your child knows you value being a good person above all else.

There are some incredibly simple things—things our grandmothers knew how to do with their hands tied behind their backs—that we can do to raise healthy kids.

Kids need to be loved, period. The closest we come to a silver bullet in psychology is maternal warmth. When a toddler falls down, we are not mad at the toddler. We are proud of them for trying to walk. Why, then, do we get mad when our teens experiment with their attempts to be independent? Kids need us to be interested in them and support them even if they are very different from us. We need to be just as interested in the child who is learning to fly solo as we were in the one who wanted a co-pilot.

Kids need discipline. Childrearing is not just about the warm fuzzies. When I would tell my teenage boys they had a curfew, they would slam their door and say, "you are the meanest mom in Kentfield." I took that as a compliment. Since Kentfield is a pretty small town, it meant I wasn't the meanest mom in the world.

When we set limits for them, kids learn how to set limits for themselves. As a psychologist, I tell parents that the single most important thing we (continued on page 60)

Spirituality
and Intimate
Relationships



Monogamy, Polyamory, and Beyond

by Jorge N. Ferrer

IN BUDDHISM, SYMPATHETIC JOY (*MUDITA*) IS REGARDED as one of the “four immeasurable states” (*brahmaviharas*) or qualities of an enlightened person—the other three being loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), and equanimity (*upeksha*). Sympathetic joy refers to the human capability to participate in the joy of others, to feel happy when others feel happy. Although with different emphases, such understanding can also be found in the contemplative teachings of many other religious traditions such as the Kabbalah, Christianity, or Sufism, which in their respective languages talk about empathic joy, for example, in terms of opening the “eye of the heart.” According to these and other traditions, the cultivation

As jealousy
dissolves, universal
compassion and
unconditional love
become more easily
available to the
individual.

of sympathetic joy can break through the ultimately false duality between self and others, being therefore a potent aid on the path toward overcoming self-centeredness and achieving liberation.

Though the ultimate aim of many religious practices is to develop sympathetic joy for all sentient beings, intimate relationships offer human beings—whether they are spiritual practitioners or not—a precious opportunity to taste its experiential flavor. Most psychologically balanced individuals naturally share, to some degree, in the happiness of their mates. Bliss and delight can effortlessly emerge within us as we feel the joy of our partner's ecstatic dance, enjoyment of an art performance, relishing of a favorite dish, or serene contemplation of a splendid sunset. And this innate capacity for sympathetic joy in intimate relationships often reaches its peak in deeply emotional shared experiences, sensual exchange, and lovemaking. When we are in love, the embodied joy of our beloved becomes extremely contagious.

Jealousy in Monogamous Relationships

BUT WHAT IF OUR PARTNER'S sensuous or emotional joy were to arise in relation not to us but to someone else? For the vast majority of people, the immediate reaction would likely be not one of expansive openness and love, but rather of contracting fear, anger, and perhaps even violent rage. The change of a single variable has rapidly turned the selfless contentment of sympathetic joy into the "green-eyed monster" of jealousy, as Shakespeare called this compulsive emotion.

Perhaps due to its prevalence, jealousy is widely accepted as "normal" in most cultures, and many of its violent consequences have often been regarded as understandable, morally justified, and even legally permissible. (It is worth remembering that as late as the 1970s the law of states such as Texas, Utah, and New Mexico considered "reasonable" the homicide of one's adulterous partner if it happened at the scene of discovery!). Though there are circumstances in which the mindful expression of rightful anger (not violence) may be a temporary appropriate response—for example, in the case of the adulterous breaking of monogamous vows—jealousy frequently makes its appearance in interpersonal situations where no betrayal has taken place or when we rationally know that no real threat actually exists (for example, watching our partner's sensuous dance with an attractive person at a party). In general, the awakening of sympathetic joy in observing the happiness of one's mate in relationship with perceived "rivals" is an extremely rare pearl to find. In the context of romantic relationships, jealousy functions as a hindrance to sympathetic joy.

What are the roots of this widespread difficulty in experiencing sympathetic joy in the arenas of sexuality and sensuous experience? What is ultimately lurking behind such an apparently defiled behavior as jealousy? Can jealousy be transformed through a fuller embodiment of sympathetic joy in our intimate relationships? What emotional response can take the place of jealousy? And what are the implications of transforming jealousy for our spiritually informed relationship choices? To begin exploring these questions, we need to turn to the discoveries of modern evolutionary psychology.

Evolutionary Map of Jealousy

THE EVOLUTIONARY ORIGINS and function of jealousy have been clearly mapped by contemporary evolutionary psychologists, anthropologists, and zoologists. Despite its tragic impact in the modern world (the overwhelming majority of mate battering and spousal murders worldwide is caused by jealous violence), jealousy very likely emerged around 3.5 million years ago in our hominid ancestors as an adaptive response of vital evolutionary value for both genders. Whereas the reproductive payoff of jealousy for males was to secure certainty of paternity and avoid spending resources in support of another male's genetic offspring, for females it evolved as a mechanism for guaranteeing

protection and resources for biological children by having a steady partner. In short, jealousy emerged in our ancestral past to protect males from being cuckolded and to protect women from being abandoned. This is why even today men tend to experience more intense feelings of jealousy than women do when they suspect sexual infidelity, while women are more likely than men to feel threatened when their mates become emotionally attached to another female and spend time and money with her. Modern research shows that this “evolutionary logic” in relation to gender-specific jealousy patterns operates widely across disparate cultures and countries, from Sweden to China, from North America and the Netherlands to Japan and Korea.

The problem, of course, is that many instinctive reactions that had evolutionary significance in ancestral times do not make much sense in our modern world. There are today many single mothers, for example, who do not need or want financial—or even emotional—support from their children’s fathers, yet still feel jealous when their ex-partners pay attention to other women. And most contemporary men and women suffer from jealousy independent of whether they want children or plan to have them with their partners. As evolutionary psychologist David Buss puts it in his acclaimed book *The Evolution of Desire*, most human mating mechanisms and responses are actually “living fossils” shaped by the genetic pressures of our evolutionary history.



Our Genetic Instincts

INTERESTINGLY, THE GENETIC ROOTS of jealousy are precisely the same as those behind the desire for sexual exclusivity (or possessiveness) that we have come to call “monogamy.” In contrast to conventional use, however, the term “monogamy” simply means “one spouse” and does not necessarily entail sexual fidelity. In any event, whereas jealousy is not exclusive to monogamous bonds (swingers and polyamorous people also feel jealous), the origins of jealousy and monogamy are intimately connected in our primeval past. Indeed, evolutionary psychology tells us that jealousy emerged as a hypersensitive defense mechanism against the genetically disastrous possibility of having one’s partner stray from monogamy. In the ancestral savannah, it was as imperative for females to secure a stable partner who would provide food and protect their children from predators as it was for males to make sure they were not investing their time and energy in someone else’s progeny. Put simply, from an evolutionary standpoint the main purpose of both monogamy and jealousy is to provide for the dissemination of one’s DNA.

In a context of spiritual aspiration aimed at the gradual uncovering and transformation of increasingly subtle forms of self-centeredness, we can perhaps recognize that jealousy ultimately serves a biologically engrained form of egotism which we may call “genetic selfishness”—not to be confused with Richard Dawkins’ “selfish gene” theory, which reduces human beings to the status of survival machines at the service of gene

replication. Genetic selfishness is so archaic, pandemic, and deeply seated in human nature that it invariably goes unnoticed in contemporary culture and spiritual circles. An example may help to reveal the elusive nature of genetic selfishness. In the movie *Cinderella Man*, an officer from the electric company is about to cut off the power at the residence of three children who will very likely die without heat—it is winter in New York at the time of the Great Depression. When the children's mother appeals to the compassion of the officer, begging him not to cut off the power, he retorts that his own children will suffer the same fate if he does not do his job. As I looked around the theater, I noted a large number of people in the audience nodding their heads in poignant understanding. We can all empathize with the officer's stance. After all, who would not do the same in similar circumstances? Is it not both humanely understandable and morally justifiable to favor the survival of one's own progeny over that of others? But, we may want to ponder, was the officer's decision the most enlightened action to take? What if by saving our only child we were condemning to death three or four children from another person? Should numbers be of any significance in these decisions? What course of action is most aligned with universal compassion in these admittedly extreme situations? Any effort to reach a generalized answer to these questions is likely misguided; each concrete situation requires careful examination within its context and from a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing. My aim in raising these questions is not to offer solutions, but merely to convey how tacitly genetic selfishness is embedded as "second nature" in the human condition.

Transforming Jealousy Into Sympathetic Joy

THE DISCUSSION OF THE TWIN evolutionary origins of jealousy and monogamy raises further questions: Can jealousy be truly transformed? What emotional response can take the place of jealousy in human experience? And how can the transformation of jealousy affect our relationship choices?

To my knowledge, in contrast to most other emotional states, jealousy has no antonym in any human language. This is probably why the Kerista community—a San Francisco-based polygamous group that was disbanded in the early 1990s—coined the term "compersion" to refer to the emotional response opposite to jealousy. The Keristas defined compersion as "the feeling of taking joy in the joy that others you love share among themselves." Since the term emerged in the context of the practice of "polyfidelity" (faithfulness to many), it encompassed sensuous and sexual joy, but compersion was only cultivated when a person had loving bonds with all parties involved. However, the feeling of compersion can also be extended to any situation in which our mate feels emotional/sensuous joy with others in wholesome and constructive ways. In these situations, we can rejoice in our partner's joy even if we do not know the third parties. Experientially, compersion can be felt as a tangible presence in the heart whose awakening may be accompanied by waves of warmth, pleasure, and appreciation at the idea of our partner loving others and being loved by them in nonharmful and mutually beneficial ways. In this light, I suggest that compersion can be seen as a novel extension of sympathetic joy in the realm of intimate relationships, and particularly in interpersonal situations that conventionally evoke feelings of jealousy.

The reader acquainted with *Vajrayana* Buddhism may wonder whether such an extension is novel at all. Has not the transformation of jealousy into sympathetic joy been described in the tantric literature? Well, yes and no. In *Vajrayana* Buddhism, jealousy is considered an imperfection (*klesha*) associated with attachment and self-centeredness that is transmuted into sympathetic joy, equanimity, and wisdom by the power of the Lord of Karma, *Amoghasiddhi*, one of the Five *Dhyani* Buddhas (Buddhas we visualize in meditation). From the green body of *Amoghasiddhi* emanates his consort, the goddess Green Tara, who is said to also have the power of turning jealousy into the ability to dwell in the happiness of others.

At first sight, it may look as if the green gods and goddesses of the Buddhist

pantheon have defeated the green-eyed monster of jealousy. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that this perception needs correction. The problem is that the Buddhist terms translated as “jealousy”—such as *issa* (Pali); *phrag dog* (Tibetan); or *irshya* (Sanskrit)—are more accurately read as “envy.” In the various Buddhist descriptions of “jealousy” we generally find illustrations of bitterness and resentment at the happiness, talents, or good fortune of others, but very rarely, if ever, of contracting fear and anger in response to a mate’s sexual or emotional connection to others. In the *Abhidhamma*, for example, jealousy (*issa*) is considered an immoral mental state characterized by feelings of ill will at the success and prosperity of others. The description of the “jealous gods” realm (*asura-loka*) also supports this assertion. Though commonly called “jealous,” the *asuras* are said to be envious of the gods of the heaven realm (*devas*), and possessed by feelings of ambition, hatred, and paranoia.

Discussing the *samsaric* mandala, Chöogyam Trungpa writes in *Orderly Chaos*, “It is not exactly jealousy; we do not seem to have the proper term in the English language. It is a paranoid attitude of comparison rather than purely jealousy . . . a sense of competition.” As should be obvious, all of these descriptions refer to “envy”—defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “to feel displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable”—and not to jealousy, which is a response to the real or imagined threat of losing one’s partner or valued relationship to a third party. Since Buddhist teachings about jealousy were originally aimed at monks who were not supposed to develop emotional attachments (even those who engaged in tantric sexual acts), the lack of systematic reflection in Buddhism upon romantic jealousy should not come as a surprise.

Let us explore now the implications of transforming jealousy in our intimate relationships. I suggest that the transformation of jealousy through the cultivation of sympathetic joy bolsters the awakening of the enlightened heart. As jealousy dissolves, universal compassion and unconditional love become more easily available to the individual. Human compassion is universal in its embrace of all sentient beings without qualifications. Human love is also all-inclusive and unconditional—a love that is both free from the tendency to possess and that does not expect anything in return. Although to love without conditions is generally easier in the case of brotherly and spiritual love, I suggest that as we heal the historical split between spiritual love (*agape*) and sensuous love (*eros*), the extension of sympathetic joy to more embodied forms of love becomes a natural development. And when embodied love is emancipated from possessiveness, a richer range of spiritually legitimate relationship options organically emerges. As people become more whole and are freed from certain basic fears (e.g. of abandonment, unworthiness, or engulfment), new possibilities for the expression of embodied love open up, which may feel natural, safe, and wholesome, rather than undesirable, threatening, or even morally questionable. For example, once jealousy turns into sympathetic joy, and sensuous and spiritual love are integrated, a couple may feel drawn to extend their love to other individuals beyond the structure of the pair bond. In short, once jealousy loosens its grip on the contemporary self, human love can attain a wider dimension of embodiment in our lives that may naturally lead to the mindful cultivation of more inclusive intimate connections.

Social Monogamy as a Mask for Biological Polyamory

EVEN IF MINDFUL AND OPEN, the inclusion of other loving connections in the context of a partnership can elicit the two classic objections to nonmonogamy (or polyamory): First, it does not work in practice; and second, it leads to the destruction of relationships. (I am leaving aside here the deeply engrained moral opposition to the very idea of polyamory associated with the legacy of Christianity in the West.) As for the first objection, though polygyny (“many wives”) is still culturally prevalent on the globe—out of

Human beings are endowed with widely diverse dispositions that predispose them toward different relationship styles: celibacy, monogamy, serial monogamy, or polyamory.

The culturally prevalent belief that the only correct sexual options are either celibacy or monogamy is a myth that needs to be laid to rest.

853 known human cultures, 84 percent permit polygyny—it seems undeniable that with a few exceptions, modern attempts at more gender-egalitarian and open relationships have not been very successful. Nevertheless, the same could be said about monogamy. After all, the history of monogamy is the history of adultery. As H. H. Munro wrote, monogamy is “the Western custom of one wife and hardly any mistresses.” Summing up the available evidence, David Buss estimates that “approximately 20 to 40 percent of American women and 30 to 50 percent of American men have at least one affair over the course of their marriage,” and recent surveys suggest that the chance of *either* member of a modern couple committing infidelity at some point in their marriage may be as high as 76 percent—with these numbers increasing every year. Though most people in our culture consider themselves—and are believed to be—monogamous, anonymous surveys reveal that many are so socially, but not biologically.

In other words, social monogamy frequently masks biological polyamory in an increasingly significant number of couples. In her book *Anatomy of Love*, prominent anthropologist Helen Fisher suggests that the human desire for clandestine extramarital sex is genetically grounded in the evolutionary advantages that having other mates provided for both genders in ancestral times: extra opportunities to spread DNA for males, and extra protection and resources, plus the acquisition of potentially better sperm for females. It may also be important to note that the prevalent relationship paradigm in the modern West is no longer lifelong monogamy (“till death do us part”), but serial monogamy (many partners sequentially), often punctuated with adultery. Serial monogamy, plus clandestine adultery, is in many respects not too different from polyamory, except perhaps in that the latter is more honest, ethical, and arguably less harmful. In this context, the mindful exploration of polyamory may help in alleviating the suffering caused by the staggering number of clandestine affairs in our modern culture.

Furthermore, to disregard a potentially emancipatory cultural development because its early manifestations did not succeed may be unwise. Looking back at the history of emancipatory movements in the West—from feminism to the abolition of slavery to the gaining of civil rights by African Americans—we can see that the first waves of the Promethean impulse were frequently burdened with problems and distortions, which only later could be recognized and resolved. This is not the place to review this historical evidence, but to dismiss polyamory because of its previous failures may be equivalent to having written off feminism on the grounds that its first waves failed to reclaim genuine feminine values or free women from patriarchy (e.g. turning women into masculinized “superwomen” capable of succeeding in a patriarchal world).

Polyamory as a Path Toward Emotional and Spiritual Depth

BUT WAIT A MOMENT. Dyadic relationships are already challenging enough. Why complicate them further by adding extra parties to the equation? From a spiritual standpoint, an intimate relationship can be viewed as a structure through which human beings can learn to express and receive love in many forms. Although I would hesitate to declare polyamory more spiritual or evolved than monogamy, it is clear that if a person has not mastered the lessons and challenges of the dyadic structure he or she may not be ready to take on the challenges of more complex forms of relationships. Therefore, the objection of impracticability may be valid in many cases.

The second common objection to polyamory is that it results in the dissolution of pair bonds. The rationale is that the intimate contact with others will increase the chances that one member of the couple will abandon the other and run off with a more appealing mate. This concern is understandable, but the fact is that people are having affairs, falling in love, and leaving their partners all the time in the context of monogamous vows. As we have seen, adultery goes hand in hand with monogamy, and lifelong

monogamy has been mostly replaced with serial monogamy (or sequential polyamory) in our culture. Parenthetically, vows of lifelong monogamy create often unrealistic expectations that add suffering to the pain involved in the termination of any relationship—and one could also raise questions about the wholesomeness of the psychological needs for certainty and security that such vows normally meet. In any event, although it may sound counterintuitive at first, the threat of abandonment may be actually reduced in polyamory, since the loving bond that our partner may develop with another person does not necessarily mean that he or she must choose between them or us (or lie to us).

More positively, the new qualities and passions that novel intimate connections can awaken within a person can also bring a renewed sense of creative dynamism to the sexual/emotional life of the couple, whose frequent stagnation after three or four years (seven in some cases) is the chief cause of clandestine affairs and separation. As recent surveys show, the number of couples who successfully navigate the so-called four- and seven-year itches is decreasing every year. Mindful polyamory (i.e., practiced with the full knowledge and approval of all concerned) may also offer an alternative to the usually unfulfilling nature of currently prevalent serial monogamy in which people change partners every few years, never benefiting from the emotional and spiritual depth that only an enduring connection with another human being provides. In a context of psychospiritual growth, such exploration can create unique opportunities for the development of emotional maturity, the transmutation of jealousy into sympathetic joy, the emancipation of embodied love from exclusivity and possessiveness, and the integration of sensuous and spiritual love. As Christian mystic Richard of St. Victor maintains, mature love between lover and beloved naturally reaches beyond *(continued on page 60)*

Dear Swami

BY SWAMI BEYONDANANDA

D**EAR SWAMI:** The war in Iraq drags on. More than 600,000 civilians have died in Iraq since our invasion, as have more than 2,800 of our troops. Private companies are making money hand over fist, yet the Iraqi people don't even have basic services. Our fearless leader has instituted a stay the (inter)course policy, and no one seems able to stop him. I could go on.

My question is, where are the religious leaders in this country? I don't mean those in the thrall of the Religious Right. I mean those ministers in mainstream denominations, rabbis with conscience, Evangelicals who believe in Jesus' actual teachings, New Thought ministers, etc. Where are these people, and why aren't they standing up and speaking out? Is it about losing their nonprofit status, or something deeper?

—Ann Sadat, Putney, Vermont

DEAR ANN: Regardless of what our religious leaders are or aren't doing, most Americans are waking up to the sad realization that our President laid an egg in Iraq, and now the chickens are coming home to roost. Once again, we've had to learn that

every war that starts out as a “just war” ends up as ... just war. The entire notion that we went there to keep the peace has been shattered, as more and more people begin to suspect we’re there to keep the pieces instead.

