

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

MARCH/APRIL 2010

**OBAMA &
AVATAR**

BY MICHAEL LERNER

GOD

AND THE 21ST CENTURY

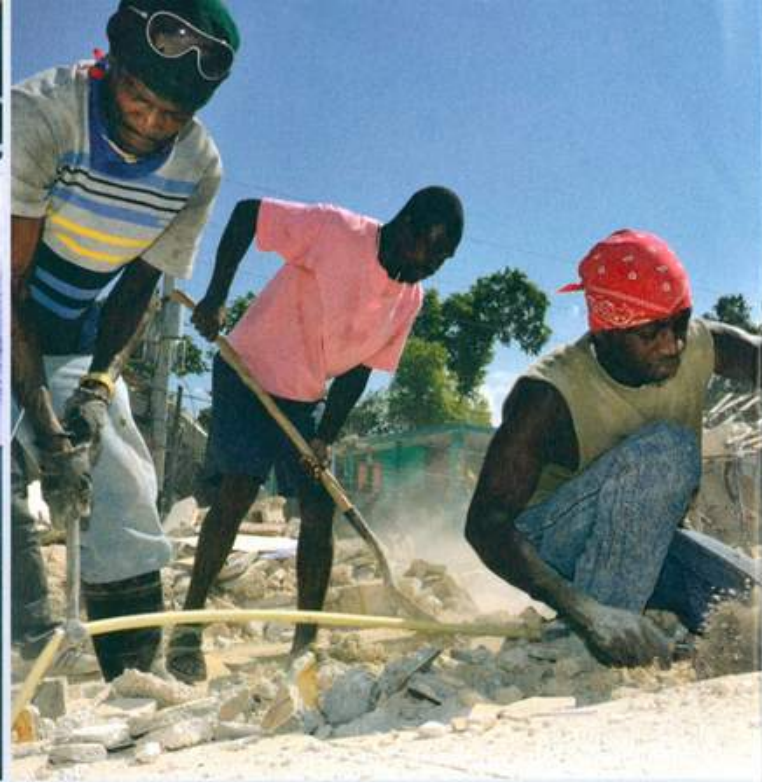
Arthur Green
on Sacred Evolution

Plus essays by John D. Caputo, Aryeh Cohen, Gary Dorrien,
Diana L. Eck, Peter Gabel, Jeffrey Kuan, Hans Küng, Bruce Ledewitz,
David R. Loy, Shaul Magid, Sallie McFague, David Nelson, Judith Plaskow,
Rosemary Radford Ruether, Zaid Shakir, and Wendy Zierler

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**A Spiritual Perspective on Family Courts | Notes on Silence
The Activist's Dilemma | Sacred Dance | Radical Media Renewal
Education in a Time of Hardship | Science and Religion in Children's
Literature | A Constitutional Amendment to Limit Corporate Power
The Legacy of Howard Zinn | Passover Haggadah Supplement**



The U.S. media all too often raised fears of looting after the January 12 earthquake in Haiti, casting Haitians as likely to act violently and selfishly in the face of disaster. Novelist Edwidge Danticat, speaking on NPR, countered that Haitians extended great generosity to each other to save lives and organize food and shelter. David Belle, the director of the Ciné Institute in Jacmel, Haiti, wrote from Port-au-Prince on January 17:

I have traveled the entire city daily since my arrival ... NOT ONCE have we witnessed a single act of aggression or violence. To the contrary, we have witnessed neighbors helping neighbors and friends helping friends and strangers. We've seen neighbors digging in rubble with their bare hands to find survivors. We've seen traditional healers treating the injured; we've seen dignified ceremonies for mass burials and residents patiently waiting under boiling sun with nothing but their few remaining belongings.... Haiti can be proud of its survivors. Their dignity and decency in the face of this tragedy is itself staggering.

As always, poor countries—often impoverished by Western policies, as Haiti has been—suffer more in earthquakes, for lack of quakeproof buildings. It's time we matched the Haitians' own solidarity and generosity by providing adequate aid to Haiti and all poor countries, through a Global Marshall Plan.



Top left: an injured child in Port-au-Prince. Top right: Haitians attempt to dig through concrete to rescue twenty people believed to be buried, in Petionville. Bottom left: A child holds a baby outside a damaged home in Port-au-Prince. Bottom right: A man sets up shelter in Cité Soleil.

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Nothing less will suffice to overturn the latest capitulation to corporate interests.