I too have been curious about the whereabouts, whatabouts and howabouts of our mainstream religious leaders. We hear all this religious outcry about how two men lying together is an abomination, but when a whole bunch of men lie together to bomb a nation, the silence is deafening. I can understand not wanting to jeopardize nonprofit status, but you cannot forget that REAL Bottom Line is their For-Prophet status. No matter what the religion, the founding Prophets offered up some version of the Golden Rule. While spiritual text is always open to interpretation, not even the most dyslexic translation has Jesus saying, “Doo-doo unto others before they can doo-doo unto you,” “blessed are the war makers,” or “the guys with the biggest army shall inherit the earth.”

If churches really are worth all those taxes they don’t pay, then the real service they can perform is to have faith in their faith and stand by their stand. And maybe be less concerned with Armageddon and Judgment Day and more focused on bringing about Disarmageddon and Nonjudgment Day, when indeed a peacemaker is planted in the heart of every nation and we the people sit on the seat of power instead of it sitting on us.

Maybe we can encourage our religious leaders to be less concerned with the here-after (or, in the case of those who believe in reincarnation, the here-before) and make the world a better place in the here-now. Maybe we can help them move past the Ten Commandments to the One Suggestion: That we’re all one with the same One, the Inescapable Oneness. The Universe has us surrounded! Might as well surrender.

Might as well surrender to using the spiritual power in our own hearts rather than

waiting for a Higher Power to magically come down and intervene. We can’t expect to be fed intravenously forever, can we? It’s called supply side spirituality: Be more supplying, and less demanding. For indeed we are not here to earn God’s love, we’re here to spend it! Time for all denominations to go for the highest common denominator instead of the lowest and see the world from a God’s-eye view for a change: We’re all in it together, and we’re here to re-grow the Garden from the grass-roots up—and have a heaven of a time doing it.

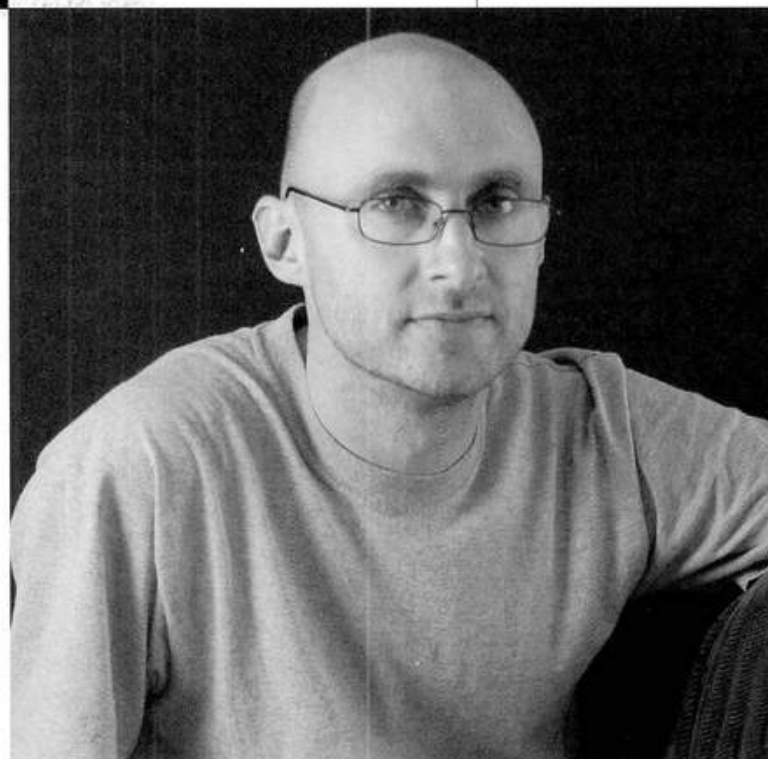
DEAR SWAMI: We’ve been exploring our sexuality for several years now. We’ve been through tantra, and now we’re considering polyamory. What’s your take, Swami?

—Rich Ewell and Sara Mony,
Tiburon, California

DEAR RICH AND SARA: Never, never, never! Not with a parrot. Ever. ■



To learn more about Swami Beyondananda, visit wakeupaughing.com



A Conversation with Arthur Neslen Covering Israel

by Joel Schalit

THE BIGGEST FAILING OF MOST WESTERN writing about Israel is its failure to properly capture the distinctiveness of Israeli politics. Always unfairly compromised by any number of factors—political partisanship, lack of historical knowledge, or the rush to continuously keep up with the exhausting pace of regional events—the details frequently get lost, and so do the people responsible for them. For a country with such a remarkable impact on global politics, this failing is not just a journalistic problem, but an ethical one as well. How best might anyone interested in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict play an effective role in finding peace if they continually have to work with reporting that consistently overlooks the true identities of its

combatants? What such readers need is a kind of reportage that successfully portrays the idiosyncratic ways that Israelis understand themselves and their situation.

Arthur Neslen's *Occupied Minds* (Pluto Press) helps point the way. A 275-page collection of interviews with contemporary Israelis ranging from soldiers, sex workers, and anarchists, to ultra-orthodox rabbis, settlers and recent immigrants, *Occupied Minds* is an ethnographer's dream come true. Each interview subject communicates an essential aspect of Israeli society, giving testimony to the complex nature of the country in the most representative and uncensored of ways. Though the author's own political prejudices always shine through, he somehow manages to use his partisanship as the basis for extremely candid conversations with even the most reactionary of his interviewees. Indeed, Neslen always gets his story, and in doing so manages to capture that of Israel in a delightfully eye-opening and unprecedented manner.

Occupied Minds is the product of Neslen's long career in reporting on the Middle East for such diverse outlets as *The Guardian* and *Al-Jazeera.net*, as well as at the BBC. *Tikkun's* Managing Editor Joel Schalit spoke to Neslen, a British Jew now based in Tel Aviv, about his opinions on the state of contemporary Mideast reporting, and where Israel fits into the highly problematic mix.

TIKKUN: Middle Eastern affairs have developed a higher profile in the West since 9/11. How well do you think they're being covered?

ARTHUR NESLEN: I don't think that Western audiences are getting an accurate picture of events here—or a balanced sense of the range of debate. There's a long tradition of press cheerleading in times of war. When the home team is in trouble, or splits emerge among the sources journalists depend on to tell its story, they can be a bit more critical. They can campaign on one side or the other, debate how to win the war, or even whether to end it. But the parameters for debate are set by official sources. Journalists depend on them, and they know it.

In Iraq, news journalism has been compromised first by the threat to reporters—123 have been killed since 2003, 48 this year alone so far. For self-preservation, journalists tend to stay in Baghdad's Green Zone, venturing out only as embeds with the U.S. military. They report the narrative they're surrounded by: an uphill struggle to bring democracy to a land scarred by ethnic hatred, terror, and fundamentalism. Apart from *The Independent's* Patrick Cockburn, few reporters have really challenged that. Because this war has been spun like no other, even the best have to spend their time chasing the latest PR wheeze from Washington, and bigger questions often fall by the wayside.

TIKKUN: What about reporting on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?

AN: Because it's been going on longer than Iraq, journalists can choose between the narratives of terror or occupation to explain the conflict. The BBC used to pay lip service to the Palestinian narrative, albeit without much context. But after 9/11, Palestine effectively became the War on Terror's Mediterranean front. The Occupation disappeared from the radar to the extent that sanctions against the Palestinians have been recast as a prop to fight Hamas terror.

When I was writing BBC national news bulletins in 2001–2002, lobbyists routinely accused our editors of anti-Semitism for not calling Palestinian fighters "terrorists" or whatever. After the assassination of the PFLP leader Abu Ali Mustafa, the Israeli embassy called up to demand that we not run a PFLP statement threatening revenge in case it contained a coded instruction for terrorists. We complied, and as I recall, we didn't report the PFLP's statement two weeks later linking their assassination of the Israeli tourism minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, to Mustafa's death. During Operation Defensive Shield, the Israeli government threatened to close down our Jerusalem offices unless we withdrew Barbara Plett from Ramallah. We caved in again.

I remember scripting a two-way with the BBC Correspondent Caroline Hawley in Jerusalem for Radio Five Live, after one of the first suicide bombings of the Intifada. As

ever, the first question I had to pen was the generic body count one ("What's the latest?"), and the second, equally generic, "What reaction can we expect from the Israelis?" But the third question was where you had some latitude. So I tried, and asked, "But Caroline, what could drive a Palestinian to kill themselves and others for so little political gain?" The assistant editor drew a red line through the question. "That's not news," he said. When I asked him why he thought they did it, he replied, "Because they're all fanatics."

The BBC, particularly the World Service (which isn't available in the U.K.), is miles ahead of other corporate networks, but it's funded by the state, and highly susceptible to pressure from it. Our editor even used to go to a weekly meeting with the home secretary. The BBC's roots are in the civil service, not journalism, and it's highly ideological, despite its public image.

TIKKUN: Critics sometimes accuse European reporters of covering Israel like any other "backward" or "violent" Middle East state. Do you think Israel should be editorially set apart from the region or presented as possessing core Middle Eastern traits?

AN: It's ironic that Israel strives to present itself as Western, secular, and enlightened when a lot of British journalists still see it as something close to "the wogs fighting each other again." I do hear outrageous comments from reporters who've just arrived here sometimes. But within the current British news paradigm, Israelis are people like us, a friend with shared values etc. There's enough cynicism in the business that it could flip over as soon as there's no perceived British interest involved. Then we'll be back to age-old hatreds, ethnic factions, and maybe worse.

My own view is that Israel is a part of the Middle East and should be reported that way. That doesn't necessarily mean focusing on core traits—and I'm not sure which would be most illuminating—but providing background. In 2000, the Glasgow University Media Group did a survey of 300 young people who got their information from BBC and ITN news and 71 percent of them didn't know that Israel was occupying the occupied territories. Most thought the Palestinians were occupying them! Certainly, editorial interference should be resisted, but context is crucial for an organization like the BBC to meet its public service remit, even if it's "not news" in the narrowest definition.

TIKKUN: What do you think are the most common mistakes that reporters make in covering the Arab world?

AN: The Israeli gestalt that "the Arabs" have all these countries and "we" have only one has more sway in U.S. newsrooms. Journalists working in Arab countries for any length of time become sensitive to local nuance or they don't get stories. But when reporters are parachuted into newsworthy countries, they tend to rely on narratives about "hardliners" and "moderates" or how will the latest diplomatic intrigue play on "the Arab street" because these please the editors back home.

Maybe there's also a general historical ignorance about the role that foreign powers such as the U.K. and U.S. have played in the region. One of the problems with the Middle East is the totally arbitrary nature of the borders that were drawn up under the Sykes-Picot agreement. Nation-states with stable borders are still seen by Westerners as the apex of civilization, which is ironic because globalization is rendering them obsolete. But in the Middle East, nation-states have always been superficial and few regimes have popular legitimacy.

Robert Fisk excepted, most journalists don't have the time, knowledge, or editorial tolerance to examine how these states were created or survive. They may not know about the U.S.-backed destruction of the Arab Communist parties in the second half of the last century, the funneling of radical sentiment into Islamic parties, and buttressing of dictators with U.S. aid. So they tend to locate problems from women's oppression to the democratic deficit in third world political systems, or else Islam. And then we're back to the War on Terror.

Many journalists at the higher-brow end of the market would be quite happy to hone in on the ethnic differences of the Middle East in pseudo-anthropological studies of

"the natives strange aversion to democracy." Ethnic differences here are like a chaos theory fractal; you can go into them forever without taking any heat. Meanwhile, the allegiances shift like desert sands, yesterday's bad guys become today's good guys, people get confused and the editors say let's focus on the big picture: What is it about Iraqis that their army won't stand up so we can stand down?

TIKKUN: Most Israeli newspapers now publish online English editions—*Haaretz's* has become increasingly important to Diaspora audiences—but how well do they report Israeli affairs to the Diaspora and vice versa?

AN: I think that *Haaretz* is a brilliant and indispensable news resource. There are limits to the way they report things, and their English edition is very different to the Hebrew one, but it's essential reading for anyone interested in the region. Even *Yediot Ahronot's* website, *Ynet*, isn't bad sometimes. You often get freer and more intelligent commentary in Israel, and a wider and more informed range of sources.

But I still find it shocking that most days in *Haaretz*, there aren't any international stories. The criteria for reporting foreign news seems to be that 1) it involves Jews or 2) it impacts in some way on Israel. A headline about the Tsunami might read, "20 Jews killed in Thai beach resort" or "Indonesia refuses Israeli military aid." I know people say that "Jews are news" but it's incredibly parochial. You don't tend to notice it though because this is such a news-rich region that you could fill a paper with just what happened yesterday in Gaza.

In some ways, I think the Diaspora is viewed as a national interest issue here. Why? There's the conflation of ethnicity, religion and nationalism, the demographic issue—which is crucial—and Israel's continuing need for wealthy immigrants and legitimacy as a Jewish state. The prism for the concern though is anti-Semitism. It gets to the point where it's like Yeti-watching.

Finding anti-Semites everywhere doesn't just reinforce Israel's claim to statehood. It raises morale amongst a demoralized population, 44 percent of whom recently told pollsters they'd immigrate to improve their living standards. A friend who was born here, left thirty years ago, and recently returned said that her family always used to ask why she'd left. Now they ask why she's come back. Put simply, if Jews can live peacefully and prosperously elsewhere, why are we having constant wars to keep a Jewish state in Palestine?

Regarding American Jewry, there is a major focus in the press here on groups such as AIPAC and the ADL. But it's typically one of uncritical defense, unless A.B. Yehoshua is visiting the U.S. The community itself is presented in monochromatic terms, either heroically supporting Israel whatever the cost, or a lost tribe assimilating toward extinction. American-Jewish politicians, celebrities and lifestyle trends are endlessly pored over, but you couldn't call it a balanced picture. The way it's constructed reveals real insecurities among Israelis about their reasons for living here, their state's legitimacy, and maybe how far Jews can really be considered to be one people.

TIKKUN: Do you feel that the exclusive focus of the Diaspora Left press on the Occupation is detracting from other politically significant issues in Israel?

AN: The focus on the Occupation is probably inevitable. Because of its injustice, illegality, and implicit support from America, it's the obvious campaigning spearhead. And I think that's right really, but it does mean that other issues get buried. The rise of Israeli neo-liberalism is a good example, because it's so tied in with the Occupation.

For example, the way that Oslo led to factories in Mizrahi areas being relocated to lower-paid sites in Jordan, the Palestine, and Egypt helped diminish support for it among Israel's working class. The Zionist Left's support for Oslo meant they couldn't relate to that. When continued U.S. aid was made contingent on a neo-liberal economic plan to cut jobs, wages, and taxes in 2002, the Left again didn't take up the issue because they saw the U.S. as Israel's guarantor.

The poor in Israel have suffered as a result. Twenty-five percent of Israeli kids live beneath the poverty line. But it's not the same measure they use in Gaza—which is closer

to countries like Haiti—and how many of those Israelis are Arab citizens? Israel's working class is hurting, but Israeli per capita income is still seventeen times higher than that of the Palestinians and they're not dealing with 40 percent unemployment rates.

The national question in Israel/Palestine can't be ducked. It's like an apple in the barrel that bobs back up whenever you try. But it works a little bit the other way too because when you talk about neo-liberalism, you quickly get on to whether the Israeli working class can be a potential ally of the Palestinians, or just their most diehard enemies. Are they more like Ulster protestant engineers or Afrikaaner miners?

There isn't a conclusive answer at this stage, but the question has implications because the bottom line of most honest one-state arguments is a revolutionary Arab war to destroy Israel. That's not something I'm comfortable with. The best alternative I have is campaigning against the disastrous ways that the Occupation and neo-liberalism have impacted both Palestinians and working class Israelis. It's also important to highlight how Israel has destroyed Jewish religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions. But I don't have any illusions about it. It's difficult to see a material basis for Palestinian-Israeli unity at the moment. ■

Remembering Najib Mahfouz

BY BEN LYNFIELD

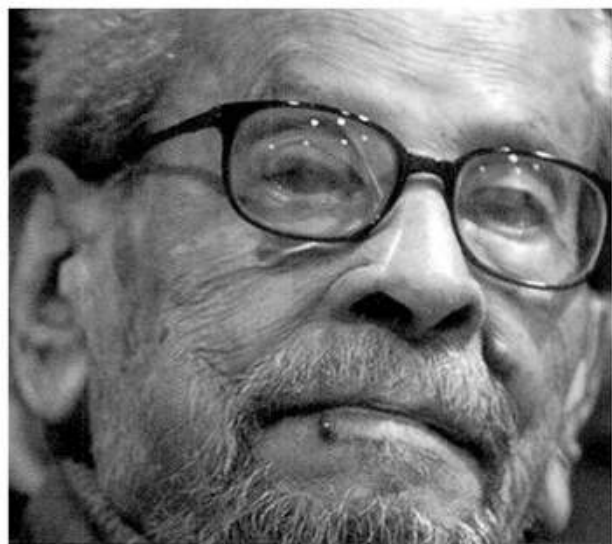
WHEN NOBEL LITERATURE laureate Najib Mahfouz died on August 30, 2006 at age 94, among the tributes that flowed into Cairo from all over the world was one from the state of Israel.

"The people of Israel will remember him always as a man of peace who believed in friendship between the peoples and strove for understanding and dialogue between us."

Israeli President Moshe Katsav wrote to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Israelis would be right to recall Mahfouz's early and vocal support for Egyptian peace with Israel, together with the remarkable literary achievements of a man whose career spanned seven decades. Mahfouz was a master of allegory, a keen observer of human nature and politics who wrote books that were both popular and profound, distinctly Egyptian and yet universal. But what Katsav did not mention was that over the years, Mahfouz became disappointed by Israeli behavior and the demise of his dream of Egyptian-Israeli cooperation.

When he was awarded the Nobel literature prize in 1988, the Swedish Academy cited his creation of an Arabian narrative art that applies to all of mankind.



Mahfouz was a master of allegory, a keen observer of human nature and politics who wrote books that were both popular and profound, distinctly Egyptian and yet universal.

But Mahfouz was not merely influential in the literary world. He was very much a political novelist. His indirect criticisms of the Nasser regime in his novels, which became more direct after Nasser's death, were significant in airing and driving home the conclusion that the Egyptian revolution had gone wrong.

Mahfouz steered away from collisions with the authorities and was even, in a sense, part of the system he criticized, serving as chief censor for the Culture Ministry during the 1960s. He never went to jail for his beliefs, and he made his toughest criticisms against Nasser's police state after Nasser died. Mahfouz knew how to survive and keep writing.

One issue about which he was quite direct was peace with Israel. Mahfouz and playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim's support for Sadat's peace policy—at a time when most Egyptian intellectuals opposed it—added to the legitimacy of the Camp David Accords in Egypt. Mahfouz had a hopeful vision for Egyptian-Israeli relations, and he had argued even before 1977 that Egypt required peace in order to concentrate on its own development. In 1978, Mahfouz wrote a letter to Tel Aviv University Arabic Literature specialist Sasson Somekh expressing the hope that through Arab-Jewish cooperation, the Middle East would become “a bright temple of science blessed by divine principles.” It is worth adding that Mahfouz highly esteemed Israeli academic work about his writings.

At the close of my first interview with him at the Ali Baba cafe in Cairo in 1989, a few months after he won the Nobel Prize, Mahfouz surprised me by saying, “send my regards to Professor Milson.” He was referring to Hebrew University Arabic Literature Specialist Menachem Milson, who was best known in left-wing Israeli circles for his hard-hitting bid to crush Palestinian nationalism during the early 1980s as Ariel Sharon's appointee to head the civil administration in the West Bank. His actions included dismissing elected pro-PLO mayors, closing newspapers, and shutting down Bir Zeit University.

To Mahfouz, Milson, who later published an excellent book on the Egyptian novelist, was one of several Israeli academics whose work impressed upon him that they truly understood his writing. Another was Somekh, the Tel Aviv University scholar. Speaking to *October* magazine in 1982, Mahfouz, describing his reaction upon reading a study by Somekh on his works, says, “I felt as though he had lived for many years at my side.”

In that first meeting with him in Cairo, Mahfouz had received me at his table, which overlooked bustling Tahrir Square, after Philip Stewart, an Oxford academic who translated several of his books into English and was with the laureate, introduced me as a journalist for the *Jerusalem Post*. It was only due to Stewart that I met Mahfouz. I had to catch the bus from Cairo to Tel Aviv and did not have time to wait in the line of people anxious to see the laureate. But Stewart let me take away some of his own time with Mahfouz, apparently believing it important that contact should be made between the leading writer in the Arab world and the readers of the *Jerusalem Post*. Mahfouz had trouble with his hearing, something that would worsen over the years, and Stewart raised his voice and directed it toward the laureate's left ear as he repeated my questions to Mahfouz. Downstairs about ten people waited to see Mahfouz, some of them carrying books to be autographed. Even after winning the Nobel prize, the writer had remained unbelievably accessible, frequenting the cafe at the same time every morning and being open to people approaching him with questions or to ask for his autograph.

During our meeting, Mahfouz's openness toward Israel was coupled with his criticism of its policies. “After the peace agreement, our nation opened its heart to every Israeli, but the Israelis threw this away,” he said. He added that he had been angered by Israeli actions after the peace treaty, including its refusal to withdraw from Taba, a strip of the Sinai Peninsula and the 1982 Lebanon invasion.

Still, he said, he did not repent his support for peace. “Even though there have been many deceptions, I am still hopeful that a complete peace will be achieved. I know that many Israelis want peace.”

Despite having grown up at a time when there were many Jews in Egypt, including some in his neighborhood, Mahfouz hardly referred to Jews—or to Israel—at all in his more than thirty books and hundreds of short stories. Somekh, who became friendly with him after the 1979 peace treaty, recalls asking him about this but being unable to elicit an explanation.

Mahfouz's openness to Israel stemmed from a variety of factors. He believed Egypt needed peace in order to develop. Mahfouz was an Egyptian rather than an Arab nationalist, and he was disillusioned by the internal and external failures of Nasserism, including its disastrous leadership of Arab confrontation against Israel. In a book he published in 1983, *In Front of the Throne*, Mahfouz puts Jamal Abdul Nasser and Anwar Sadat on trial before a tribunal of judges presided over by Osiris, the judge of the dead in Egyptian mythology. Nasser is criticized for being a failure militarily and for foreign misadventures at the expense of development in Egypt. Sadat is taken to task for failing to establish real democracy, but his striving for peace is applauded and he earns a far more favorable judgment than Nasser.

In May 1990, I went to see Mahfouz a second time at the Ali Baba café. This time, I had come a few days after a chance encounter with the Egyptian playwright Lenin Ramli, who had explained to me his view that Israel's existence was illegitimate since it was the result of a foreign aggression against the Palestinians. He had added that Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Palestine and Israel have no place in the Middle East. "The Sephardi Jews belong here and are part of our region," Ramli said. "But the European Jews are from the countries of Europe. And it is not my problem if the Christian Germans and Poles did not see it that way."

Mahfouz listened patiently as I described to him how intellectuals I had met in Cairo remained shocked even by the word Israel. (Although Ramli, it should be added, said he was against war.)

I asked Mahfouz if Egyptians would ever make peace intellectually and not just politically with Israel.

"Yes," he replied, "If we solve our problems, I believe Israel may prove to be useful. This will make people forget [their animosity]."

Recalling the biblical days of King David and King Solomon, Mahfouz said, "Close relations between Egypt and Israel is not a strange idea," and that in ancient days there was friendship between them most of the time. I mean after the time of Musa," (Moses) he added with a laugh.

I asked Mahfouz what he meant by Israel being useful, but he declined to specify. "I think you know what I mean," he told me.

But in this interview as well, the peace vision was coupled with expectations of peaceful behavior by Israel.

At a time when the first intifada was raging, Mahfouz put the burden squarely on Israel to make peace with the Palestinians and he stressed that "unless Israeli-Palestinian peace is achieved, Israeli-Egyptian peace will be cold because we can't have good relations while Arabs are being killed every day."

When I met with Mahfouz on another occasion—after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990—he strongly condemned Saddam Hussein and predicted a tragic end for the Iraqi dictator. Although he did not say so, my guess is that for him Saddam was a latter-day Nasser.

The signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993 fueled Mahfouz's expectations that his vision was on the way to realization. "Mutual recognition has arrived and step-by-step a genuine peace is being realized," he wrote in *al-Ahram*. Then he added, "We have to understand that real peace begins with face-to-face contacts, the meeting of two cultures and economic and scientific cooperation. All of these things will allow the region the development and progress it deserves."

But Oslo unraveled and eventually blew up. The last time I saw Mahfouz was in 1999, at one of the gatherings with friends and writers he attended almost every night after being stabbed by an Islamic fundamentalist five years earlier. He had always held weekly meetings with groups of writers and with his old high-school friends. But after Mahfouz lost the ability to put pen to paper due to his injuries, friends made sure he had meetings with a different circle every evening of the week to keep his spirits up and keep

him in touch with the outside world. He still dictated a weekly column for *al-Ahram*.

I saw that Mahfouz was waging a battle to hold on to his intellect and sense of humor. "You should be drinking vodka," he quipped to a young writer about to sip tea, convulsing those around him. Mahfouz spoke little during the gathering, becoming animated only when someone he really liked or respected approached him. But as part of the price of his fame, politicians and obscure intellectuals came by, seeking to bask in his glory as the leading writer in the Arab world. The head of the Moroccan Writers Union arrived, seeking a photograph with Mahfouz to convey the impression the two were close. Friends, raising their voices so he could hear, read him the contents of newspaper and magazine articles.

Mahfouz listened as Egyptian playwright Ali Salem told about a lecture he had just given to Israeli students from Ben Gurion University at the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo. In retrospect, Mahfouz was probably the only intellectual in the Arab world who was close both to people who were staunch supporters of normalization with Israel like Salem, and intellectuals who rejected Israel, but still viewed him as a friend and profound literary influence.

In his last years, Mahfouz left behind several columns expressing fury over Israeli actions.

In April 2002, after Israel reoccupied West Bank cities after a string of suicide bombings, he wrote in his *al-Ahram* column, "I do not recall ever having been more infuriated than at the monstrous Israeli attacks on the Palestinian territories, the siege of Arafat and the demand that he renounce terrorism." He continued:

"While Israel's actions are the most dangerous form of terrorism because they are perpetrated by a state rather than by individuals, the Palestinians attempt to defend themselves in the name of identity and freedom is their only means of expressing hope. Suffering the worst kind of occupation in an age that has long freed itself of the vestiges of colonialism, the Palestinians have no option but armed resistance to Israeli savagery. All attempts at peace have failed and Sharon has ignored the Arab proposal and violated international law with impunity. Their lives stripped of all meaning, who can blame the Palestinians for searching for some meaning in death?"

A month before his death, Mahfouz gave an interview about Israel's war with Hezbollah, which was published in *al-Ahram* weekly in July 2006:

"What is this? What is this destruction and hatred unleashed against an Arab nation that still has part of its land occupied? What do they want exactly? The assault on Lebanon's infrastructure is not meant for Hizbullah but for the Lebanese people. The aim is to bring Lebanon back fifty years, to make it an example. Is this the same Israeli government that claims it wants peace? I don't get it anymore. We used to think that Israeli generals were the ones to want war, but the current prime minister and interior minister [sic] are civilians. Does everyone in Israel wish to bomb the Arabs?"

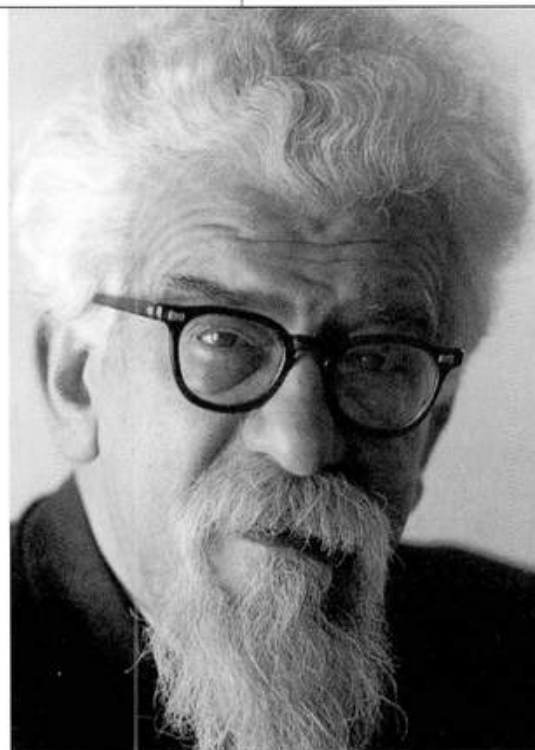
Olmert's government has proven that it is no different from earlier military governments. Had the Israeli government been serious about reaching an agreement, as it claimed in the platform that brought it to power, it would have dealt with this crisis in a different manner, not in the manner of previous governments that had no commitment to peace. Olmert's government came to power saying that it wants a peace settlement. Now, given the wars it started in Lebanon and Gaza, that government has weakened the genuine proponents of peace on both sides. Peace is now further away than ever."

The question of Mahfouz' legacy regarding Israel is not merely academic in Egypt, where a fresh effort to annul the Camp David Accords—this time mounted by the pro-democracy Kifaya movement—has recently been launched. An article written in *Rosa al-Yossef* magazine after Mahfouz' death in Egypt suggested that he may have gone to the grave regretting his support for the peace treaty. However, Somekh, the Israeli Mahfouz scholar, believes that Mahfouz' reference to proponents of peace on both the Arab and Israeli sides at the end of his *al-Ahram* interview indicates that despite his bitter criticism, he hadn't changed his point of departure at all. ■

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

A Centennial Forum Heschel for a New Generation

Edited by Or N. Rose



ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED JEWISH leaders of the twentieth century, and an inspiration to the Tikkun community, Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) is a model of personal piety and social responsibility. Born into a Hasidic dynasty in Warsaw, Heschel earned a doctorate at the University of Berlin before fleeing from the Nazis. After arriving in the United States as a refugee scholar, Heschel quickly emerged as a powerful voice for spiritual renewal and societal change. He wrote eloquently on a broad range of Jewish topics—from the prophets to the Sabbath to the founders of Hasidism—and beginning in the early 1960s became an outspoken activist. Not only did he march alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. for African American civil rights, but Heschel also played a key role in the Second Vatican Council, and was one of the founders of Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam.

In honor of the 100th anniversary of Abraham Joshua Heschel's birth, *Tikkun* has invited three young Jewish leaders to reflect on the legacy of this visionary figure.

Descendents of the Prophets BY SHAI HELD

GOD TAKES AN ENORMOUS RISK in creating human beings. God is "in search of man," Heschel emphasized again and again, but man can—and all too frequently does—turn away. If there is one idea that animates Heschel's theology, it is surely his insistence that God is vulnerable, that God can be disappointed and even angered by human cruelty and callousness. Against the abstract, unmoved God of medieval philosophy; against the less-than-personal God of Mordecai Kaplan; and, I hasten to add, against the mystical theology of many of his Hasidic forebears, Heschel returned always to the personal God of biblical revelation, to the God who seeks a relationship with human beings, to the transcendent, commanding God whose will it is that we respond to Him. "The notion that God can be intimately affected," Heschel writes, "that he possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also feeling and pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God."

If Heschel's God could be moved by human behavior to the point of suffering, his ideal human being could be "convulsed" by that divine pathos "to the depths of his soul." The prophet is the person who is able to see the world through God's eyes, to see the pain caused by injustice and oppression both to human beings and to the God who created them. Faced with depravity and degradation, the prophet cannot help but cry out: "A single crime—to us it is slight, but to the prophet—a disaster.... Exaggeration to us is understatement to him." On one level, Heschel was a traditional Jew who recognized that prophecy had come to an end in antiquity. But on another level, he seemed to affirm that something of the prophetic remained available to the authentically religious Jew; although we can no longer be prophets, we can become worthy of our status as descendants of the prophets (*mibenei hanevi'im*). "Let us hope and pray," he told Carl Stern, "that I am worthy of being a descendant of the prophets."

We would do well to remember that far from advocating some secularized reduction of Judaism to *Tikkun Olam*, Heschel calls us to a life of *Avodat Hashem* (the service of God). And we ought to caution ourselves lest some Jewish thinkers read Heschel's evocations of the prophets and be reminded of ... well, themselves; the line between righteousness and self-righteousness is, sadly, almost imperceptibly easy to cross. Somehow the spiritual life demands that we marry prophetic passion with genuine humility.

Jewish theology, then, is above all a story about a covenant, a story about the relationship between the divine and the human, the heavenly and the earthly, the eternal and the temporal, the sacred and the quotidian. It is the story of a personal God seeking love and choosing to need us, of a transcendent God whose immanence depends on the countless decisions we make each day.

"The words of the wise are like goads" (Ecclesiastes 12:11). May Heschel's legacy be a blessing, and may his Torah remain an inspiration.

Rabbi Shai Held, Lecturer on Jewish Philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, is co-founder of Machon Hadar: An Institute for Prayer, Personal Growth and Jewish Study.

Limitless Concern: Divine and Human Response to Suffering BY MELISSA WEINTRAUB

The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

A WOMAN WAS WEEPING. Somewhere, outside my Jerusalem living room, a woman was crying out her pain. Instinct-ruled, heart-led, I was at my window in a breath. There, I looked out to find four faces. Other women in their living rooms, pressed up against windows, peering out in concern.

The cries stopped. Four women caught sight of each other's empathic, searching faces.

It had been a time of suffering in my life. I had been feeling alone, wondering where the loving Presence who'd hummed within me for years had vanished in my pain.

Can I explain this? Looking out at these women—I beheld.

No roaring thunder. No flaming glory. God: in the faces of women registering anguish, pulled involuntarily towards another's pain.

Years later, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel re-gifted me this moment in poetry and theology.

For Heschel, God is first and foremost the One who suffers with us.

Heschel builds on rabbinic and Kabbalistic portrayals of God's empathic identification with our distress. A midrash teaches that God speaks to Moses from within the burning thorns, as "a companion in our anguish." Another, that God enters into exile with us weeping, resonating with our pain like a twin, crying out: "When your arm is heavy, my arm is heavy."

The Kabbalah weaves an entire cosmology around this concept: the celestial Bride separates from her Husband to accompany us into exile. Human pain (continued on page 62)

Congregation-Based Organizing BY BENJAMIN ROSS

Synagogue. Organizing. Until recently, these words rarely appeared in the same paragraph, much less the same sentence.

Yet since Jewish FundS for Justice (JFSJ) began its support for synagogue organizing five years ago, the number of congregations engaged in this work has increased from thirty to eighty. Two years ago, a conference designed to bring together synagogues interested in engaging in community-based organizing drew 130 synagogue leaders. (There is still time to sign up for this year's conference, Feb 11-13 in Santa Clara, California: www.jewishjustice.org). This past summer the Reform movement created Just Congregations, its own program to advance synagogue organizing. With as many as thirty congregations exploring membership in their local interfaith organizing network in 2007 alone, we may be approaching a tipping point.

So, what is synagogue organizing, or congregation-based community organizing, as it is often called?

Congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) was a social change strategy developed by Saul Alinsky, an organizer from Chicago, who was Jewish. Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation in the 1950s, which over time became a national organization with local networks made up almost exclusively of neighborhood churches. The foundation of synagogue organizing is built around hundreds of one-to-one conversations where congregants connect, stories emerge, and leaders are identified. People talk about what keeps them up at night and why *tzedek*, or justice, is important to them. The result of these conversations is the emergence of common concerns within the congregation. These concerns become the basis for action.

Today there are several major national CBCO networks. They have been involved in some of the most successful local organizing efforts, spearheading the living wage movement, expanding health insurance, and building affordable housing, among others.

Although the organizing groups have always been ecumenical, they have rarely been interfaith, with limited participation from synagogues.

Yet through a concerted effort by JFSJ, open-minded synagogues, and the networks themselves, that has begun to change. The goal of synagogue organizing is to address the lack of sustained engagement in social justice activities beyond direct service programs in the Jewish world. The aim is to challenge congregations to address systemic issues relating to poverty and social injustice. Additionally, as Rabbi Toba Spitzer of Congregation Dorshei Tzedek notes, organizing "has also been an important learning about how to begin to think about social justice organizing in a predominantly middle/upper-middle class community by getting folks to take their own struggles seriously as social problems."

All across the United States, lay leaders and clergy are launching grassroots organizing campaigns inside their synagogues, joining interfaith coalitions and fighting for structural change. What this looks like depends on the community: healthcare for all (Boston), immigrant worker rights (Omaha), language access at hospitals (Bay Area), truancy (Columbus, Ohio), and access to affordable housing (Chicago, and many other cities), to name a few of the recent campaigns. Traditional and critical synagogue service projects—the soup kitchens and shelters—long the cornerstone of our community's justice work, are now informing and being complemented by this new wave of justice.

Rabbi Janet Marder summarizes one of the key cultural shifts that CBCO enables: moving justice to the core of the congregation. "I was troubled by the very idea of a social action committee—a small group of people performing social justice work on behalf of others—as if this work was marginal to the life of a synagogue, rather than central to everything we do. CBCO has helped bring social justice from the periphery into the center, into the forefront of our consciousness, so that it is integrated into all aspects of congregational life."

Moving social justice to the center of Jewish life: that is the essence of congregation-based community organizing.

Benjamin Ross is Director of Organizing at Jewish FundS for Justice, www.jewishjustice.org

Our Stories, Ourselves

Toward An Aggadic Judaism

BY RAMI SHAPIRO

LET ME BEGIN AT THE END: the future of Judaism depends on the vitality of her stories and the genius of her storytellers. In addition to anything else we may do to secure a vibrant Jewish future, we should be pouring serious thought, money, and effort into training, supporting, and promoting *maggidim*, Jewish storytellers. Now that you know where I am going, let me share with you how I get there.

Rationale

We are the stories we tell. If there were no Jewish stories, there would be no Jews. Story is at the heart of Judaism, and has been ever since Torah opened with *Bereshit*, "Once upon a time." Stories provide us with history, identity, meaning, and purpose. Story is how we make sense out of the world.

Normally we think of the Jewish future in terms of numbers: how many Jews keep kosher, make Shabbos, join synagogues, marry other Jews, and send their kids to Jewish schools. As important as these factors may be, they are contingent upon a more fundamental dynamic: the capacity of the Jewish story to capture people's hearts, minds, and spirits.

When our stories fail us, or when they are lost to us either through theft or neglect, we either die or invent new stories. The genius of Jews has been our ability to tell new tales. Indeed rabbinic, kabbalistic, hasidic, and even Zionist expressions of Judaism are, at their core, new stories offered to either reinterpret or replace older stories that no longer spoke compellingly to then-contemporary Jews. One might argue that we are in need of new stories today, especially stories that integrate science with spirituality. While I look forward to hearing these new stories, my concern here is with the revival of story itself.

I Place before you Story and Fact, Therefore Choose Story

IN THE PAST WE BELIEVED that our stories were not stories at all, but facts. God created the world in six days and destroyed it in forty—fact. God spoke to Abraham and chose Sarah's descendents as his chosen people—fact. God plagued the Egyptians, divided the sea, wrote the Ten Commandments, promised his chosen a land flowing with milk and honey rather than oil—all facts. Fewer and fewer Jews accept these facts today. We see them as story rather than history. This is the inevitable result of the postmodern mindset, and this is why every religion seeking to hold onto its stories as facts is at war with the postmodern world.

For premodern thinkers (whether ancient or contemporary) story is history, history is the will of God, and war determines whose god is God. Modern thinkers claim to separate

history from story, relegate theology and religion to the sidelines, and fight wars over things that matter such as oil, trade, and empire. The Israeli-Arab conflict is a premodern war of gods and stories: the land is valuable not for what it contains, but for what it is—land as Land. The war in Iraq is a modern war of empire, using the premodern narratives of religion to mask the true motives of oil and influence. Sensing this is so, modern critics of both premodern religion and of its abuse at the hands of modern powers have argued that if we can only get beyond the stories each religion tells, we would see that all religions are saying the same thing.