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this spring/summer.*

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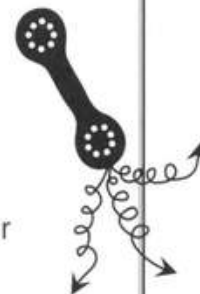
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Readers Respond

A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send your letters to the editor to Letters@Tikkun.org. Please remember, however, not to attribute to Tikkun views other than those expressed in our editorials. We email, post, and print many articles with which we have strong disagreements, because that is what makes Tikkun a location for a true diversity of ideas. Tikkun reserves the right to edit your letters to fit available space in the magazine.

OBAMA AND ALINSKY

I READ PRESIDENT OBAMA'S political character structure to be essentially the same as that of Rabbi Lerner's—despite Obama's Nobel Prize speech and his stance on Afghanistan. Then how do I explain his recent positions on the war and how to deal with perceived threats? Obama was elected for a term of four years. He knows that he cannot possibly leave the imprint that he desires to leave on the American political structure and on the thinking of the American people in four years, but maybe he can in eight. Therefore he must constantly keep in mind—in the background of all his significant decisions—how not to imperil the next presidential election.

Saul Alinsky, from the grave, taught him that when you first (and for some time) face a disparate and partially hostile group, you must be very careful not to confront its members with ideas and positions that will offend them and make them anxious. You are bound to lose them. So initially and for some time you may not profess action or a way of thinking too removed from what they can accept. If you keep this strategy—which Obama has studied and worked with before entering politics—in mind, then we can understand that what appears to be a shift

from his earlier positions is really a strategy to permit him to pursue his true beliefs during a second term in office. If my analysis of his strategy is correct, it remains to be seen whether it will work.

LOUIS GETOFF
Sedona, AZ

Michael Lerner replies:

IT'S WELL KNOWN IN PROGRESSIVE circles that Saul Alinsky's great strength in organizing in Chicago was also his great weakness: he organized white people around their self-interests as narrowly defined within the existing social order and never challenged their racism. These same people, once organized, were able to be an effective force against Blacks moving into their neighborhoods.

Alinsky-style organizing avoids ideology, and that is its great weakness—a weakness now reflected in Obama. What presidents can do is shape the ideas of a given historical period, and if they do not do so, they end up strengthening the existing set of ideas that come from the powerful and their servants in the media, the schools and universities, the Congress, and the various state legislatures.

No president can guarantee passage of his or her program—the one

thing a president can control is the vision he projects in the country, and so far, Obama has strengthened the worldview of the militarists by his endorsement of the “war on terror” and the notion that the violence of war can be justified even when there is no immediate threat (from Taliban Afghans) and no popular call from the people of Afghanistan for us to escalate violence. And with his call for nuclear power plants, offshore drilling, and “clean coal,” Obama has strengthened the hands of the polluters. And with his rejection of “Medicare for All” and his embrace of deals with pharmaceutical firms and health insurance companies ... well, the list goes on and on.

A PROGRESSIVE THIRD PARTY

IN THE *TIKKUN* ARTICLES YOU published back when President Clinton took office, and then again when

MORE LETTERS!

Thanks for all your letters! We receive many more than we can print. Go to www.tikkun.org/letters for an expanded version of this issue's letters, including readers' responses to our interview with Congressman Keith Ellison on health care; to Harriet Fraad's analysis of why Americans are depressed and politically passive; to Daniel Brook's piece on vegetarianism, Judaism, and the planet's future; to Riane Eisler's article on an economics beyond capitalism and socialism; to Gershon Baskin's piece on Middle East peace; and more.

President Obama took office, your tone was supportive, placing progressives in the new president's corner, offering to be a force of encouragement. However, now that both of us can recall in our own lifetimes being betrayed by at least four Democratic presidents, we need to face the bitter fact that the Democratic Party no longer represents (if it ever really did) the interests of the American working, middle, or pensioner class. The bailouts, the continuation of the Bush administration's policies of "endless war," failure to close Guantánamo, wasted opportunities after the Cairo speech, the weak response to Israeli settlements, backpedaling on gay rights, half-hearted efforts at health care, and on and on—how much failure, how much proof, do we all need that the Democrats are a group that has no real interest in substantive change?

You wrote, "We have to reconstitute that movement without Obama's help, before the disillusionment with

Obama's compromises leads to the resurgence of the Right's policies." I agree with the "without Obama's help" part, but I would add that it should apply to his political party as well.

Perhaps the twenty-first century is a time to resurrect the nineteenth-century idea that we need a political party that represents our interests. Encouraging the left wing of the Democratic Party to exit and form a third party seems the best option we have for any real change.

DAVID EHRENS
Dartmouth, MA

Michael Lerner replies:

YES, AND IF SOMEONE WERE TO give me five billion dollars, I would start the "New Bottom Line Party" (or readers can supply us with better names—maybe the "Love and Generosity Party" or "Spiritual Progressives Party" or "Environmental Progressives Party" or "Healing and Transformation Party" or ... well, you

INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Tikkun/NSP is looking for students and/or recent college graduates, people taking a break mid-career, and retirees who would like to work on changing the world now. Work with us:

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tell me). What I'm clear on, having been a Green for many years, is that the Green Party's religiophobia, its one-sided expressions of anger at Israel that lack any feel of compassion for the Jewish people (and this is coming from me, a person who is frequently accused of that very same thing), and its preference for internal debate over external outreach in the communities where its members live all combine to make the Greens feel to me to be unconsciously committed to being the ones who lose. If I were

Tikkun

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Tikkun Passover

Supplement 2010

FOR YOUR SEDER, here is a Haggadah supplement—not a replacement. If you don't normally do a Seder, you can use this supplement as the basis for an interfaith gathering in your home on March 29, the first night of Passover, or on any of the other nights of Passover until it ends on April 6.



AS WE SIT AT THE SEDER TABLE we need to discuss how ancient liberation for the Jews can inspire liberation today for all people.

Seventy-eight percent of American Jews voted for Barack Obama in 2008, and a majority of non-Jewish Americans joined them. The message was clear: end the war in Iraq and let our troops come home, end the war on the poor and the environment, and stop favoring the rich and corporate interests.

No wonder, then, that as we sit around the Passover table in 2010 there is a widespread sense of disappointment at the way President Obama moved far away from the hope for "change that we can believe in." Some will say that Obama was never who he said he was, that he was always just a clever manipulator of our hopes while actually being a centrist corporate-oriented politician, and that is why as soon as he was elected he chose advisers such as Geithner and Summers and chose to retain Bush's secretary of defense, rather than balancing his cabinet with people like Paul Krugman or Robert Reich and representatives of the women's, GLBT, environmental, human rights, immigrant rights, peace, and other progressive movements that made his nomination possible in the first place. Others will suggest that he had no options, that he couldn't do more than he did (and some will then say that he should have told the truth about what was happening and that he should have stopped trying to appeal to the people on his right while failing to appeal to his own base). Still others will say that the whole idea of a U.S. president being able to stand up to the complex of corporate interests, military-industrial powers, insurance and health care companies, pharmaceutical firms, fossil fuel promoters, environmental polluters, and their banks and investment companies was ludicrous from the start. Some will argue that to counter such forces Obama would have needed to mobilize his own constituency, from the first moments of his presidency, into an independent movement present in the streets and in the balloting—a movement able to go door to door to advocate for a new kind of social and economic order and willing to push him away from the temptation of betraying his highest vision through backroom deals.

Well, that's the kind of discussion that is needed on Passover this year—because Passover is not meant to be

merely a celebration of the Jewish victory for liberation in our past, but is rather meant to stimulate us to extend that liberation to the whole world. Such liberation would bring an end to the destruction of the environment. It would bring an end to the cheapening of cultural life by the dominance of an ethos of "looking out for number one."

It would bring an end to rampant materialism and our society's belief in salvation through mechanical objects and technological fixes.

It is not a new president that we need but a new kind of movement. We need a movement that has a spiritual dimension and affirms and builds on what the 2008 election revealed: the deep yearning of Americans (and really all people on the planet) for a world in which love, kindness, generosity, ethical and ecological sanity, awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe, and commitment to a higher meaning for our lives are valued over the pursuit of money, power, sexual conquest, and fame, which have been extolled as central values by corporate media and enshrined in the workings of the global capitalist system. At the Seder table, we invite you to ask how you can help get this kind of spiritual consciousness introduced into the discourse of secular liberal and progressive social change movements, NGOs, and liberal political parties. We invite you to make this discussion a central part of your Passover Seder this year.