Postmodern thinkers understand, however, that there is no getting beyond the story: story is who we are. This does not mean there is no Reality transcending our stories, only that we cannot step outside of story to experience it. Our stories are the lenses through which we look to see what reality is. New stories can sharpen our focus and extend our sight, but we cannot put the lens aside and see directly what is so.

The postmodern condition is about knowing that we cannot know, and this not-knowing is profoundly liberating because it is deeply humbling. When you imagine you know the truth, or worse, that you somehow own it, you are easily seduced to cruelty and violence in defense of your story. When you know you don't know; when you know you can't know, you cannot be manipulated by those who pretend to know. Fear gives way to a fearless and gentle humor that allows us to live gracefully in the face of uncertainty.

The postmodern Jew lives consciously in story as story, and is thus free to retell and reinvent her story. The postmodern religious awakening is not about discovering the *uber*-story that all religions share, but about the humbling realization that the story that can be told—that we must tell, since we must tell some story—is not and can never be the Eternal Story.

I am a postmodern Jew. I cannot live without attending to fact, but I cannot thrive without attending to story. Story carries archetypal truths from the unconscious to the conscious. Story is a map to territory so deeply imbedded in the human psyche that facts alone cannot grasp it. If Judaism is to have a creative future, if it is to be something more than a nostalgic fantasy, our stories must be revealed for what they truly are: maps to meaning, timeless vehicles for carrying the deepest spiritual yearnings of the human psyche into the realm of consciousness where they can be fulfilled through acts of justice, kindness, and humility.

Despite all rhetoric to the contrary, postmodern Jews are not hungry for tradition, they are starving for life—for meaning and spiritual experience—and these come not through law but lore, not through *halacha* but *aggadah*. The future of Judaism lies not with her lawyers and judges, but with her storytellers and shamans. The future Judaism is an aggadic Judaism.

An Aggadic Judaism

AGGADIC JUDAISM HONORS STORY AS STORY, and embraces myth and metaphor as the best tools we have for pointing beyond the idols of the known toward the reality of the unknown and unknowable. To get a sense of what this Judaism may be like, I have engaged in an exercise of the imagination, asking and answering a few key questions from the aggadic perspective to give you a better sense of what I imagine the future of Judaism to be.

What is Judaism? Judaism is the ever-renewing story of the Jewish people's quest for wisdom, justice, compassion, and humility. It is true to the extent that it points beyond itself toward these universal principles; it is valuable to the extent that it aligns each individual Jew with them.

Who is a Jew? A Jew is a person whose personal story is shaped primarily (but not necessarily exclusively) by the Jewish story, whether these be the stories of Torah, Midrash, Zohar, Hasidic Tales, or others stories in the Jewish tradition that have been widely acknowledged to meet the answer to the question, "What is Judaism?" A Jew is one who turns to these particular stories when seeking meaning and life-purpose. Jewish identity is rooted not in genes, but memes, the carriers of culture among which story reigns supreme.

Who is God? God is the Unknown and Unknowable. God is the True North toward which every authentic compass points and which no compass contains. God cannot be defined, but godliness can be lived: doing justly, loving mercifully, and walking (continued on page 63)

THE MISSING KATRINA STORY

(continued from page 29) shoddily built levees; a vacationing, clueless White House; and the Forces of Nature. "The blame game for New Orleans's sorry state is many-sided. The Bush administration, the governor's office in Baton Rouge and City Hall all share some responsibility for the slow state of reconstruction. So does the culture of New Orleans itself." Even Donna Brazile, the Democratic Party campaign operative, writing in *Vanity Fair.com*, blamed the disaster on a White House that "stumbled for weeks, along with state and local officials, trying to figure out what to do."

What is missing from this analysis is something Baum only hints at in his *New Yorker* piece. He quotes White House officials who killed a bold plan unveiled by Congressman Richard Baker, a Baton Rouge Republican, in January 2005 that would have provided a \$30 billion bill to guarantee that homeowners received at least 60 percent of the equity in their homes. That money would have helped to jump-start the revitalization of New Orleans by encouraging the rebuilding of most of the 200,000 homes. Bush spokesmen said their opposition was "ideological." "We don't want to set up another bureaucracy."

Indifference not Incompetence

WHY DID THE LEADERS of the world's richest nation fail so abysmally to prevent a predictable hurricane from wreaking such havoc on a major American city?

Lee, Baum, and many other journalists essentially attribute the government's mishandling of Katrina to incompetence. By doing so, they failed to link Katrina's human disaster to the ideology of conservative governance as practiced by the Bush administration. The conservative strategy had three prongs: shrink domestic government services such as FEMA; shift public responsibilities to private corporations (even at the expense of the well-being and safety of American citizens); and engage in pay-to-play politics where personal gain counts for more than government performance. This lethal combination is not the traditional conservative belief in small government. It's contempt for government. A central tenet of conservative ideology is the belief that government interferes with individual liberty, is less efficient than the private sector, and in many cases is simply unnecessary. Among the world's industrial nations, the United States has the lowest overall level of taxation (especially for the wealthy), the weakest regulations on business for consumer and worker protections, and the smallest safety net in terms of health insurance, childcare, and anti-poverty programs.

Even so, conservatives like President George W. Bush, his Republican allies in Congress, his intellectual strategists like Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform and William Kristol of the *Weekly Standard*, and the corporate-sponsored policy wonks at the American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation argue that (with the exception of military spending) we need to further reduce government, in large part by cutting taxes even more, especially for the very rich. They call this "starving the beast," reducing

taxes so much that government in general, and the federal government in particular, will be virtually paralyzed.

With the Katrina disaster, these conservatives got what they were looking for. When it was needed most, government was paralyzed. The administration's failure was a natural outgrowth of the Bush administration's fundamental hostility to government itself. In the subsequent year, we've been watching the consequences play out in the daily lives on the people described by the media.

The people of New Orleans were victims of incompetence compounded by a long ideological assault on government, which began as a small movement following Republican Barry Goldwater's defeat by Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential contest and reached its goal with the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980. Reagan famously said in his 1981, inauguration speech, "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." More recently, the influential conservative activist, Grover Norquist, quipped, "My goal is to cut government ... down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub."

Government can be competent or incompetent, and, at times, it can be not only effective but also bold. This was true with FDR's efforts to respond to the Depression and win World War II, Truman's postwar efforts to rebuild Europe as a United States ally, and JFK's pledge to put a man on the moon. The federal government has a reasonably good track record of responding to so-called "natural" disasters like earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes. President Lyndon Johnson quickly and competently responded to Hurricane Betsy, a major hurricane that struck New Orleans in September 1965. More recently, the Clinton administration significantly professionalized and improved FEMA, appointed an experienced administrator (James Whitt), increased its budget, and developed close working relationships with governors, mayors, and their disaster management agencies. The Clinton administration's success in overseeing relief and reconstruction after the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake suggests that the federal government can act effectively and efficiently in times of crisis.

The Bush administration's actions might better be characterized as indifference rather than incompetence. For example, the administration apparently assumed that people would evacuate New Orleans on their own, without giving much thought to who these people were, what resources they had, or where they would go. They acted as if everyone had an SUV full of gas and family or friends (or a second home) waiting to take them in somewhere safe. In fact, among the city's African Americans, 35 percent did not own a car, compared with 15 percent of whites. Many reports had warned that tens of thousands of people would have difficulty evacuating New Orleans in the case of a flood. Even so, FEMA Director Michael Brown resorted to typical blame-the-victory conservative rhetoric. He attributed the death toll in New Orleans "to people who did not heed evacuation warnings."

In reality, the government had plenty of competent bureaucrats who even under Bush tried to do their jobs. Even under downgraded conditions, FEMA's middle management and on-the-ground employees were highly capable. On August 28,

2005, the Department of Homeland Security had compiled a forty-page “fact analysis” report and emailed it to the White House at 1:47 am on August 29. It warned that any hurricane rated category 4 that hit New Orleans would likely lead to severe flooding and/or levee breaching, leaving the city submerged for weeks or months. Long-time FEMA employees such as Marty Bahamonde provided accurate and timely information to FEMA’s front office and its director, Michael Brown.

President Bush and the rest of the catastrophic conservatives in his administration hired their cronies, outsourced core functions, and shrunk government until it was too small to respond effectively once Katrina struck.

After Katrina, FEMA rewarded lucrative no-bid contracts to companies like Halliburton (\$125 million) and Bechtel instead of to qualified contractors who had worked in New Orleans, lived in New Orleans, who wanted to go back home and rebuild. FEMA, for example, paid the Shaw Group, a giant engineering firm, \$175 per 100 square feet to install blue-tarps on storm damaged roofs, even though the actual installers earned as little as \$2 per 100 square feet, and the tarps were provided by FEMA for free. The Shaw Group and Halliburton had hired the lobbyist Joe Allbaugh, a former FEMA director and Bush’s 2000 presidential campaign director, to secure the federal contracts. Halliburton gave 91 percent of its PAC donations to Republicans; Bechtel Corporation gave 72 percent.

If the Bush administration can be labeled inept, it was an incompetence by design. A government without resources and talent can’t perform effectively when major challenges arise.

We Only Get What We Demand

THE MEDIA DID A GOOD JOB of evoking our sympathy for the hurricane’s victims and our anger at elected officials for failing to come to their aid. But the national media failed the public when it framed the story of Katrina as a tale of passive victims and inept government, instead of telling the real story of an organized grassroots effort of citizens struggling for their homes and livelihoods against a government ideologically unwilling to help.

Not surprisingly, *The Times-Picayune*—New Orleans’ daily newspaper—has covered ACORN and its community organizing counterparts with regularity since Katrina hit. A Lexis/Nexis search reveals over 100 *Times-Picayune* articles mentioning ACORN alone. Any local reporter with an ounce of street smarts understands ACORN’s key role in the power struggle over the city’s future. Likewise, the *Houston Chronicle* has paid attention to organizing work of The Metropolitan Organization (the local IAF affiliate) and ACORN among the Katrina survivors in that city. But to the major national newspapers—*The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*—the community organizing groups are, with some notable exceptions, virtually invisible. These papers’ reporters found lots of individual human interest stories of loss, tragedy, and even resilience and courage, but when hundreds of individuals join together to demand respect and rights from government and business leaders, their efforts rarely find their way into the nation’s most presti-

gious newspapers, news magazines, and news broadcasts.

Although the mainstream press doesn’t know how to cover grassroots organizing, it recognizes lobbying, even by the poor. So when ACORN brought more than 500 Katrina survivors to Washington in caravans of buses last February for two days of rallies, protests and meetings with elected officials to demand an end to FEMA’s “paperwork nightmare” and more funds to rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the *Washington Post* put the story—and a color photo—on its front page. “We want all of New Orleans rebuilt, not just parts,” said Dorothy Stukes, a leader of ACORN’s Katrina Survivors Association. “And we don’t want a Chocolate City. We want a Gumbo City, a city that has a little bit of everything in it.” At a meeting with Democratic allies, ACORN members applauded when Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) called the Bush administration’s failure to help rebuild New Orleans’ low-income neighborhoods “a policy of ethnic cleansing by inaction.”

Once the protesters returned to New Orleans, however, neither the *Washington Post* nor other major newspapers followed up to see what ACORN had accomplished in its own backyard. Indeed, ACORN is a difficult group for the mass media to follow because it is so unlike the nonpartisan, apolitical soup kitchen-type of volunteerism that is so beloved by politicians and so ubiquitous in America. While providing clothing and “doing good,” ACORN is not a “feel good” community group rushing into New Orleans with cans of food and other charity work. It’s been there for over thirty years organizing the poor and working class people to put pressure on the system from the outside. And its leaders and staff are made up of shrewd and tough political infighters whose goal is building political power.

Even progressives are sometimes so cynical about politics that they have a hard time believing that a group like ACORN, with its blunt emphasis on power, is capable of winning economic and political victories for poor and working class people, doing so in the most conservative of times, and in the face of intractable odds.

If there’s any hope for a progressive future, it will turn on the work of a new generation of labor unions activists, environmentalists, and community organizing groups like ACORN that understand the importance of grassroots organizing to rebuild a political constituency for change.

The lessons of Katrina reflect both the worst and best aspects of our democracy. Worst—the ideological indifference and crony capitalism reflected by the now-discredited Bush administration. Best—the hopefulness mobilized by ACORN’s unflagging commitment, even in the worst circumstances imaginable, to organize ordinary people to challenge business-as-usual and build a movement for social justice. ■

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PRIVILEGE

(continued from page 36) can teach kids is self-control, partly because the number one cause of teenage deaths is a failure in self-control—drinking and driving for example—and also because as long as children have not mastered self-control they will not be able to get on with the other tasks of child development. The kid who is once again sitting in the principal's office for shouting out in class or bothering the student next to him is missing out on both academic and social experiences.

Kids need us to be there, without judgment. When I asked a large group of my sons' friends what single thing would lessen the stress in their life, they told me—without prompting—that they wanted to spend fifteen minutes with their favorite teacher, just hanging out. That's what quality time means—it's human being, not human doing. Research tells us that eating with our children five times a week dramatically cuts the likelihood of them being substance abusers. Other research tells us that a half hour of "floor time" with young children encourages emotional health. We need to hang out with our children, to "chill," to be the inviting, listening presence that encourages disclosure and reflection in our kids.

Kids need a sense of purpose. A child's first community is his or her family. Children should be encouraged, at an age-appropriate level, to contribute to their households. We need to pull back on micro-managing our kids' academic and athletic lives and make sure that they have a meaningful life within the family. Chores, family outings, dinners together with everyone participating in preparation or clean up, assure our children that they are both loved and needed by their families.

An Alternative to Materialist Culture

OUR MATERIALIST CULTURE teaches us that if we only get our kids the right things—the right clothes, the right schools—that they will be happy. Our culture is wrong. The thrill that we get from "stuff" is amazingly short lived. Even lottery winners, people whose lives have been radically altered by great sums of money, have been found to return to the same level of happiness they were at before their windfall within about eight weeks.

Of course we want our children to be happy. But in order to successfully navigate through life, kids need more than happiness. They need a strong sense of self, an internal home, where they can retreat to problem solve and heal when the going gets tough. Even if we could give our children a "perfect" childhood—no unhappiness, no distress, no failure—we would be sadly mistaken if we thought that they would then have a "perfect" life. The notion of perfection is a childhood fantasy, one we would do well to get rid of. If every time our toddler fell, we picked him up, we would be crippling him for life. He wouldn't learn how to fall down and find himself quite capable of getting up and starting out again. Every time we prematurely intervene for our children—call the teacher about a grade that doesn't seem right, or argue with the coach about why our child is sitting on the bench—we interfere with our child's ability to learn how to manage their own conflicts and disappointments. As our children grow, they carry themselves, not their parents, with them at all times.

The renowned pediatrician Dr. Spock said that a child who has not been bandaged has not been well loved. Part of being a parent is the very difficult job of watching our children struggle. It is an act of love that we are able to do this, and in the process we make sure that our children develop a healthy sense of self—the ability to be independent, capable, and connected to others.

Many children of privilege (as well as their parents) are disconnected and lonely. Our culture of materialism makes them lonelier, teaching them to replace people with things. They are vulnerable to the bankrupt values on TV shows like *My Super-sweet Sixteen* or *Pimp My Ride*. Because of the pervasiveness of the media, we are all swimming in the same ocean of isolation and materialism. In that ocean, there is no safe harbor.

I've been on a book tour recently, and one day I found myself standing at the pulpit of an Episcopal church. It was awkward for a Jewish girl, accustomed to her home shul, but I found my sense heightened by the newness of the situation. I started talking, and when I hit the part of my speech about how important it is for a child to be connected, I had a moment of intense clarity. I looked around at the people sitting in the pews and realized that you can't walk out on the street and create a community. You can't stand on a corner with a placard saying, "I'm ready to be connected to other people."

The church I was standing in—and other faith- or community-based institutions that embody parents' values—can provide that kind of ready-made community for our kids. They can be our safe harbors.

Children need communities where they can learn shared values and make connections that are not based on their performance. Children need places where people value them for being who they are, not for what they do or how they perform. They need parents who love them just for being themselves. They need a life in which the essence of a person matters, a life based on values. They need an inner life, a reflective life; they need, as we need, a more spiritual life. ■

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MONOGAMY, POLYAMORY, AND BEYOND

(continued from page 43) itself toward a third reality, and this opening, I suggest, might in some cases be crucial both to overcome codependent tendencies and to foster the health, creative vitality, and perhaps even longevity of intimate relationships.

I should stress that my intent is not to argue for the superiority of any relationship style over others—a discussion I find both pointless and misleading. Human beings are endowed with widely diverse biological, psychological, and spiritual dispositions that predispose them toward different relationship styles: celibacy, monogamy, serial monogamy, or polyamory. In other words, many equally valid psychospiritual trajectories may call individuals to engage in one or another relationship style either

for life or at specific junctures in their paths. Whereas the psychospiritual foundation for this diversity of mating responses cannot be empirically established, recent discoveries in neuroscience support the idea of a genetic base. When scientists inserted a piece of DNA from a monogamous species of mice (prairie voles) into males from a different—and highly promiscuous—mice species, the latter turned fervently monogamous. What is more striking is that some people carry an extra bit of DNA in a gene responsible for the distribution of vasopressin receptors in the brain (a hormone associated with attachment bonds), while others do not, and that piece of DNA is very similar to the one found in the monogamous prairie voles. Although the implications of this finding for our understanding of human mating await further clarification, it strongly suggests that a diversity of relationship styles—both monogamous and polyamorous—may be genetically imprinted in humans.

Religious Decree on Sexual Behavior

I ADDRESS THE OBJECTIONS to polyamory because lifelong or serial monogamy (together with celibacy) are still widely considered the only or most “spiritually correct” relationship styles in the modern West. In addition to the traditional Christian prescription of lifelong monogamy, many influential contemporary Buddhist teachers in the West make similar recommendations. Consider, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh’s reading of the Buddhist precept of “refraining from sexual misconduct.” For the monks, this precept originally meant to avoid engaging in any sexual act whatsoever and; for lay people it was to not engage in a list of “inappropriate” sexual behaviors having to do with specific body parts, times, and places. In his book *For a Future to Be Possible*, Thich Nhat Hanh explains that the monks of his order follow the traditional celibate vow in order to use sexual energy as a catalyst for spiritual breakthrough. For lay practitioners, however, Thich Nhat Hanh reads the precept to mean avoiding all sexual contact unless it takes place in the context of a “long-term commitment between two people,” because there is an incompatibility between love and casual sex (monogamous marriage is a common practice for lay people in his order). In this reading, Thich Nhat Hanh reinterprets the Buddhist precept as a prescription for long-term monogamy, excluding the possibility of not only wholesome polyamorous relations, but also spiritually edifying intimate encounters. (It is important to note, however, that “long-term commitment” is not equivalent to “monogamy,” since it is perfectly feasible to hold a long-term commitment with more than one intimate partner.) In *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama also assumes a monogamous structure as the container for appropriate sex in intimate relationships. Since reproduction is the biological purpose of sexual relations, he tells us, long-term commitment and sexual exclusivity are desirable for the wholesomeness of love relationships.

Despite the great respect I feel for these and other Buddhist teachers who speak in similar fashion, I must confess my per-

plexity. These assessments of appropriate sexual expression, which have become influential guidelines for many contemporary Western Buddhists, are often offered by celibate individuals whose sexual experience is likely to be limited, if not nonexistent. If there is anything we have learned from developmental psychology, it is that an individual needs to perform a number of “developmental tasks” to gain competence (and wisdom) in various arenas: cognitive, emotional, sexual, and so forth. Even when offered with the best of intentions, advice offered about aspects of life in which one has not achieved developmental competence through direct experience may be both questionable and misleading. When this advice is given by figures as culturally venerated as spiritual authorities, the situation can become even more problematic. What is more, in the context of spiritual praxis, these assertions can arguably be seen as incongruent with the emphasis on direct knowledge characteristic of Buddhism.