LIBERATION TODAY IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Unfortunately, we in the Jewish world have another major challenge. We have to face the set of distortions that have accompanied a blind and idolatrous worship of the State of Israel—distortions that are apparent whenever Jews close their eyes to the suffering of our brothers and sisters, the Palestinians. Go into most synagogues or Jewish institutions in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, or France, and you'll find that you can denounce God, question the Torah, or refuse to follow various Jewish ritual practices, and you are likely to be met with a "ho-hum" response. But dare to question Israel and its policies, and you'll find yourself being denounced as a traitor, a self-hating Jew, an anti-Semite, or "an accomplice of Hitler." The blind worship of Israel has become the only contemporary religion of the Jewish people, a people still so traumatized by our long history of oppression and so angry at God for not intervening during the Holocaust that we've come to believe in the religion of our enemies, the religion that says that we can only trust in our power, our army, and our ability to wipe out our enemies.





To be sure, that celebration of violence and hurt against our enemies was always there in the Jewish tradition and is present in the famous song that Moses's sister Miriam is said to have composed while watching Pharaoh's army drown in the Sea of Reeds. But that chauvinist triumphalism was the compensation for our powerlessness, an empowering fantasy that made it possible for us to believe that no matter what those who hated and oppressed us were doing to us, no matter how bitter their treatment of us, we would survive because there was a Force of Healing and Transformation in the universe: God. We believed that God would ultimately be there for us as God had been there for us in Egypt, when we had been utterly degraded as slaves. To see God as redeeming us when we could see no rational path to self-protection had a positive value. But today these very same thoughts have a very different meaning when it is we who are powerful, and when our Jewish community aligns itself with the State of Israel, even as Israel uses its power in heartless and cruel ways against another people over whom it rules. Israel's approach is structurally cruel because on the one hand it denies Palestinians the right to vote in Israel, but on the other hand it denies Palestinians the freedom to create their own state and run their own affairs free of the military presence of Israelis.

Our Torah understood the potential of this problem, which is why its most frequently repeated command (mitzvah) is a variant of this: "When you come into your land, DO NOT OPPRESS THE STRANGER. Remember that you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Indeed, it commands us positively: **thou shalt love the stranger.**

We cannot turn this Seder into a meaningless ritual by ignoring the ways in which we, the Jewish people, have been acting as Pharaoh to another people.

Yet we also have to approach these issues with a high degree of compassion, both for Israelis and for Palestinians. Both peoples have co-created the current mess. Both are suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder so acute that they cannot recognize the humanity of the other, nor can they see their way to the peace and justice both legitimately seek. And both have been victims of a horrendous history of oppression. So while we as Jews have a responsibility to challenge our own people's distorted vision, we have to mix that challenge with a high level of love and caring for our own people, and recognize that our people needs healing and not just chastisement. We have to acknowledge that some Israeli intransigence is rooted in genuine fear that has been reinforced by terrorist attacks and by Hamas' bombing of Israeli cities, just as some Palestinian intransigence is rooted in the daily violence imposed on Palestinians by the Israeli Occupation, as well as by the targeted assassinations, the killing of hundreds of civilians, and the jailing of tens of

thousands of Palestinians, who are often imprisoned without formal charges. Because our people has vastly more military power than the Palestinians, we must mix our compassion with a firm commitment to end the Occupation with its inevitable consequences of human rights violations and its hatred-generating behavior, which in turn has already ensured that there will be generations of Palestinians who will feel justified in acts of terror and hatred

against our people. Both peoples need healing, and that can only happen when there is both a genuine peace accord that brings justice to the Palestinian people and also a fundamental change in the dominant paradigm of thought so that our people become the embodiment of Torah values of love, generosity, repentance, and forgiveness. We must escape the "blame game" of who did what to whom and focus on how we can embody more loving and compassion for both sides of this struggle.

HOW WE FIND SECURITY

What is really needed is a revolutionary transformation in our way of thinking and in our economic, political, and social arrangements. **America will find security when it is perceived by the world as caring not merely for its own well-being, particularly that of its most wealthy citizens and global corporations, but genuinely for the well-being of all of the people on the planet.** Instead of relying on domination, we know both from our holy texts and from our real-world experience that it is generosity, kindness, compassion, and caring for others that will be the key to our success and survival.

Telling the ancient story reminds us that the same Power in the Universe (YHWH or, in English, "God") that made the Exodus possible can, at this very moment, make it possible for the world to be transformed and liberated from all forms of oppression. No matter how overwhelming the global order of materialism and selfishness might seem at this moment, the power of God's goodness can again be enlivened in all of us, and we can act together to transform the world, just as the ancient Israelites did in their struggle with Pharaoh.