It may be worth remembering that the Buddha himself encouraged polyamory over monogamy in certain situations. In the *Jataka 200* (stories of Buddha’s former births), a Brahmin asks the Buddha for advice regarding four suitors who are courting his four daughters. The Brahmin says, “One was fine and handsome, one was old and well advanced in years, the third a man of family [noble birth], and the fourth was good.” “Even though there be beauty and the like qualities,” the Buddha answered, “a man is to be despised if he fails in virtue. Therefore the former is not the measure of a man; those that I like are the virtuous.” After hearing this, the Brahmin gave all his daughters to the virtuous suitor.

As the Buddha’s advice illustrates, several forms of relationship may be spiritually wholesome (in the Buddhist sense of leading to liberation) according to various human dispositions and contextual situations. Historically, Buddhism hardly ever considered one relationship style intrinsically more wholesome than others for lay people and tended to support different relationship styles depending on cultural and karmic factors. From the Buddhist perspective of skillful means (*upaya*) and of the soteriological nature of Buddhist ethics, it also follows that the key factor in evaluating the appropriateness of any intimate connection may not be its form but rather its power to eradicate the suffering of self and others. There is much to learn today, I believe, from the nondogmatic and pragmatic approach of historical Buddhism to intimate relationships—an approach that was not attached to any specific relationship structure but was essentially guided by a radical emphasis on liberation.

As is well known, Judaism permitted and even encouraged polygyny (“many wives”) for centuries until Rabbeinu Gershom (c. 960-1028) enacted an edict against marrying more than one wife, unless allowed on special grounds by at least 100 rabbis from three different countries. Interestingly, Rav Yaakov Emden explains, the reason for the ban was not moral or spiritual, but social. The edict was a reaction to the danger that having more than one wife could bring to the Jews in a Europe increasingly dominated by Christianity, which had been trying

to abolish polygamy from about 600CE to 900CE. In short, the purpose of the edict was to protect the Jewish people from being attacked or even killed by resentful Christian fundamentalists. Furthermore, according to most authorities, the ban was supposed to have validity only until the end of the fifth millennium of the Jewish calendar, so it never actually had the force of an edict (*cherem*) after the year 1240CE, though it continued as a custom in many places. (Originally, the prohibition was also limited geographically to certain European countries and regions.) If the Torah and the biblical law permitted polyamory, if the rationale for the prohibition was contextual, and if the validity of the edict was supposed to last only until the year 1240CE, then the current observance of the Cherem Rabbeinu Gershom seems unjustified. Of course, in light of the modern reconstruction of Judaism carried out by Rabbi Michael Lerner and others (see Lerner's *The Jewish Renewal*), contemporary Jews may regard the traditional endorsement of polygyny and prohibition of polyandry ("many husbands") as a "sexist" trend of ancient Judaism and, consequently, may want to creatively explore more egalitarian forms of polyamory.

For a variety of evolutionary and historical reasons, polyamory has had "bad press" in Western culture and spiritual circles—being automatically linked, for example, with promiscuity, irresponsibility, inability to commit, and even narcissistic hedonism. Given the current crisis of monogamy in our culture, however, it may be valuable to explore seriously the social potential of responsible forms of nonmonogamy. And given the spiritual potential of such exploration, it may also be important to expand the range of spiritually legitimate relationship choices that we as individuals can make at the various karmic crossroads of our lives.

Beyond Monogamy and Polyamory

IT IS MY HOPE THAT THIS ESSAY opens avenues for dialogue and inquiry in spiritual circles about the transformation of intimate relationships. It is also my hope that it contributes to the extension of spiritual virtues, such as sympathetic joy, to all areas of life and in particular to those which, due to historical, cultural, and perhaps evolutionary reasons, have been traditionally excluded or overlooked—areas such as sexuality and romantic love.

The culturally prevalent belief—supported by many contemporary spiritual teachers—that the only spiritually correct sexual options are either celibacy or monogamy is a myth that may be causing unnecessary suffering and that needs, therefore, to be laid to rest. It may be perfectly plausible to hold simultaneously more than one loving or sexual bond in a context of mindfulness, ethical integrity, and spiritual growth, for example, while working toward the transformation of jealousy into sympathetic joy and the integration of sensuous and spiritual love. I should add right away that, ultimately, I believe that the greatest expression of spiritual freedom in intimate relationships does not lie in strictly sticking to any particular relationship style—whether monogamous or polyamorous—but rather in a radical openness to the dynamic unfolding of life that eludes any fixed

or predetermined structure of relationships. It should be obvious, for example, that one can follow a specific relationship style for the "right" (e.g. life-enhancing) or "wrong" (e.g., fear-based) reasons; that all relationship styles can become equally limiting spiritual ideologies; and that different internal and external conditions may rightfully call us to engage in different relationship styles at various junctures of our lives. It is in this open space catalyzed by the movement beyond monogamy and polyamory, I believe, that an existential stance deeply attuned to the standpoint of Spirit can truly emerge.

Nevertheless, gaining awareness about the ancestral—and mostly obsolete—nature of the evolutionary impulses that direct our sexual/emotional responses and relationship choices may empower us to consciously co-create a future in which expanded forms of spiritual freedom may have a greater chance to bloom. Who knows, perhaps as we extend spiritual practice to intimate relationships, new petals of liberation will blossom that may not only emancipate our minds, hearts, and consciousness, but also our bodies and instinctive world. Can we envision an "integral *bodhisattva* vow" in which the conscious mind renounces full liberation until the body and the primary world can be free as well? ■

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HESCHEL FOR A NEW GENERATION

(continued from page 55) mirrors and feeds an abyss at the heart of the divine, a state of agonized estrangement *within* God. Only human action can restore the Bride to her supernal Husband, can *reunify* God through the raising up of the world.

Heschel integrates these existential and mystical teachings with prophetic outrage at social injustice. Heschel's God weeps over the state of the world, the unnecessary suffering sown in injustice, violence, and oppression. Justice, says Heschel "is not only a relationship between man and man, it is an *act* involving God, a divine need."

God *needs* us, to hear, to heed, and to respond. Redemption—restoration of the broken, weeping God—hinges on the degree to which we as human beings allow ourselves to commune with divine anguish in the face of suffering—and join in solidarity with the oppressed.

We are "wired" for empathy. Our moral grammar is innate, evolutionists tell us. And yet, Kitty Genovese: neighbors look on as a woman screams and is stabbed before their eyes.

For Heschel, our "wired" response to suffering is God operating within us. And our turning away—Pharaoh's hardened heart. The worst evil: indifference, callousness, paralysis.

My activism right now is difficult. I oversee the Rabbis for Human Rights Jewish Campaign against Torture. Sometimes

I must pore through detainee testimonies narrating unspeakable acts of cruelty. Sometimes my heart wants to close to the gruesomeness and the pain. I believe it is on account of—not despite—my encoding with empathy that I want to turn away.

Can I explain this? Meeting courageous survivors of torture whose lives go on; trauma counselors sitting each day with victims; Rabbis willing to speak out against torture, even as three congregants walk out, saying “Don’t talk about this in shul!”; and other congregants who rise up from their seats—and say, “What can I do?”

Looking out at them—and you, in whatever ways your heart calls you to respond—I behold. No roaring thunder. No flaming glory. God: in the faces of all of us registering anguish, pulled involuntarily to ease each other’s pain.

Rabbi Melissa Weintraub is Director of Education at Rabbis for Human Rights, North America, and Co-founder and Co-Director of the Encounter Program bringing Jewish Diaspora leaders to Palestinian communities.

Looking for the Law BY YEHUDAH MIRSKY

Spiritual ends come with a claim upon the person. They are imperative, not only impressive; demands, not abstract ideas.”

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

HALAKHAH WAS CENTRAL to Rabbi Heschel’s religious vision. He waged a dual polemic, with moderns who dismiss halakhah as barren legalism, and with the kind of Orthodoxy that degenerates into what he called “religious behaviorism.” This moral-spiritual polemic ran parallel to how he read the tradition: using historical criticism to loosen Orthodoxy’s hold on the meaning of scripture and thus of revelation, and using Orthodoxy’s rigor to chastise the flabby self-indulgences of mere “spirituality” and smug liberal ethics.

This dual vision served him as polemic stance and interpretive strategy because it resonated with what he saw as the dual, if you will dialectic, structure of Judaism itself; an endless *Coincidentia Oppositorum* of reason and bafflement, criticism and vision, clarity and mystery. The never complete effort to reconcile these opposites, in his reworking of the Maimonidean mean, is itself the work of Torah.

What, though, can hold all of this together, keep it from dissolving into a mist of incoherencies? Presumably, the halakhah, the law.

And this is where we have a problem. Though Rabbi Heschel bespeaks a new halakhah, in which the intensity and authenticity of the tradition is brought to bear on the new and complicated moral and spiritual imperatives of our day, he never concretely spelled out his halakhic vision, *takhles*, what it might look like and how it might work.

He did seem to find a form of new halakhic praxis via his involvement in the Civil Rights movement at the side of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. But in deep ways Dr. King and the movement were operating prophetically, outside the comparatively quotidian realms of politics and law—a stance whose limitations Dr. King himself seemed to realize toward the end of his life.

At times one is left wondering whether Rabbi Heschel’s ethics, his new halakhah, is in the end anything more than the most lyrical and moving rendition imaginable of an editorial page in a well-respected publication. And what is the wrong with that? It’s that sort of liberalism—like any political stance, and certainly one based on morals—that is routinely in danger of falling deeply in love with itself, to the detriment of its ostensible beneficiaries and of its practitioners themselves.

Rabbi Heschel took much from Hillel Zeitlin, above all the sense of wonder and the ineffable as the starting point of religion. But Zeitlin was rooted day in and day out in a thick, traditional milieu, and his aesthetic religion was intimately bound up with a living practice. On what ground are we to stand while living out the demands of the ineffable? How do we discover what it is that we are to do?

Zionism, for better or worse, has provided one sort of framework for working out, or trying to work out, the new Halakhah, albeit not without great difficulties of its own. Can diaspora Judaism generate anything comparable—and within the terms of liberal democracy, the only terms that can guarantee Jewish survival?

As ever, Rabbi Heschel provokes large questions, and indeed part of the beauty of his teaching is his refusal to claim that he has them solved. Indeed his figure as it emerges from his writings eludes his own dichotomies. In his posthumous magnum opus *Torah min Ha-Shamayim* he argues at the discursive level for the primacy of the rationalist jurisprudence of Rabbi Yishmael, but in the sheer force of his writing and fire of his vision proves himself to be an apostle of the God-intoxicated Rabbi Aqiva on almost every page. ■

Yehudah Mirsky, an Orthodox rabbi, served in the U.S. State Department’s human rights bureau in the Clinton Administration and is now a fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem.

OUR STORIES, OURSELVES

(continued from page 57) humbly. Aggadic Judaism aligns with God by informing our lives with stories of godliness. Our stories show us how to be godlike in the various situations we find ourselves.

What is Torah? Beginning with *Beresheet*, embracing rabbinic, kabbalistic, and hasidic tales, Yiddish and Ladino stories, the stories of Kafka, Singer, Agnon and others, and reaching beyond these to the as yet unspoken voice saying, “Once upon a time,” Torah is the open-ended creativity of the Jewish imagination.

What role will rabbis play in Aggadic Judaism? Unlike halachic Judaism, aggadic Judaism is not a proprietary code written by a learned elite, but an open-source narrative continually tweaked by anyone with the passion for doing so. Variations will spread and catch on if people find them meaningful, and there will be no one to say, “This is authentic and that is not.” Hence the rabbis’ role as arbiter and judge of Judaism will become obsolete in the postmodern period. Rabbis may continue on as masters of ceremony, but the *maggid* or storyteller will be the creative force of aggadic Judaism.

The *maggid* will also act as *darshan*, interpreter of tales, not only telling stories, but helping people find meaning through

story as well. Notice I said “through” rather than “in.” The story is not the end, but the means. *Maggidim* will be trained in the art of the story, both listening and telling, both remembering and inventing. The *maggid* will be a postmodern shaman who knows how to mix just the right tales to help you heal what haunts you.

What will happen to synagogues? Storytelling is intrinsically communal, and Jews will need places to gather to share their stories. Synagogues may serve this function. They will be small and intimate, with circular seating around the flames of *Shabbos*, *Havdallah*, and *Yom Tov* (what is a story without night-time and fire?). People won't join a shul, they will gather for a story.

I imagine people sitting in a circle chanting and singing *niggunim*. The singing will naturally give way to silence, and silence will give way to stories. A question will present itself, and a story will arise to address it. One story will lead to another surrounded by silence and singing as the stories are given time to sink in. And when the telling is over, hugs and food.

What will draw people to aggadic Judaism? A longing for meaning and purpose they cannot find anywhere else, and a desire to share stories in a way that invites meaning and purpose without suggesting that they are that meaning and purpose. Halachic Judaism is an end unto itself; aggadic Judaism is a means only. It has no teaching per se, but simply points godward in the direction of wisdom, justice, compassion, and humility.

How will aggadic Judaism raise the next generation? Just as the Passover Haggadah says we should: by inviting them into the story. The stories of halachic Judaism were stories we grew out of; the stories of aggadic Judaism are stories we grow into. The more life experience the listener has, the more depth the story reveals.

Will Hebrew be taught? Yes. Jewish stories of the future will draw on Jewish stories of the past, and those Jewish stories were written and spoken in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino. *Maggidim* will lace their tales with these languages—bringing the languages alive in story, and the story alive in its language. Listeners will learn a working vocabulary that will, along with the stories themselves, shape their identities as Jews.

And Bar and Bat Mitzvah? I imagine aggadic Jews becoming bat or bar mitzvah by mastering the ability to share and enter into the core stories of Judaism. And this would be only the beginning. Teenagers would spend time preparing for a late-teen *lech lecha* experience, allowing themselves to hear God calling them to leave the conditioning of tribe and family and venture boldly into the unknown (Genesis 12:1). Twenty-somethings would devote years preparing for a vision quest for Jacob's Ladder, experiencing the unity of all opposites in the greater nonduality of God (Genesis 28:12). Adults would take up the story of Jacob/Israel and set out for Jabbok's Ford to wrestle with the angel of God, accept the wound of their own imperfection, earn a new name, reconcile with their enemies, and learn to walk at the nurturing pace of the nursing mother (Genesis 32:24-33:14). Elders who have finished their walk will prepare for death by learning to sit unmoved through the wind, the earthquake, and the fire of life's closing years until they hear the Fragile Voice of Stillness that is God's call (1 Kings 19:11-12). In other words, our

stories will become living paradigms for spiritual practice.

Next Steps

IF WE ARE TO SHAPE a vibrant Judaism that reclaims her stories without falling into the trap of nostalgia, we must do three things, and do them soon.

1. We must identify the core stories of our people. This is already well underway. The *Ein Yaakov*, Berdyczewski's *Mimekor Yisrael*, Hayyim Bialik's *Sefer Aggadah*, Martin Buber's *Hasidic Tales*, and Howard Schwartz's *Tree of Souls* make finding our stories easy.

2. We must train storytellers to recast these tales for telling in a variety of media: “live,” print, and digital. In addition, the *maggid* must become a *darshan*, not only a teller of tales but also a miner of meaning, capable of helping the listener find herself in the tale in a manner that brings purpose and meaning to her life. Here Kurtz and Ketchum's *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, Buber's *The Way of Man* and Maurice Friedman's *Dialogue with Hasidic Tales* are excellent guides.

3. We must subsidize our *maggidim* and seed them in our communities so they are financially able to tell our stories and help our people find their way to them. Storyteller-in-residence programs funded by federations could be offered to synagogues and Jewish community centers, and individual *maggidim* could apply for grants from various Jewish sources to establish independent storytelling programs in their communities.

Conclusion Redux

OUR FUTURE BELONGS to our story and depends upon the creative skill and imagination of our storytellers. If you care about the former, you must do something to promote the latter.

Postscript

IT IS ONE THING to call for something new, and quite another to actually build it. The former allows me the luxury of blaming others for failing to act; the latter provides the true challenge of having my ideas tested in the real world. So I will make you a promise: Within the next six months I will establish a training program for *maggidim*. I will find the teachers, set up the curriculum, secure a space, and invite you to learn. If you find aggadic Judaism compelling, contact me. If you can help financially, good. If you wish to enroll, also good. I can't set forth the program or its costs, but I can say this: our *maggidim* will, if you let them, become indispensable resources for your community. They will know the range of Jewish story, and how to make them speak to people in their communities. They will become the new shamans of Jewish life, fanning the fires of meaning and quenching the flames of madness. They will spark a renaissance of Jewish spiritual creativity as story steps beyond words to film, music, dance, and art. If our *maggidim* are the next step, we need not worry about last steps. ■

Rabbi Rami Shapiro is director of the One River Foundation and author of numerous books including *Hasidic Tales*, *Annotated and Explained*, and *The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness*. He can be reached at rabbirami@rabbirami.com

Culture

BOOKS | FILM | MUSIC

The Need Not to Know

The American Jewish Community and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict BY JEROME SLATER

THE ROAD MAP TO NOWHERE: Israel/Palestine Since 2003, by Tanya Reinhart. Verso, 2006.

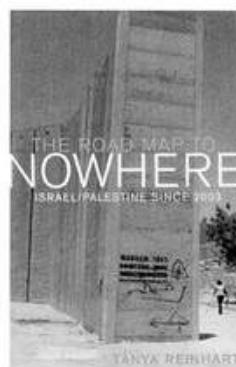
ZIONISM'S DRIVE TO CREATE a state for the Jewish people was designed to serve two purposes. The most fundamental of them was to provide a refuge that would ensure the well-being and security of the Jewish people, wherever they were endangered by the ever-recurring historical cycles of murderous global anti-Semitism—most recently, of course, the Holocaust. Beyond that, the Jewish state of Israel was to be a moral exemplar for all mankind, “a light unto the nations,” the model of the kind of state that a liberal, well educated, sophisticated, and morally sensitive people—the people of the Book—could create.

The Zionist dream is becoming a nightmare. There is no place in the world where the Jewish people are more insecure than in Israel, in part, of course, because of the continuation of anti-Semitism, especially in the Islamic world, but also because of the policies and behavior of the Jewish state. As for its role of moral exemplar, today defenders of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians don't even bother to claim a higher morality; rather, they wish Israel to be judged as an “ordinary” state and typically complain bitterly that the West has a double standard, condemning Is-

rael's human rights record but minimizing the even worse record of typical Arab autocracies. What a defense—it's a long way from “a light unto the nations” to “better than Syria.”

Zionism's “original sin” (in the language of many Israeli critics) was the political dispossession of the Arab peoples of Palestine, who had a more compelling historical case for political sovereignty over Palestine than did the Jews. True, Palestine had been the original Biblical homeland for the Jews, before the Romans had expelled them two thousand years earlier. But it hardly follows that this history gives the Jews an inherent right to the land in perpetuity, particularly in light of the uncontestable fact that for thirteen hundred consecutive years the area had been largely inhabited by Arabs, and also because religious and historical claims to the land by both Muslims and Christians are no less powerful than those made by Jews.

Thus, the religious argument for Jewish sovereignty over Palestine is unpersuasive, and the argument based on previous possession of the land is even more so. There is no place on earth that hasn't at one time or another “belonged” to a different people than its current inhabitants, and no place other than Palestine where it even occurs to anyone to argue that the passage of two



thousand years is irrelevant to judging current land rights. Far worse, by blinding the Israelis—and their equally unseeing supporters among diaspora Jews, especially in the United States—to the reality of the conflict, these childish arguments have had devastating consequences for the Israelis and the Palestinians alike.

The tragedy is that these deeply flawed arguments for privileging Jewish claims to Palestine over those of its indigenous inhabitants were so unnecessary because by the early 1940s there was one incontestably *good*—and sufficient—argument. After the Holocaust, it was clear to people of good will everywhere that the creation of a Jewish state was now morally imperative, and that there was no practical place to put such a state other than in Palestine. True, this would create an injustice for the Palestinians, but one that could be mitigated by dividing the land of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. Tanya Reinhart puts it this way: “As an Israeli, I grew up believing that this primal sin our state was founded on might be forgiven one day, because the founders' generation was driven by the faith that this was the only way to save the Jewish people from the danger of another holocaust. But it didn't stop there.”

Everyone knows, of course, that the Palestinians—insisting on holding 100 percent of the land for themselves, regardless of the consequences for world Jewry—refused to accept the UN's partition plan of 1947. What is not nearly so well known, however, is that Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, and most of the rest of the Zionist leadership also never truly accepted partition. Rather, they regarded their agreement to the UN plan as merely a tactical necessity, one that would later be reversed when Israel became militarily strong enough to resume its drive for Jewish sovereignty over all of the Biblical land of Palestine. And so they did, and so—as Tanya Reinhart argues—Israel continues to do today, in an only somewhat modified manner.

Thus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no longer a continuation of an historically unavoidable Original Sin; rather, it has become an avoidable, ongoing, and ever-worsening sin. Avoidable because there was a reasonable chance that the conflict might have been resolved long ago, had the Israelis acknowledged the inevitable harms done to the Palestinians by the creation of Israel as well as the subsequent expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages, and resolved to do everything possible to make up for these injustices in any manner possible, *short of abandoning the Jewish state in one part of the land of Palestine*. Israel's failure to acknowledge its responsibilities and moral obligations to the Palestinians has turned a tragedy into a crime.

Tanya Reinhart, a professor emeritus at Tel Aviv University and a regular columnist in Israel's biggest daily newspaper, *Yediot Aharanot*, has written two recent books of blistering, unsparing, and entirely persuasive criticism of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. The first, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, covered the 1999–2002 period; her most recent book, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine Since 2003*, updates her analysis through early 2006.

Reinhart argues that under the administrations of both Ariel Sharon and current Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the real goal of Israeli policy has been, at

a minimum, to unilaterally annex some 40 percent of the West Bank, including the most productive lands and most of the water resources of the area. Beyond that, Olmert is continuing the process of what Reinhart openly calls “ethnic cleansing” that began with the expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians in 1948. Reinhart contends that the brutality employed in the 1948 war is no longer feasible, if only because of the potential condemnation of the international community and the consequences it would have for Israel, so it is being replaced by the more indirect method of “slow and invisible transfer”—that is, making life so miserable for the Palestinians that they give up and move elsewhere.

The tactics used to achieve this goal include the killing of more than two thousand innocent Palestinians as the result of Israel's indiscriminate attacks on “militants” or “terrorists” via bombs, missiles, artillery fire, and the like. Besides the killings, the Israeli government has imposed collective punishment and deliberate impoverishment of the entire Palestinian population by, as Reinhart describes, creating “a complex system of prisons...[pushing the Palestinians] into locked and sealed enclaves, fully controlled...by the Israeli army.” This is done by the “Separation Wall” and other barriers, as well as by military roads, patrols, checkpoints, and roadblocks; the closing of Gazan trade and commerce with the outside world; and the repeated incursions of the Israel Defense Forces. Beyond even that, other measures seek to destroy the Palestinian economy and ordinary life, including the destruction of Gaza's main electrical power plant; the severe restrictions placed on Palestinian drinking and agricultural water; the daily humiliations and often severe hardships imposed by draconian Israeli laws against the free movement of Palestinians throughout the West Bank; the disruption of the private and public health systems—and more.

Faced with this catastrophe, it is no wonder that the Palestinians have revolted; as Reinhart notes, international law and the Geneva Conventions “recognize the right of an occupied people to carry

out armed struggle,” although not to resort to terrorism against civilians. Even noon-terrorist armed Palestinian resistance may not have been wise in practice, Reinhart concedes, but what alternatives did the Palestinians have? Many—including *Tikkun*—have proposed nonviolent strategies of resistance, but there is little reason to believe that approach would have been any more successful. Reinhart goes into great detail on the tactics the Israeli army, police, and intelligence services have used to suppress even nonviolent demonstrations—including the use of tear gas, stun guns, rubber bullets, and occasionally even live fire.

Reinhart focuses primarily on the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians. She might well have added that the Occupation and repression have had devastating direct and indirect effects on Israeli institutions, society, and quality of life. As regularly discussed by the Israeli news media and academicians, these include the following:

Israeli Democracy: All of Israel's democratic institutions are in severe decline. The Knesset is widely regarded with contempt, as are politicians generally. The judiciary in general, and the Supreme Court in particular, have largely abandoned their imperative role of upholding law and human rights against widespread governmental abuses, so long as the government cites “security needs” as its justification. Not surprisingly, the power of the military and security services in Israel are greater than in any other Western democracy.

Democratic and Human Rights: There are many Israeli commentaries about the radical decline of values and ordinary moral norms and constraints. Among the consequences are the growth of (1) class and intra-Jewish ethnic and religious conflict; (2) organized and unorganized crime, including routine intra-Jewish violence; (3) anti-Arab sentiments and other forms of racism; and (4) the abuse of women, including white slavery. As academics like Aviad Kleinberg and journalists such as Tom Segev have concluded, “interest in human rights has never been so negligible,” and

Israeli society, gripped by “moral and political paralysis,” is “gradually coming undone.”

Economic Injustice: Israel has completely abandoned its earlier goal of creating a democratic socialism in favor of “rampant capitalism.” Consequently, while some Israelis grow fabulously wealthy, other sectors of the society suffer through high unemployment rates, high inflation, and continuously widening income inequalities.

To add to the picture of this third-world style pathology, Reinhart notes that a 2005 World Bank report found Israel to be one of the most corrupt and least efficient Western states.

Education and Culture: Religious messianism and fundamentalism are on the rise. This together with the secular but primitive nationalism of Sharon and his successors has created an environment in which academic freedom is under severe attack, Israel’s intellectuals are increasingly regarded with scorn, and the education system as a whole has radically declined, becoming increasingly government-controlled, politicized, and ineffective. As Adir Cohen, a chaired professor of education at Haifa University, recently wrote, the deterioration in the Israeli education system (as reported by a spate of recent studies) is accompanied by a national move in “an anti-cultural direction. The art institutions are being suffocated, the orchestras choked, the theaters closed down.... Public libraries are in a terrible state. For 2,000 years we were People of the Book. Now we’ve become the country bumpkins.”

Though it cannot be said that all of these problems are attributable only to the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor that they would disappear if that conflict were settled, it is equally obvious that the conflict, the Occupation, and the repression of the Palestinians has played a major role in either creating or exacerbating them.

What Can the American Jewish Community Do?

Israel is in a headlong rush towards catastrophe—even existential catastrophe, for

not only is its democracy and society at stake, but even its basic security. As Reinhart puts it, Israel is a “small Jewish state...surrounded by two hundred million Arabs,” and it “is making itself the enemy of the whole Muslim world. There is no guarantee that such a state can survive. Saving the Palestinians also means saving Israel.” Sooner or later the most fanatical of the Islamic fundamentalists by one means or another are likely to acquire nuclear weapons—and they may very well use them against Israeli cities, regardless of the obvious consequences to the Muslim world from Israeli retaliation. And that will be the end of Israel, and much of the Middle East.

Only serious pressures by the American government, including making continued political, economic, and military support contingent on the end of the Israeli occupation and repression of the Palestinians, can stop the Israelis from marching over this looming cliff. Given the confluence of rightwing ideology and domestic political realities in the United States, however, it is hard to imagine any American government imposing such tough-love policies on Israel without strong support from the American Jewish community.

Reinhart argues that “Part of the reason why the pro-Israeli lobbies [in the U.S.] have been so successful...is the massive lack of knowledge about what is really happening in Israel-Palestine.” However, matters are even worse: it is not so much innocent ignorance that accounts for the unwillingness of most of the American Jewish community to help save Israel from itself, for by now there has been considerable coverage—even in the super-cautious American news media—of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians and to its own best interests. Thus, the real issue is the *willed* ignorance—the psychological need not to know—of our community. The price—to the Palestinians, to the Israelis, and to American national security—is already unbearable, and it may well soon become apocalyptic. ■

Jerome Slater is University Research Scholar, SUNY/Buffalo.

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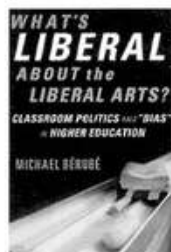
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[BOOKS]

Defending the Liberal Arts

BY DANIEL MORRIS



WHAT'S LIBERAL ABOUT THE LIBERAL ARTS: Classroom Politics and "Bias" in Higher Education, by Michael Bérubé. W.W. Norton, 2006.

DAVID HOROWITZ'S recent campaign to rid American universities of left-wing professors—through blacklisting (*The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*) and calls for pedagogical correctness (his proposed "Academic Bill of Rights")—has sent a chill throughout the American academy. The academic corollary to President Bush's War on Terror, Horowitz's efforts have succeeded in instigating a cultural conflict on university campuses, providing a rallying point for conservative students and faculty eager to make their ideological positions hegemonic in the classroom.

In *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts*, Michael Bérubé (one of the "101 Most Dangerous Academics") counters Horowitz and company by documenting what really goes on in the classroom of an unabashedly liberal English professor. He suggests that American conservatives are infuriated not because the academy fails to educate students in critical thinking, but because, like Social Security, it is a liberal institution that works well. Recalling courses he's taught on American Literature and Postmodernism at Penn State and at the University of Illinois, Bérubé presents himself as an open-minded but academically rigorous instructor who strives to preserve, not resolve, conflicts among students of varying political views. Instead of censoring students who disagree with him, Bérubé imagines his classroom as a "safe space ... for all remarks that are well-grounded in the texts." He calls this practice "procedural liberalism" in which "any reason-

able proposition can and should be debated from any reasonable angle." Challenging students to probe their assumptions, whether they are arguing points from the Right or the Left, he ridicules "the wholly uncritical Chomsky fans who seem to have abdicated some of the tasks of critical thinking in precisely the same way that the wholly uncritical Bush worshippers have done." Bérubé deplores as "morally obtuse" Ward Churchill's description of 9/11 victims as "Little Eichmanns." The author cherishes Sidney Hook's defense of tenure as "the right to heresy," but he holds offensive fools in contempt.

Horowitz wants to insulate literature from historical and social contexts, but Bérubé shows that race, class, gender, and ethnicity should inform any thoughtful analysis of novels such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, and *The Great Gatsby*. "Perhaps *The Great Gatsby* is not only about love and the green light across the bay, but also about culture, society, and systems of value that traverse both 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' economies," he argues. The often contradictory ways in which novelists handle social issues constitute the substance of their compelling works. Following Lionel Trilling, Bérubé believes literary criticism should allow students to see "how complex and remarkable works ... [have] as much to do with their vigorous participation in the literature and culture of [their times] as with their uncanny ability to speak to us across hundreds of years and thousands of miles."

Bérubé admits that most liberal arts faculty are Democrats, but this is a red herring in right-wing critiques of academic bias. "Voting records of my colleagues are actually one of the most trivial features of our departmental deliberations.... [They] do not matter in

the least when we're discussing the undergraduate curriculum, the graduate program... or any of the other things that make up the actual diurnal work of running an academic department." Often withholding his viewpoint in the classroom, in *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts*, Bérubé lays his political and philosophical cards on the table. For Bérubé, "liberal democracies seem best suited to realizing the kind of social self-reflexivity necessary for any significant political—or personal—change of understanding with regard to human rights." In a lengthy chapter on postmodernism, he presents an anti-foundationalist ethics indebted to the philosopher Richard Rorty. Bérubé supports Rorty's approach to morality because, he argues, appeals to a higher authority as ground for ethics tend to close off discussion and to harden positions. His final chapter offers his vision of a just society in which human rights are extended, and the social safety net is secured.

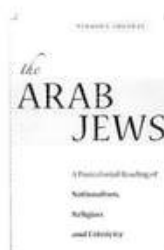
Bérubé has also edited a collection of essays on the relationship between aesthetics and cultural studies, but his attention to literary forms, techniques, and tropes are fairly limited in *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts*. Bérubé carefully demystifies texts. He is not a champion of their sublimity. I suspect many *Tikkun* readers will find his anti-foundationalist ethics lacking in the spiritual dimension that informs the work of such progressives as Michael Lerner and Cornel West. Given how Bérubé demonstrates his sensitivity as a close reader throughout this book, I also found it a pity that he has devoted so much time and ink to debunking such easy targets as David Horowitz. Nevertheless, somebody has to fight to restore the value of the humanities against fallacious attacks. We should be grateful that, despite whatever disagreements one might have with Bérubé, higher education has such a nimble defender. ■

Daniel Morris is a Professor of English and Jewish Studies at Purdue University.

[BOOKS]

How to Speak About Arab Jews

BY DAVID SHASHA



THE ARAB JEWS: A Post-colonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity, by Yehouda Shenhav. Stanford University Press, 2006.

IN *THE ARAB JEWS*, TEL Aviv University professor Yehouda Shenhav tells the story of Israel's Arab Jewish immigrants in a voice that Edward Said once promoted as the "subaltern" revolt in academia.

Eschewing the heatedly polemical style of writers like G.N. Giladi, Shenhav has written a brilliant book that adheres to the protocols of sociological inquiry with arguments that have been thoroughly documented. His voice is that of a modern intellectual who has broken into the system and articulated a position that responds directly to the endemic racism of Israeli scholarship, which once portrayed Arab Jews as inferior and culturally backward.

The structure of Shenhav's book is deceptively simple, yet quite effective. Unearthing a hitherto obscure episode in the history of Zionist activity in Abadan, a city at the cusp of the Iraqi and Iranian world(s), Shenhav reconstructs the ways in which Zionism first approached the reality of Arab Jewry. After this examination, Shenhav goes on to discuss Sephardic discourses about Abadan's history and how it functions within the larger context of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The book opens with a fascinating anecdote that reveals the internal contradictions of the Arab Jew. Shenhav relates the odd tale of his father, Eliyahu Shahrabani, and his role in the Zionist usurpation of Arab Jewish memory. After Shahrabani's death, Shenhav is approached by a mysterious man who informs Yehouda about his

father's role in the Israeli intelligence services:

When my father was seventeen, he moved with a group of Iraqi-born friends to Kibbutz Be'eri, on the ruins of the Arab village of Nahbir. In that same year, Avshalom Shmuely, a recruitment officer, came to Be'eri and recruited them into Israel's intelligence community. There is nothing surprising about this. They were part of an inexhaustible reservoir of ambitious young people, loyal to the state, spoke perfect Arabic, and looked like Arabs. They had the ideal profile. As an intelligence man, my father worked hard and was sometimes gone for lengthy periods. His absence enhanced my status as a boy in the neighborhood. By working for the state against the Arab enemy, he earned his entry ticket into Israeliness. I was able to benefit from it vicariously. But this does not mean I was comfortable with his Arabness. As a kid, I fought against my parents and their culture. Employing creative tactics, I would shut the radio off or put it out of commission when they wanted to listen to the great Arab singers Om Kolthoum, Farid al-Atrash, or Abd-el-Wahab. The truth is that I was greatly preoccupied with my own and my family's Arab Jewish origins but kept the subject to myself. Those origins did not provide a valid entry ticket to become an equal member of Israeli society, with its basically orientalist mentality, then as now.

In the course of recounting this story, Shenhav shows how the dense, interstitial patterns of Sephardi Israeli identity were formed out of a paradoxical relationship between the need to retain and make use of Arabic culture and language, but in a way that negated that culture:

It may seem eminently reasonable for the new Jewish state to use immigrants' Arab backgrounds as "expertise"

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and the basis for a "career." As such, my use of Israel's spies to argue that the incorporation of the Arab Jews into the Jewish collective was complex and internally contradictory may seem facile. But first, though Arab Jews were routinely used as spies, their cultural skills were never used to forge positive links with Arab countries. This disjuncture suggests that the state was after more than just practical help. Its practices were used to separate Arab Jews from their Arab backgrounds.

The interconnectedness between the intrinsic Zionist need for "insiders" who could "pass" as the enemy and the Zionist rejection of Arab culture serves as the fulcrum upon which Shenhav's study turns. Zionism, which has generally sought to use Arab Jews for strategic purposes—for example, to populate Israel's border regions as a bulwark against Palestinian recidivism, after it was clear that Western Jews were not going to immigrate *en masse* to the fledgling country—maintained two mutually exclusive and contradictory positions. Arab Jews were needed to serve the new country, often using their cultural identities. But these very traits were marked as part of the "enemy" culture that Israel was determined to destroy.

For a young man like Shenhav, growing up in a hostile environment where Arab culture represented backwardness and incompetence, the process of "De-Arabization" was a socio-cultural mechanism that had been stitched into the very fabric of the nascent Israeli psyche. The attempt to restore the history of this Arab Jewish world would thus be an assault on the very socio-cultural mechanisms that served to define Israeli identity as European.

Zionism as Jewish Colonialism

The charge of colonialism against the Zionist movement has been one that is deeply contested by many Zionists. Conceding that they were not settler-clients of an imperial power, Zionists have consistently sought to show how their relationship with the United Kingdom

bristled with conflict. However, the reality of this situation was far more complex. Shenhav explains that as Zionism expanded in the region, the adoption of a non-Arab element would prove to be ultimately beneficial to Western interests. The Abadan context provided a perfect example of how deeply Zionism and colonial ideology were imbricated:

Indeed, on the ground, in their day-to-day lives, the emissaries were well aware of the social divisions and hierarchies dictated by color and ethno-racial differences produced by the colonial situation. They could not help but be aware of them. Everywhere they looked these divisions were ingrained in the fabric of their existence in Abadan, from their segregated "whites-only" neighborhoods to their privileged working conditions and positions of authority. The emissaries, who had arrived as Zionists, came to identify themselves also—and even mainly—as white Europeans. Those who had not arrived in Abadan already in possession of a colonial consciousness had ample opportunity to develop one on site. The emissaries' descriptions of their day-to-day lives and an analysis of their point of view make it possible to bring in their voices and create a history from below of the colonial experience.

Though the process of colonization was not intrinsic to the situation, it nevertheless reinforced the Eurocentric elements inherent in Zionist thinking, building upon those ideas a new socio-political reality that fused Zionist theoretical ideality with the colonialist status quo.

And how did this affect the Jews who were native to the region?

Shenhav documents a series of detailed statements by the above-quoted emissaries, Zionist functionaries who, under the cover of the Solel Boneh project, looked to proselytize to Abadan's Jews and exhort them to immigrate to Palestine. In the course of this subterfuge, the emissaries were forced to hide their actual identities in order to fool those to whom they were preaching the Zionist message. Their innate con-

tempt for these Arab Jews was barely concealed. In the words of Enzo Sereni, one of the European Zionist emissaries:

This material is not European material, it is material that is quick to become enthusiastic, but also quick to despair...unable to keep a secret, unable to keep their word... There are deep waters, and those waters are not bad ... but there is the foam on the water, and it is bad, of an Arab-Levantine sort... Assimilation from a Levantine type into a culture that does not yet exist or is at a nadir... They can be turned into "human beings," but we shall not be able to accomplish that without the help of the people in the Land.

What is even more startling is the degree of intrigue that was undertaken in the process of trying to convince Arab Jews to leave Iraq and Iran, and come to Palestine. Sadly, this program implicated the figure of the revered Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook who, as a hardened Zionist fighting his own internal Jewish battles against the Orthodox anti-Zionist Ashkenazi establishment, provided "cover" to emissaries like Sereni, who required a new identity in order to be permitted access to Arab Jewish communities.