Inviting God's goodness to be enlivened within us takes inner work, as well as political organization. First and foremost, we need to overcome ego, quiet our minds, affirm pleasure for our bodies, rejoice in our opportunity to serve God and humanity, and recognize that beyond the self, beyond family and country, we are part of the ongoing unfolding and evolution of the consciousness of the universe as it moves toward higher and higher levels of self-knowledge, partly through us. So we pause now to close our eyes, to envision the universe and our place in it, and to affirm the meaning of our human mission as partners with God in the healing and transformation of all that is.



KIDDUSH

We are gathered here tonight to affirm our continuity with the generations of Jews who have kept alive the vision of freedom in the Passover story. For thousands of years, Jews have affirmed this vision by participating in the Passover Seder. We not only remember the Exodus but actually relive it, bringing its transformative power into our own lives.

The Hebrew word for Egypt, *mitzrayim*, means "narrow straits." Traditionally, *mitzrayim* has been understood to mean a spiritual state, the "narrow place" of confusion, fragmentation, and spiritual disconnection. Liberation requires us to embrace that which we have been taught to scorn within ourselves and others, including the split-off parts from our own consciousness that we find intolerable and that we project onto some evil Other. The Seder can also be a time to reflect on those parts of ourselves.

Israel left Egypt with "a mixed multitude"; the Jewish people began as a multicultural mélange of people attracted to a vision of social transformation. What makes us Jews is not some biological fact but our willingness to proclaim the message of those ancient slaves: (*say together*) **The world can be changed, we can be healed.**

Blessing over the first cup of wine.

KARPAS

The saltwater on our table traditionally represents the tears of the Israelite slaves. The green vegetables we dip in the water suggest the possibility of growth and renewal even in the midst of grief.

The greens on the table also remind us of our commitment to protect the planet from ecological destruction. Instead of focusing narrowly on what we may "realistically" accomplish in today's world, we must refocus the conversation on what the planet needs in order to survive and flourish. We must get out of the narrow place in our thinking and look at the world not as a resource, but as a focus for awe, wonder, and amazement. We must reject the societal story that identifies success and progress with endless growth and accumulation of things. Instead we will focus on acknowledging that we already have enough; we need to stop exploiting our resources and instead care for the earth.

Dip the greens in saltwater and say blessing.

FOUR QUESTIONS: THE ADULT VERSION

Discuss as a group or in pairs at the Seder table:

1. Egypt, "*mitzrayim*" in Hebrew, comes from the word "tzar": the "narrow place," the constricted place. In what way are you personally still constricted? Are you able to see yourself as part of the unity of all being, a manifestation of

God's love on earth? Are you able to overcome the ego issues that separate us from each other? Can you see the big picture, or do you get so caught in the narrow places and limited struggles of your own life that it's hard to see the big picture? What concrete steps could you take to change that?

2. Do you believe that we can eventually eradicate wars, poverty, and starvation? Or do you believe that no one really cares about anyone but themselves, and that we will always be stuck in some version of the current mess? Or do you think that such a belief is, itself, part of what keeps us in this mess? If so, how would you suggest we spread a more hopeful message and deal with the cynicism and self-doubt that always accompanies us when we start talking about changing the world?

3. What experiences have you had that give you hope? Tell about some struggle to change something—a struggle that you personally were involved in—that worked. What did you learn from that?

4. When the Israelites approached the Sea of Reeds, the waters did not split. It took a few brave souls to jump into the water. Even then, the waters rose up to their very noses, and only then, when these brave souls showed that they really believed in the Force of Healing and Transformation (YHVH), did the waters split and the Israelites walk through them. Would you be willing to jump into those waters today—for example by becoming an advocate for nonviolence or for the strategy of generosity? Would you go to speak about this to your elected representatives? To your neighbors? To your coworkers? To your family?

MAGID (TELL THE STORY):

Tell the story of the Exodus, and identify the Pharaohs in your life today.

Blessing over the second cup of wine.

We are descended from slaves who staged the first successful slave rebellion in recorded history. Ever since, our people has kept alive the story of liberation, and the consciousness that cruelty and oppression are not inevitable "facts of life," but conditions that can be changed.

THREE SYMBOLS OF PASSOVER

PESACH (the Bone or Beet): Our Seder plate includes a symbol of the ancient Passover sacrifice, which was brought each year to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which comes from the root meaning "near." What could bring you closer to your highest spiritual self?