What Kook did was to confer upon such envoys—all atheist socialists to a man—the traditional character of the *shali'ah*, or in Shenhav's term, *shadarim*. These *shadarim* concealed their true identities under the guise, ironically, of *religious* emissaries empowered to persuade the local Jews to come to Zion for spiritual reasons. This was no historical anomaly. During Israel's early years, such collaborations between secular and religious Zionists fostered the illusion that Zionism was indeed a logical extension of the Jewish religion.

Clearly, a good deal of Zionist outreach to Arab Jewry was based on a series of deliberately interlinked falsehoods that would serve to undermine the communal integrity of Arab Jews in ways that are felt to this day. In Shenhav's words, Arab Jews were "religionized" in

ways that went well beyond the cultural norms of their respective Diaspora communities.

What Shenhav is pointing out here is the way in which Zionism manipulated religion as a means to undergird and reinforce a nationalist ideal that was understood in neo-Hegelian terms. For Zionism, religion was not a concrete reality; unlike the devotional practices inherent to the Arab Jewish tradition, Zionism was unconcerned with halachic praxis. What Zionism was concerned about was Judaism as the abstract basis of the national entity.

Such a transformation of Jewish praxis—and its cognitive realities—led to an undermining of the traditional customs and beliefs of Arab Jews, resulting in a fusion of Jewish customs with the Zionist ideological imperatives that privileged national over religious considerations. This transformation of Arab Jewish religious identity has served Israeli political interests extremely well over the years.

As Shenhav explores the paradoxical ways in which Zionism has had to be inclusive of a Jewish religion whose legal and textual strictures it has long since marked as defunct, we see how at its very conceptual root, Zionism is caught in a trap of religio-national ethnocentrism anchored in the Ashkenazi experience and its tragic history. In this regard, Shenhav cites kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem:

The people here [in Palestine] do not understand the implications of their actions.... They think they have turned Hebrew into a secular language, that they have removed its apocalyptic sting. But this is not the case.... Every word that is not created randomly anew, but is taken from the "good old" lexicon, is filled to overflowing with explosives....

It is here that Shenhav shows us the paradoxical nature of Zionism and how that paradox functions in the context of Arab Jewish history and identity. Forcing the richness of the Jewish past, its language, its religion, its culture, to serve at the altar of a monocausal identity—of

Ashkenazi Hegelianism—can only serve to touch off the tripwires of history and its wide reserve of hidden energies and suppressed antinomianisms.

Between A Rock and a Hard Place: Sephardim as Zionist Victims

The Arab Jews is another significant chapter in the literature of Sephardic history and its relationship to Zionism. Its English-language publication recalls the final pages of Giladi's now out-of-print *Discord in Zion*, in which the author is insistent that, after decades of struggle and failure, Israel's Arab Jews are set to emerge from the cloud that they have been living under. And in the early 1990s, the work of Ammiel Alcalay, Ella Shohat, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and a few others made it appear as though this promise might actually be fulfilled. But the internal censoring mechanisms inherent in the Zionist project took hold of the Sephardic community, which resolutely rejected this activist approach and began to fulfill the "death of the Sephardim" project that Shenhav narrates as being a crucial part of the Ashkenazi Zionist mission.

With the eradication of Israel's Black Panthers and the socialist Matzpen organization, and the increasing movement of Sephardi activists into Israeli universities—a place where the vast majority of the great Sephardi "unwashed" remain deeply uncomfortable—the discourse of Arab Jewish activist scholars such as Giladi became increasingly esoteric and obscure. The malodorous realities of the *ma'abarot* are direct and immediately accessible in *Discord in Zion* in ways that elude the more reserved nature of the scholarly, even though the anti-Sephardi polemic continues on its harsh and merry way.

Like Ammiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs*, Shenhav's similarly titled book may prove too difficult for the average reader. The academic nature of its language marks it in the ranks of books by academic theoreticians of nationalism and culture that are widely read in universities, but whose arguments rarely enter into the common currency of the

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average person. This is not to stigmatize *The Arab Jews* ultimate social worth, which remains vast precisely because of its subject matter.

The argument I am making has to do with the way that knowledge is all too frequently marked as inaccessible and unusable in a non-academic context because it partakes of the technical lexicon of university scholarship. When Sephardim don't even know the most basic elements of their own history and culture, the complex discourse of such works may estrange them from the very people who so badly need to read them.

Paradoxically, part of the anti-Sephardi racism that has been endemic to the Ashkenazi Zionist argument is that Sephardim are primitive and less capable than Europeans. How better then to show the "other side" that Sephardim are as smart, if not smarter, than they are by approaching the subject of Sephardic culture from within the very scientific and intellectually sophisticated parameters of the European academic tradition?

The Sephardim thus find themselves between the proverbial rock and hard place. It must therefore be stated without hesitation that Yehouda Shenhav's *The Arab Jews* serves to articulate the Sephardic cause in ways that are bracingly innovative and intellectually challenging. As Sephardic readers, we must lift ourselves up to the rarefied heights of such books and not wallow in anti-intellectualism. The challenge of this work is to internalize the passions and emotions that often serve to fire up our conscience, and to see the ways in which the methods and protocols of social scientific discourse can serve to detail the glorious richness of our history and preserve the intensely human complexities of our culture. ■

David Shasha is the director of the Center for Sephardic Heritage in Brooklyn, New York. The Center publishes the weekly e-mail newsletter Sephardic Heritage Update as well as promoting lectures and cultural events relevant to Sephardic culture. He can be reached at davidshasha@aol.com

[BOOKS]

Why Culture Matters

BY CHARLIE BERTSCH



PRETEND WE'RE DEAD:
Capitalist Monsters in
American Pop Culture,
by Annalee Newitz.
Duke University Press,
2006.

ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP on popular culture starts by confronting a paradox. In trying to take seriously books, films, and records that weren't intended to be taken that seriously—at least from an intellectual standpoint—scholars risk having their own work trivialized. Nobody who writes about Shakespeare, Hitler's rise to power, or the matriarchal structure of a small South American tribe has to justify their research topic to their colleagues. But if you want to write about the role of Shakespeare on the *Star Trek: Next Generation* holodeck, Darth Sidious's rise to power in the *Star Wars* series, or the gender politics of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, you are bound to encounter befuddlement, if not outright mockery. This is why those in the academy who study popular culture tend to protest the importance of their work a little too vociferously, and also why some of the people who do it best end up pursuing other career opportunities.

Annalee Newitz, who writes a popular syndicated column on technology and contributes regularly to magazines like *Wired*, falls into the latter category. As she explains in the acknowledgements to *Pretend We're Dead*, the book began as a dissertation project. That it ended somewhere else was clearly a boon for her prose. After beginning the book with a brief discussion of the film *The Sixth Sense*, in which she describes the dead, whom the young character Cole sees as, "spirits who cannot rest until they get some kind of closure on their lives," she turns to the *Blair Witch Project*:

Of course, some ghosts could give a crap about closure. Certainly this is the

case with the bloodthirsty sprits who haunt the remote Maryland woods in *Blair Witch*. When a bunch of art students decide to slum it around the countryside to get footage for a sarcasm-laced film they're making about the legend of these spirits, they discover what documentary filmmakers have known for almost a century: the natives don't appreciate their condescending attitude.

This is writing that, like those pissed-off Maryland ghosts, hits its point with the force of a hammer. But that doesn't make the point any less sophisticated than it would have looked buried in a half-page sentence full of abstract terminology.

Although *Pretend We're Dead* is clearly the product of someone who has thought long and hard about her topic, it is also refreshingly free of the secondary and tertiary references that make most university press books of this kind a tough read. If Newitz mentions something, she does so because it matters for her argument, not because she is trying to pay her scholarly dues. Her discussion of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides an excellent example. After compactly summarizing their critique of the culture industry, she deftly traces its influence on the work of less subtle thinkers, citing the "media effects" studies that began in the 1960s:

One might compare this historical transformation to the way a bastardized version of Freudian psychoanalysis reached a broad audience through pop psychology and Hitchcockian cinema. Certainly Adorno and Horkheimer never became household names like Freud did, but their ideas have held sway over subsequent generations of media producers and critics.

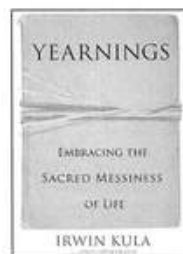
What makes the many passages like this one in *Pretend We're Dead* so helpful is that Newitz is just as interested in "bastardized" versions of ideas as she is in the

original source. Her entire argument about the ways in which the effects of capitalism are manifested in horror films—"contained, figured, talked around, repressed"—hinges on this idea of bastardization. It doesn't matter whether a film like *Logan's Run* provides a coherent critique of the culture industry. The important thing is to recognize its affinities with both Adorno and Horkheimer's actual argument and its "watered-down" offspring in media effects studies. *Logan's Run*, she writes, "is actually about audiences zombified by computers rather than movies. I would argue that the omnipresent, authoritarian computers in *Logan's Run* are precisely the kind of mass culture victims Adorno and Horkheimer feared." That's a strong claim, to be sure, but one that illuminates both the film and the critique that animates it more clearly than writing that is less sure of its own strength. Like the work of Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek, which it sometime resembles, *Pretend We're Dead* is a book that conveys rich insights about our society through inventive examination of specific films. And it's fun to read as well, whether you could give a crap about horror movies or not. ■

Charlie Bertsch is Tikkun's music editor. He teaches at the University of Arizona.

[BOOKS]

Capsule Reviews



YEARNINGS: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life, by Irwin Kula with Linda Loewenthal. Hyperion, 2006.

JEWS ARE TIRED OF hearing that Judaism is a religion of acts rather than faith.

Admittedly, a Jewish tradition that excused its adherents from belief has stirred the imagination—and the pride—of countless sophisticated urban Jews. The notion that a tradition based solely in a dialogic ethics could stand against fundamentalisms of all stripes

has been a source of solace during the 20th century's dark ages of Holocaust, Occupation, and Terror.

Yet, after almost 150 years of enlightened Judaism, Jews want more. Progressive Jewish leader and rabbi Irwin Kula identifies what we desire in *Yearnings*. We yearn for truth, meaning, the way, love, the ability to create, happiness, and, perhaps most of all, transcendence. We want to know what we are and why we are, which is our way of asking what God is and why God is.

Kula does not provide easy answers. Instead, in a book filled with anecdotes of the every day, he asks us to embrace "the sacred messiness of life." Instead of imagining a God who can answer all our questions, Kula marries the Socratic emphasis of ethical Judaism to our newfound desire for faith, asking us to embrace the unknowable, to have faith in the questions rather than the answers.

The author's faith in embracing uncertainty is not the same as a secular Jew's cynical rebuff of capital "T" truth. According to Kula, the one who yearns constantly reaches out for answers even though they are well aware that they may never find what they seek.

Yearnings imagines each of us as Moses, standing by the burning bush, hearing God say, "I am. I was. I will be." That's not, Kula points out, a God who will tell you what you want to hear. Believing in God is not about finding answers for our prayers so much as a way we allow ourselves to enlarge our sense of the possible.

A life-long progressive at the forefront of Jewish thought, Kula wants us to learn how to be as messy as life is. Why can't we, he asks, "hold two seemingly opposing truths together: the mystical and the pragmatic; the fantastic and the mundane; the idealistic and the realistic; the ordinary and the enchanted." Kula knows that some days we just want to be comfortable, and some days we want to change the world. Yearning is not enough, but neither can we live without it.

—Jo Ellen Green Kaiser



CIVILIZATION, by Elizabeth Arnold. Flood Editions, 2006.

FEW POETS CONVEY the relation of the self to history as convincingly as Elizabeth

Arnold. Maybe that's because history is not the past for Arnold, but the very substance that we inhabit. In this second collection of poems, Arnold not only attends to the most global (even galactic) realities, but she brings them to bear upon the minutest aspects of our lives. To read Elizabeth Arnold is to see such connections in refreshing, if sometimes disturbing, lucidity. This is what makes her poems so vital.

Take the three-line poem, "Polis," with which she opens her collection:

It's alive in us, what you thought,
what you made
happen in the mind, o precarious
ones,
threading your life into us from the
other end of time.

In these lines, the bare acts of consciousness turn out to carry the imprint of all of human history.

That may sound merely philosophical or dry. But in Arnold's poems, the links between the individual and the world at large conduct great emotional heat. For one thing, those connections are always "precarious." For another, the poet's exploration begins in and returns to family life. At the heart of *Civilization* stand Arnold's moving portraits of her father as he descends into Alzheimer's disease. In the poet's metaphor, he himself is "a civilization" falling out of the world.

The power of this work flows not from subject matter alone, but from the formal friction of the lines themselves. Like the modernist poet George Oppen, Arnold works in a ductile free-verse measure. Her tone is free ranging. She employs the vocabulary of science at one moment and translates Greek lyrics at the next; she takes on the idiom of family shouting matches in some poems and of philosophical inquiry in others. But the poems never sag into diffuseness.

Arnold's phrases are condensed, stark. Each word seems to sear itself into the page, like molten platinum. In a book that renders personal and political instability with unrelenting fierceness, there's genuine pleasure in such consummate artfulness. —*Peter Campion*



UNSPEAKABLE LOVE:
Gay and Lesbian Life in
the Middle East, by Brian
Whitaker. University of
California Press, 2006.

IN THE OPENING CHAPTER of *Unspeakable Love*, Brian Whitaker gives us a brief introduction to the scanty cultural capital available to gays in the greater Arab world.

Eschewing conventional reporting on the regressive character of *Sharia's* (Islamic law) positions on gender rights, Whitaker calls our attention to its more progressive positions on the subject. Sodomy, for instance, is *not* one of the so-called *hadd* crimes for which the death penalty is authorized. This means that legal opinions making it a capital crime are "human, and therefore fallible."

True to advocacy journalism's form, however, Whitaker also tells us the kinds of personal stories that are the bread and butter of queer histories everywhere, reproducing letters to periodical editors asking if it wouldn't be better to commit suicide, for instance, rather than be gay. Such testimony, sadly, constitutes the main reportorial thrust of *Unspeakable Love*.

What Whitaker's coverage of this situation ought to instruct us is that when we speak about problems of democracy in the Islamic world, we also need to call to public attention its maltreatment of gays and lesbians.

Prior to the al-Aksa Intifada, one of the few places that Israelis and Palestinians could be found dancing together was in Israeli gay bars. Reading *Unspeakable Love* reminded me how atypical that was, and why most of the Middle East is so far behind the West in granting civil recognition to its gay and lesbian citizens. —*Cynthia Hoffman*

[POEM]

Children

Children you who will die in the next
war
Burnt up in tanks or ripped by splin-
tered shells, shocked
Your hands and your limbs torn from
you
Be not afraid
Be not afraid of its arrival
Because you will die in the next war
Suddenly or slowly or with no warning
or during a desperate fight
Be not afraid now and fear not its ar-
rival
Because death will take you in war and
without war
At its own choosing

Children you are and you will die in
the next war
Following a deafening furor
Because there is no war without death
and no war without furor
And no life without death at its own
choosing

Rush not to swallow the poison await-
ing you
And rush not to love or to hate
Hold no hope for rescue or that war
will not come
Because it will
And battle awaits you
Torn flesh burnt bodies and spilled
blood and gray shriveled bones
And hovering ghosts

Children you who will die in the next
war
Will leave this valley of tears with
nothing
The righteous will continue to cheat
and to steal and to send you into
the next war to die under a bright
sun or a dark moon or the remote
stars
Beneath you will lie in the shivering
earth

Because you will die children
And cannot escape from death

You will fear no more when in your
deaths
While those who remain will weep
they will weep for themselves
And your souls will tremble in trans-
parency and light

Over this accursed earth where flesh
covers bone
And over this accursed earth where
man has forever chased after war
There are no grounds for fear. Chil-
dren you are
And children you will die. No brothers
to you are your enemies and your
brothers are your enemies.
Because a gun has an aim when it
speaks
It is better that the warrior die than be
butchered in retreat

I am speaking of my contempt for
death
Of my contempt for the death you will
die in the next war
I speak plainly and I speak truth

Fires will burn through the night, fires

Ships will sink in the sea, ships
Men will fall in the dark, men

Phone lines will be severed, power
Bridges will give way, roads
Transmitters will be shattered
Journalists bodies impaled, writers
Cars will burn and the thick stench of
corpses
Will burn your eyes, your throats

You from the hills of Ephraim, from
the hills of Judea
You from the coastal plain, you from
the ruins of Jerusalem.
You who hold each others' hands and
you who grasp another's heels none
will
survive you

I am speaking to you

I am speaking from the valley of death
I am speaking from the valley of death
that will rise in a mound of corpses

Poisoned the reservoirs and the air poi-
soned
The people will seek shelter and the
children will howl
The old, the women will cry out with
death in their mouths
No blood will be spilled
Why spill blood
Why kill in blood

A dove will awaken in smoke
Its voice in song
Its smoke-filled voice alone, its smoke-
drenched wings beating alone

A voice from the valley of death
A troupe passes in silence

Turmoil breaks loose from its cage

Rubble, ashes, bones, mountains of
plastic and rusted cans
The dead cannot scratch
Nor can the living

But why
Can someone say why
What says the speaker
Or even the righteous
A bald one and she-bears
None have survived, ascend ascend
With one stone, take my mantle
A chariot of fire of fire in the sky
To the sea runs a stream of blood
Take my mantle, let the stream stop
Let earth bring forth manure and milk
and fruit and meat
Let the earth split open and swallow
half the people

On the highway east of Jordan an or-
phan of purple light stands on the
ridged hills
The winds scream through the body, re-
lent, then begin again
My cold body flat against the earth a
part of the earth apart from the earth
the winds battering the earth

The moon spreads its cold light over the

mountain.
Elohim's chill bitter cold, lonely. A face
standing.
How full the soul is, how full the souls
float over moonlight fills the moun-
tain, hovering over the mountain full
of light, the light-filled souls

I was a child standing in death
Dissolving in the mists sinking and dis-
solving
On the hard earth my feet stepped
through mists

I have felt nourished in a gray field of
blood nourished have I felt
I've seen a child and have been nour-
ished
I was a child in a gray field of blood I
was

Fully alive

A shadow falls along the River Jordan
Taking sharp turns

From the mountains a shadow falls
Rising from the valley
Shivering in a dense wet fog

The shadow of a dove, a tree heavy with
sleep
A tree heavy with sleep in the moun-
tains
The shadow is fire, a body trapped in
darkness.

Patches of light and thunder
What of the body's trembling in sicken-
ing explosions
Bodies touch, cling in the shivering
earth

It's shivering, silently shivering, plead-
ing, come to me
In the end come to me come into the sea
in the light of day come in the hot
sun beneath a hot sun come to me
In my trembling come on me. Come in
my trembling
And comes the singing of angels coming
white in the morning light
Light of morning the singing of angels
White singing of angels white as death
in life

—Eytan Eytan; Translated from the Hebrew
by Merrill Leffler and Moshe Dor

Eytan Eytan was born in 1940 and grew up among the hills of the Lower Galilee. A graduate of the military high school in Haifa, he volunteered for Israel's naval commandos and saw fierce action during the six-day war in 1967, the war of attrition in the years following, and the Yom Kippur war in 1973. His experience of the murderous brutality that is war is inseparable from his life as a farmer, a man who tilled the earth and trusted in its fecundity—this dual sensibility is evident in much of Eytan's work, from beautifully subtle love poems to the intensely powerful "Children" (*Yeladim* in Hebrew), a poem that is fervently anti-war, desperate in its anguish, incantatory, and, finally, transcendent. The transcendence may derive from Eytan's rootedness in the land and mountains: despite man's violence and cruelty, the earth continues to yield nourishment and life itself.

The tone of Eytan Eytan's poems is unique among modern Israeli poets—his Hebrew is both ancient and modern, his voice at times oracular and apocalyptic like the Hebrew prophets.

Like all poets writing in Hebrew, his work cannot help but have allusions to the Bible. Some are inescapably familiar and will resonate with many readers, for example, in Genesis, "grasp another's heels" (Jacob and Esau) and "the dead cannot scratch" (Book of Job). But there are the no-so-familiar allusions as in, "What says the speaker/Or even the righteous/a bald one and she-bears/None have survived. . . ." This refers to Elisha in Kings II:24. This allusion, spare as it is even for the knowledgeable reader, evokes the speaker's rootedness in ancient traditions and thereby, even when meaning cannot be easily incorporated except by a footnote, can still evoke a sense of authority and mystery.

Eytan Eytan died in 1991 from cancer. Two of his three collections of poetry appeared in his lifetime in Israel; *Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Keshev Publishing. A collection of his poems in English, *A Guest in Your Own Body*, is currently being translated by Merrill Leffler and Moshe Dor.

—Josh Weiner

[TELEVISION/FILM]

Between Documentary and Agit-Prop *Jean-Luc Godard's Ici et Ailleurs*

BY SHAI GINSBURG

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE making of *Ici et Ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*) is somewhat difficult to trace. In 1970, the Arab League and/or Palestinian Organizations commissioned the French filmmaker Jean-Pierre Gorin, possibly jointly with Jean-Luc Godard and/or Anne-Marie Miéville, to make a documentary entitled *Until Victory*. It was to be a portrayal of the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel. Initially, the task seemed easy. The film opens with footage filmed in May and June of 1970, and includes scenes of desert refugee camps; Palestinian live-ammunition training (is it *just* training?); school children drilling gymnastic exercises; a woman, standing in front of the camera as a rifle leans against the wall just behind her, struggling to read a text about the Palestinian revolution; a small boy proclaiming Palestinian slogans; and an older man repeating the same slogans. Against the backdrop of these images a narrator speaks in French. All that seemed to be called for at that stage was to combine all these elements together in order to impart a sense of a Palestinian people, of the Palestinian popular army, and of a war between a nation against its oppressor—a war that would be fought as part of the worldwide revolt against imperial oppression, until victory was won.

After the filmmakers' return to France, however, these film footages looked more complex. By the end of 1970, "Black September"—the clashes between the Jordanian army and Palestinian militias (in which Israeli and Syrian forces were also involved)—left many of the Palestinians who appeared in the film dead, and as Palestinian victory



seemed more elusive, the filmmakers became uncertain about the relationship between the footage they shot and the film's intended subject. By then it was also hard to contend with the deceased human subjects. Some critics allege that Godard and Miéville joined Gorin only at this point. Additional fictional scenes depicting a middle-class French family were introduced as a juxtaposition to the original "Palestinian" footage. The filmmakers likewise added collages of still photos, film clips of news items, and commercials, and matched these with a composition of sound bites—of news and sport broadcasts, political speeches, television programs, Nazi and Palestinian marching songs, a memorial service to the dead of the Jewish Holocaust, and more. Finally, the directors composed a voice-over commentary that

runs throughout the film, which recounts its production process alongside the moral and theoretical problems the directors had to face. In September 1976, *Ici et Ailleurs* was finally released.

As the title of the film suggests, *Ici et Ailleurs* was now perceived as being divided between the *here* of the French middle class and the *elsewhere* of "the Palestinian revolution." At the same time, as the filmmakers incessantly repeat, the conjunction *et* (and)—both as a written word on the screen and in the narrator's commentary—underscores the uncomfortable, even baffling, coexistence of the incommensurable realities of French affluent consumerism and Palestinian disenfranchisement. How, they ask, can the French middle class, preoccupied as it is with its own petty problems of unemployment, political affiliation and marital discordance, comprehend Palestinian misery? After all, Europeans are overwhelmed by television and the consumerism it celebrates. The bombardment of images and sounds that envelope everyday life elides the distinction between the significant and the trivial, obscuring the plight of the Palestinians. How, then, can the very real death of Palestinians—just one sound bite, one image among a throng of others—be salvaged and grasped for what it is?

Ultimately, by its very nature, *Ici et Ailleurs* misrepresents Palestinian reality. As an art form based on the incessant turnover of images and sounds to create the illusion of movement and life, cinema can only approximate the reality of silence and death. Moving images and sound trap both audiences

and filmmakers themselves within the illusion that they are taking part in the fateful reality of their subject matter—in this case, that of the Palestinian people. Yet the violent death of so many of the Palestinians who appeared in *Ici et Ailleurs*' footage mercilessly exposes the unbridgeable gap between themselves and the filmmakers seeking to document their plight for foreign audiences.

The difficulties involved in capturing the complexities of Palestinian existence invoked by *Ici et Ailleurs* do not stop there. Godard, Miéville, and Gorin also explore the deception involved in the very making of a documentary film, because as they make clear in their commentary, the film's documentary-style footage is actually staged and manipulated. The Palestinian child, naive as she may be, dramatically reciting the poem "I shall resist" by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, against the backdrop of the ruins of Jordan's Karame refugee camp—the site of an Israeli/Palestinian battle in 1968, in which the PLO inflicted substantial losses on the IDF—is not playing an innocent part in the political drama that *Ici et Ailleurs* presents to its Western audience. Similarly, an interview with a young and beautiful pregnant Palestinian woman who pronounces her willingness to sacrifice her son for the sake of the Palestinian struggle is less innocent than it appears. As the director's on-film instructions reveal, the scene is again staged. In fact, the woman is not Palestinian or pregnant, but a Lebanese intellectual who was asked to play the role. "From secrets of this type to Fascism," the voiceover notes, "there is only one quick step."

Ici et Ailleurs is often celebrated (and censured) for the way it demonstrates the manipulation involved in the production of all filmic images—its own footage included—and for challenging our tendency to view all photographic imagery as natural and straightforward. At the same time, *Ici et Ailleurs* is one of the earliest sympathetic representations of the Palestinian struggle against Israel

made in Europe, marking the beginning of the European Left's shift in alliance from Israel to the Palestinians.

Indeed, *Ici et Ailleurs* anticipates contemporary equations of Zionism with Nazism by reversing Israel's historical association with Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and Israel's enemies with the Nazis. True to ideological form, Palestinians and the French Left are depicted as though they are "common people," absent their political leadership, while Israel, on the other hand, is represented exclusively through its figureheads of the time—Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir, whose images are contrasted with those of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and most notably, Adolf Hitler. This Manichean division of the world is meant to communicate how the Palestinians and the French are united in their opposition to the U.S. and Israel, who, in turned are depicted as though they are the heirs of Hitler's imperialist and racist politics. As the film returns time and again to footage of Nazi concentration camps, it wryly comments that when inmates arrived at the last stages of physical decay, they were called *Musselman*, that is, Muslim, thus linking European guilt and empathy towards the Jewish victims of the Holocaust to the Palestinians.

In the absence of any reference to Arab states, the PLO's leadership cadre, and the irresponsible role that both these respective parties have played in Palestinian tragedy—most notably the Jordanian civil war in the 1970s, in which tens of thousands are alleged to have been killed—this fascinating film ends up presenting a one-dimensional portrait of the Palestinians caught between the guilty conscience of the European Left and Israeli/American racial imperialism. Given the crucial role of social criticism in the narrative of documentary filmmaking, it's ironic that *Ici et Ailleurs* could not apply the same spirit of self-criticism to its portrait of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. ■

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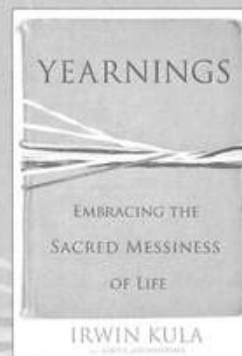
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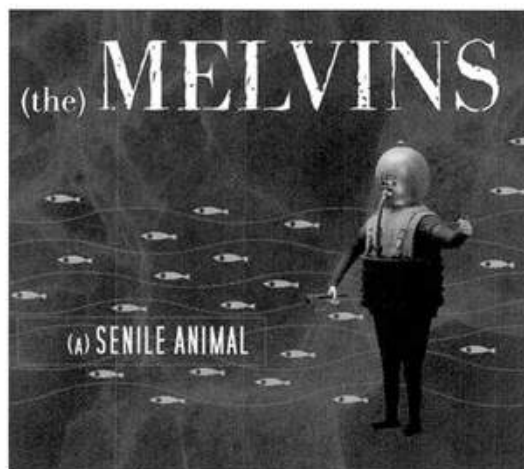
[MUSIC]

Minding the Store

The Niche Marketing of the Melvins BY CHARLIE BERTSCH

WHEN THE FIFTH anniversary of the September 11 attacks arrived, Americans had the opportunity to commemorate the day by watching the films *United 93* or *World Trade Center*, reading the extensive press coverage, or attending political events which, with midterm elections looming, had an extra note of intensity. But for those who piled into Neumo's Crystal Ball Reading Room, a nightclub in Seattle's Capitol Hill district, remembering the date also meant remembering that the Melvins were playing that night. Although not exactly a homecoming—the previous show in Tacoma was closer to the band's birthplace near Washington's Pacific coast—the fact that singer-guitarist Buzz Osborne and drummer Dale Crover had once been regulars in the same Seattle alternative music scene that produced Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden and Mudhoney was not lost on the audience, which welcomed the band with the casually festive air reserved for old friends.

Impressive as the size of the crowd was, however, its composition was even more noteworthy. Although there were plenty of people in the audience who were old enough to have seen the Melvins in the late 1980s, the majority of the audience was comprised of people in their teens and twenties who only could only have experienced Seattle's surprising rise to cultural prominence indirectly, through documentary evidence and the testimony of those who witnessed it firsthand, in some cases their own parents. In other words, even if the crowd sometimes acted as though they were



welcoming home the city's prodigal sons (the band now lives in L.A.), the truth of the matter is that Osborne and Crover were better suited for the parental role.

A Senile Animal
is available through
Ipecac Records.

Music fans have long been accustomed to dividing artists into two basic categories: those who are still capable of winning people over with new work and those who have come to rely solely on the past for sustenance. To be sure, the line between them is rather fluid. A group consigned to the has-been category can make a comeback record that makes their music commercially viable once more. For example, in the mid-1990s, the vast majority of Santana's fan base was interested in hearing the band's classic rock hits, not their light-selling new material. But the 1999 release of the blockbuster album *Supernatural*, in which Carlos Santana collaborated with a series of younger artists, restored the group to relevance and, indeed, made them more successful in the marketplace than they ever had been.

Although the stunning success of Bob Dylan's latest album *Modern Times*, which debuted at number one, might

seem like an instance of the "Santana effect," there is a crucial difference between that record and *Supernatural*. Whereas Santana's comeback was fueled by his inclusion of popular younger artists like Dave Matthews, who were rather cynically brought into a project explicitly conceived as a comeback, *Modern Times* makes no concessions to youth. Dylan and his largely anonymous band sound like they are channeling the music that percolated in the

American South before Elvis Presley made his fateful trip to Memphis's Sun Studios. The irony that one of the most successful rock albums of 2006 wears the faded denim overalls of pre-rock reveals as much about the state of the contemporary music scene as the moans of industry insiders who lament the continuing decline in CD sales.

And so does the continued vitality of bands like the Melvins, who never managed to make it big, but also avoided the ignominy of falling from a high place. There has never been much room on the commercial airwaves for the Melvins, a band notorious for playing shows in which a single guitar chord will linger for minutes between drumbeats. In their latest incarnation, however, the Melvins foreground their punk side, playing faster, more focused songs. For their new album *A Senile Animal* and the concert tour leading up to its release, Osborne and Crover teamed up with two other musicians who had transplanted themselves from the Pacific Northwest to California—Jared Warren, formerly of Karp and the Tight Brothers From Way Back When, and Coady Willis, formerly of the Murder City Devils, who have their own

two-piece band, Big Business. In concert, Big Business plays as the Melvins' opening act, with Crover joining the band for some songs on guitar, then going on to serve as the Melvins' "rhythm section." Since Crover still takes his usual spot behind the drum kit, however, the Melvins now play with *two* drummers. On record this doubling is at first hard to detect, since Crover and Willis are often in total sync. But careful attention to the stereo separation eventually reveals slight variations in their respective performances, which grow increasingly compelling with repeated listening. In concert, the drum "duets" also make a nice visual counterpoint to the sight of Osborne and Warren on stage, both of whom have "big hair" and tortured vocals to match.

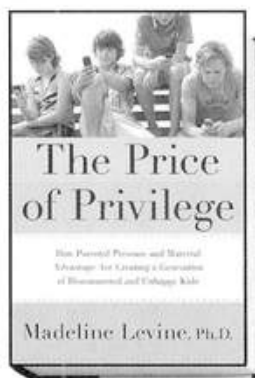
Aside from the musical advantages that Osborne and Crover achieve by doubling themselves in this way, the move also draws attention to the composition of their audience. Although the musical careers of Warren and Willis date back to the early 1990s, they look considerably younger than their bandmates. Watching the four men perform, especially in the wake of Big Business's opening act, is like witnessing a symbolic sharing of the torch, the replication of the band's aesthetic for members of the audience too young to have conscious memories of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain—from Crover's hometown of Aberdeen, Washington—telling anyone who would listen that the Melvins were his inspiration. Interestingly, *A Senile Animal* sees the Melvins making some concessions to the radio format. Many of the songs clock in at under three minutes, and some even feature singing in the places where conventional songwriting demands it. Coupled with the aural and visual effects generated by the group's new line-up, the album's accessibility, at least by the Melvins' standards, suggests that they are making a bid to win the popularity that has until now eluded them. But the truth of the matter is that, in this era of market fragmentation, that popularity may no longer be possible or desirable. More likely, the Melvins are attempting the less ambitious, more

practical task of trying to extend their fan base into a new generation.

Evidence for the soundness of this approach was in ample supply in the aftermath of the band's show at Neumo's. The "merch"—short for merchandise—table at a Melvins concert has long been a model of creative marketing. Even back in the early 1990s, the band was supplementing the standard T-shirts, pins, and posters with a variety of quirky goods, such as custom dolls, to entice customers. Today, however, that strategy has been elevated to an art. Although there were still plenty of T-shirts and a wide variety of low-priced items for sale at Neumo's, the merch table also functioned as a "virtual" virtual auction, with rare items of the sort that purveyed on E-Bay were put up for bid. As teens and college students clamored for their low-priced souvenirs, older fans of the Melvins were dropping hundreds of dollars on out-of-print 45RPM singles from Osborne's personal collection and limited edition signed prints, not to mention custom tin robots that the band had specially commissioned. In fact, it almost seemed as though the group's more seasoned fans wanted to spend a lot of money to differentiate themselves from the younger portion of the crowd in order to prove their long-term devotion. All told, the table must have taken in well over a thousand dollars that night, handsomely supplementing the Melvins' take from the door.

The entrepreneurial spectacle of the merch table may turn off people who wish to insist on the purity of the music. But it is hard to argue with financial necessity. As the culture industry continues to consolidate its resources in the wake of declining sales and the concomitant difficulty of preventing illegal song copying, fewer and fewer artists will be able to make a career the old-fashioned way. While the dream of becoming the voice of a generation persists, the reality is that the more reasonable goal is to become a voice for *several* generations at once, appealing to a niche market not limited by age or experience. The success of Bob Dylan's *Modern Times* testifies not to the

"Exposes the worm in the apple of affluence." —Jean Kilbourne, author of *Can't Buy My Love*



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renewed vitality of the traditional music industry, but to the fact that there will never be another Bob Dylan. If artists wish to earn a living making music these days, they would be wise to model themselves, not after Dylan or the Rolling Stones, but the Melvins, who have grasped better than almost anyone the importance of renewing one's base, rather than wasting energy in pursuit of new customers. Musicians may not be able to escape the reach of global capitalism, but at least they can have some measure of control over the means of production and, just as significantly, reproduction. It sure beats spending one's days in a cubicle earning money for a multinational corporation. ■

Charlie Bertsch is Tikkun's Music Editor.

[MUSIC]

Capsule Reviews



MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE, by Kode9 + the Spaceape. Hyperdub, 2006.

TONY BLAIR'S final year in office

is concluding on a rather ironic note. In October, Labor MP Jack Straw generated a huge outcry amongst the country's South Asian and Arab communities by starting a campaign to ban the wearing of headscarves in British public schools. In November, the domestic intelligence service issued a report documenting a severe rise in domestic terrorist organizing, announcing that it would be a generation before the problem was solved. And, following the government's passage of legislation limiting immigration, a court acquitted the leader of the racist British National Party on charges of incitement against minorities. What a far cry from a Prime Minister who once celebrated the multicultural character of British society by calling *chicken tikka masala* his country's new national dish.

Like the United States, the U.K. has been short on musical reactions to the War on Terror. In keeping with American productions like *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the most profound British responses to the conflict have primarily been cinematic, such as *28 Days Later*, a *Night of the Living Dead*-style take on how fear brings out the worst in people. It was only with the October 2006 release of Kode9 + the Spaceape's appropriately titled *Memories of the Future* that the U.K.'s electronic music community issued forth what might very well be the most aesthetically profound response to the country's deteriorating political environment, which, like *28 Days Later*, is characterized by solemnity, darkness, and most importantly, paranoia.

One of the very first full-length recordings to come out of the U.K.'s extremely fertile dubstep scene, *Memories of the Future* makes a remarkable political statement by thoroughly replicating the feelings of depression and anxiety suffered by England's minority communities. Referencing the intonation of Linton Kwesi Johnson's 1980s dub poetry with the apocalyptic fantasies of science fiction novelist Phillip K. Dick, vocalist Spaceape invokes, in the deepest of West Indian accents, hushed images of a destroyed future, firmly rooted in the present. Dispensing with spare synthesizer washes and languidly paced microbeats, Kode9's backing tracks follow suit, faithfully replicating the rhythms of a country descending slowly but surely into protracted ethnic conflict. —Joel Schalit



ECHOES OF THE PAST, by Dead Moon. Sub Pop, 2006.

IN THE EARLY '90s, punk bands from the Pacific Northwest were championed as the saviors of American culture. Given the mainstream commercial success of Seattle-based Nirvana's 1991 *Nevermind* LP, it was hard to argue that this wasn't true. For the first time since the 1982 release

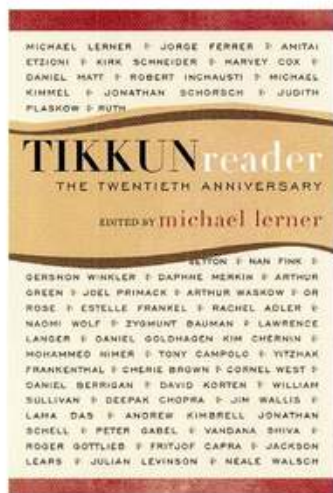
of The Clash's *Combat Rock* album, a record representing serious countercultural ideals was being consumed en masse by American youth. And, for a few all-too short years, there remained open a window large enough to push through regionally nurtured punk subgenres such as riotgrrrl, which introduced feminism and queer politics to an entire generation.

As tempting as it may be to read the title of Dead Moon's double CD anthology as a statement on the dated quality of its work (Dead Moon formed at the same time as Nirvana), *Echoes of the Past* is by no means a nostalgia trip. Though they may be the only remaining Northwest group from this period to continue to artistically thrive, *Echoes of the Past* is as much a statement of the continued health and vitality of the ideological underpinnings of late eighties Northwest punk as it is a career retrospective of a near twenty-year-old band.

Like all influential artists of Dead Moon's stature, the proof lies not so much in its music as the image projected by the band's members, and how they've chosen to practice their craft. Lead by the husband-wife team of Fred and Toddy Cole (both of whom are fifty-eight years of age) and forty-five-year-old drummer Andrew Loomis, Dead Moon play vintage sixties garage punk as though they'd just discovered it, only recording their albums in mono, singing songs about love, personal failings and sometimes even politics, without succumbing to tiresome didactics or time-worn romantic clichés.

Within these facets of the band's persona live many of the same things that have always compelled punk music to lay an abstract cultural claim to social power: the irrelevance of age—the rejection of the notion that it somehow limits an individual's capacity for expression and creativity, the embrace of sentimentality, and the ability to openly express anger. If that's what growing older means, I'm all for it. In the meantime I'm re-titling my copy of this record *Echoes of the Future*. —J.S. ■

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