MATZAH: The Torah tells us that the Israelites had to





take the uncooked dough with them, "for they had prepared no provisions for the way." Symbolically, the matzah reminds us that when the opportunity for liberation comes, we must seize it, even if we do not feel fully prepared—indeed, if we wait until we feel prepared, we may never act at all. If you had to jump into such a struggle tomorrow morning, what would you have to leave behind?

The matzah also stands in contrast to *chametz* (Hebrew for the expansive yeast that makes bread rise), which symbolizes false pride, absorption in our individual egos, and grandiosity.

MAROR (the Bitter Herbs): The suffering of the Jews in Egypt has been matched by thousands of years in which we were oppressed as a people. Our insistence on telling the story of liberation and proclaiming that the world could be and should be fundamentally different has angered ruling elites. These elites often tried to channel against the Jews the anger that ordinary people were feeling about the oppression in their own lives. But Jews are not the only ones to have suffered oppression and violence. We think of the genocide against native peoples all around the world, including in the United States. We think of the enslavement of Africans, and the oppression of Armenians, homosexuals, women, and many others. Yet, tonight it is appropriate for us to focus also on the suffering of the Jewish people and to affirm our solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism through the ages. Anti-Semitism still persists in our own time in the use of double standards in the judgment of Jews, in acts of violence against Jews, and in refusing to acknowledge the history of Jewish suffering as equal to the suffering of other victims of oppressive social regimes in Christian, Islamic, and some secular societies, as well. Meanwhile, we Jews need to acknowledge the ways that this suffering has at times distorted our consciousness and made it hard to fully grasp the pain others feel. We must evolve a Global Judaism that compassionately embraces the Jewish people and all other peoples.

THE MEAL



The Haggadah says, "Let all who are hungry come and eat." Traditionally, this is understood to mean not only literally feeding the hungry, but also offering spiritual sustenance to those in need. Both must go hand in hand. We live in a society of unprecedented wealth, yet we turn our backs on the hungry. Even the supposedly liberal and progressive political leaders are unwilling to champion any program to seriously address world hunger and homelessness.

There is also a deep spiritual hunger that must be fed. Though the cynical proclaim that those who accumulate the most toys win, our tradition teaches that money,

power, and fame cannot sustain us. Our spiritual tradition teaches us to be present to each moment; to rejoice in all that we are and all that we have been given; to experience the world with awe, wonder, and radical amazement; and to recognize that we already have enough and are enough.

Not just during the Seder, but also at every meal, it is incumbent upon us—the Jewish tradi-

tion teaches—to speak words of Torah, to study some section of our holy books, or to in other ways make God feel present at our table. Try this every night as you eat: bring God and God's message of love, generosity, peace, social justice, ecological sanity, and caring for others into every meal that you eat.

Enjoy the meal. Following the meal, say a blessing expressing thanks to God for the food and by expressing a commitment to do what you can to redistribute food on this planet so that everyone will have enough. Drink the third cup of wine.

WELCOMING THE POSSIBILITY OF THE MESSIANIC AGE



We open the door for Elijah—the prophet who heralds the coming of the Messiah and a world in which all peoples will coexist peacefully—acknowledging the Image of God in one another. To deny the possibility of fundamental transformation, to be stuck in the pain of past oppression, or to build our religion around memories of the Holocaust and other forms of suffering is to give the ultimate victory to those who oppressed us. To testify to God's presence in the world is to insist on shifting our focus from pain to hope, and to dedicate our energies to transforming this world and ourselves. We still believe in a world based on love, generosity, and openheartedness. We continue to affirm the Unity of All Being.

Now let us build together a communal vision of what messianic redemption would look like.

Close your eyes and let some picture of messianic redemption appear in your minds. Then, open your eyes and share with others your picture of the world we want to build together.

Blessing over the fourth cup of wine.

Sing songs of liberation!

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If the approach to spiritual & religious issues evidenced in this Passover Supplement appeals to you, please join with us in fostering an interfaith movement that can take these ideas and act with others to transform our society—by joining Tikkun's Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) at www.spiritualprogressives.org, 510-644-1200. Also read Rabbi Michael Lerner's *The Left Hand of God* (Harper San Francisco, 2006).

to get involved in building a new electoral party, it would be to win and actually heal and transform the world. So until I find partners with a psychological makeup oriented toward winning, plus the five billion dollars that it would take to make that party viable, I'll do what I can to reach people through the existing party structures—using *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives as consciousness-raising vehicles—even though I agree with all the progressive critiques of the existing parties and their endless attachment to the status quo.

OBAMA AND AFGHANISTAN

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR important editorial about Afghanistan, "Obama Capitulates to the Warmakers" (*Tikkun*, January/February 2010).

I'm forwarding this piece to everyone I know, and encouraging them (once again) to become a member of *Tikkun*/Network of Spiritual Progressives.

Obama has shown that he is not a visionary. He campaigned on empty words. I still cringe at the words "evil" and "evildoers." For myself, I would define evil as a complete lack of conscience and caring. I don't believe there is an entity called "evil" in the world, and I agree that people do evil things. I believe we all have that capability, and that we make choices based on what our thoughts are, how we respond to them, and how we manage our anger.

It's critical that people learn how to tell the difference between nice words and real concrete goals.

You, my friend, are a visionary. We need people like you, who so eloquently speak truth to power.

SHARON ABREU
Eastsound, WA

HIRING: ASSISTANT TO RABBI LERNER

Help out with Beyt Tikkun Synagogue, *Tikkun*, and the Network of Spiritual Progressives!
Info: WWW.TIKKUN.ORG/JOBS.

BEYOND LEFT AND RIGHT

WHAT HAPPENED TO GOING beyond left and right? That used to be a tenet of the religious left, and I believe it is the principle that Obama acts on. He's not center/right. That's just labeling of the very oldest sort and I'm disappointed to see it used here. I thought the religious left was beyond that. Aside from trying to bail us out of the disasters handed to him when he took office, Obama is trying to make politics more humane and more engaged with social justice. Obama is democratic with a small "d." He's trying to set a new tone for politics. He's also a pragmatist because he has to be. He HAS to speak and appeal to a wide range of people in the United States if he is to get anything done at all. The progressives in Congress, i.e. the progressives actually trying to govern, are far more flexible than those in our local community because they know what they're up against. Obama's actual politics are constrained by incredibly powerful forces—historically unique forces. I think it's just wrong to say he doesn't believe in peace or social justice. It offends me deeply to hear him characterized in that way.

I count myself as progressive, but I live in Berkeley and I'm really, really tired of the way many progressive armchair philosophers assume their own superior insight (*He should have done it this way, the way I would!*) while paying no attention to the forces actually in operation right now. I look to the religious left for more. While I think we can always urge Obama to do better (if he can, which for me is in doubt), I have to be practical too. I can't be part of anything that doesn't work actively to create a positive attitude toward Obama's administration. If we don't do that, we are in for the most right-wing congress and president in 2012 that we will ever have had.

JUDITH NEWTON
Berkeley, CA

Michael Lerner replies:

I'D SO APPRECIATE IT IF YOU'D read my book *The Left Hand of God*, because there I try to explain the psychodynamics of American politics, and how, when hopeful energy gets undermined by being subverted into "realistic/pragmatic" politics, it ends up creating the space for the rise of right-wing politics. I detail this in regard to the failures of both Carter and Clinton, and the same pattern is happening now with Obama.

As for going beyond left/right, I still believe that is what we are trying to do, but there are moments when there has to be a moral bottom line. For me, that line is crossed when a leader from any political party, no matter how good the party is on other issues, decides to use the military and violence in order to achieve his or her ends—goals that she or he declares to be the ends of the country as a whole (in this case, in Afghanistan). I cannot support anyone who believes that massive violence and the inevitable killing of civilians is a legitimate way to develop national policy, except in those circumstances where the threat to our own physical survival is immediate as the Bible describes (namely, where someone is coming specifically and unambiguously to kill you or a member of your family) and then, as the rabbis of the Talmud specified, only if you warn that person in advance that such behavior is punishable by death.

So I'm not a moral relativist, and going beyond left/right to me means affirming a consistent position of love and generosity. I'm certainly wanting to express that compassion toward Sarah Palin and others in the Tea Party movement on a personal level, but that doesn't preclude fierce opposition to their movement as a political phenomenon and to their world-views. (*More letters on page 77*)

Avatar— the Soul in the Machine

BY GEORGE VRADENBURG

IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN *AVATAR*, DO. PARTICULARLY IN ITS 3-D version, it is a film that will engage your senses. James Cameron has created a product that extends the palette of our filmmakers as dramatically as the introduction of sound to silent film or color to black-and-white films.

The film's story is simple: greedy corporate profiteers, with the aid of the U.S. military, seek to exterminate indigenous populations (nine-foot-tall, blue-complexioned peaceful beings called the Na'vi) and to destroy the environment (God-like trees capable of healing the dying) in order to get access to valuable natural resources. It is a distorted Hollywood caricature, but one with enough verisimilitude to permit suspension of disbelief.

Boy, are the people, plants, and forest on that planet beautiful! And you are *inside* the film, flying with birds, running through a forest vividly colorful and wonderfully alive.

But all of this is fantasy.

Or is it? The technology that animates the hero of this film may well anticipate developments in the "real" world. Our hero is a soldier who is able to enter and act in the indigenous world through an "avatar" who has the physical characteristics of a Na'vi but whose brain (hence, sensations and values) wirelessly mirrors the brain of our hero as he lies inside a whole-body container-transmitter in a safe environment miles away.

Developments on the horizon may make this man-machine connection a reality within our lifetimes, raising any number of intriguing issues.

Researchers are now working on modeling and mapping the entire brain. Doing so, it is hoped, will enable the diagnosis and treatment of brain impairments—from mental disorders like bipolarity and depression, to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, to traumatic brain injury caused by combat or concussion. Computer technology capable of mimicking brain functions, and perhaps modeling therapies for brain impairments, is not beyond reach.

Brain researchers are considering scenarios where a model of a patient's brain might be "downloaded" into a computer for analysis, diagnosis, and design of personalized therapeutic treatments. New insights into brain plasticity (the ability of the brain to build new connections or to recover memories) lead one to ask whether a computer-modeled brain with impairments might be electronically repaired and then, once repaired, "inserted" into the patient, with instructions to develop new neural connections to eliminate brain impairments.

Fascinating philosophical issues are obvious. Does a simulated brain inside a computer have a "soul"? Is that computer "spiritual"? If the computer is a robot with humanoid features, is the computer-robot "human"? If we can otherwise treat brain impairments by rewiring neural networks, can we "cure" mental tendencies to war and prejudice? If the computer finds a way to reproduce itself (robotic "hardware" with brain "software"), are we breeding the next evolution of beings? If the "real" brain animates a human's limb, can the mirrored "downloaded" brain in the computer-robot be wirelessly instructed to imitate that behavior?

This emerging technology that promises so much in treating brain impairments has obvious commercial applications. Simply programmed humanoid robots capable of performing household chores are already on the market in Japan; reprogrammable robots are now in widespread use in manufacturing. With personalized brain mirroring and more powerful computers, could robots respond in real time to instructions given from a distance by the robot's master?

It is also easy to see the military applications. A brain-activated robotic soldier would do for the infantry what the unmanned Predator and Raptor airframes are already doing over Pakistan and Afghanistan today. In the hands of terrorists, man-machine look-alikes could eliminate the need to recruit suicide bombers with the manufacture of suicide robots.

Fantasy? Consider this: the Army is investing heavily in prosthetic devices that replace limbs lost by soldiers in combat, limbs now so powerful that runners using those devices are being disqualified from athletic competitions because they are thought to give an unfair advantage over athletes without prosthetics. In the next few years, that same Army is investing over one billion dollars in research into traumatic brain injury. How difficult is it to imagine "brain prosthetics" to "remedy" combat-related brain impairments? Is a combat avatar avoiding human casualty in war altogether not a natural next step?

Like our movie storytellers of the past, James Cameron has given us a vision of future machines empowered with a soul and a sense of awe and wonder about the universe—and yet the power to kill. What a fascinating and troubling vision that is. ■

George Vradenburg is the publisher of Tikkun.

Obama and *Avatar*

WE HAD 3-D MOVIES IN THE 1950S, AND WE have seen action flicks and war movies aplenty. So despite all the techie buzz, the new technology used to make *Avatar* isn't what makes this movie significant, just as the 2008 Obama campaign's innovative use of the Web to raise money and get its message heard wasn't the source of its importance.

Avatar is one of the first movies to tell the story of Western colonial/imperial arrogance from the standpoint of its victims in a way that may affect mass consciousness in the Western world. By situating the story on another planet and giving its characters a fantastical sci-fi appearance, James Cameron was able to soften the radical message implicit in the film: that corporate forces, driven solely by the desire to maximize their own profits, are engaged in wanton destruction of indigenous peoples whose connection to nature and to each other is on a higher spiritual level than those of the imperialists and the armies they have financed and trained to do their bidding.

Moreover, the film offers a critique of corporate-funded militarism by suggesting that planet Earth has been destroyed by deadly technologies developed by modern science to assist profit-obsessed corporations in dominating or destroying those who stand in their way. The film contrasts the corporation-racked Earth to Pandora, an Earth-like moon in the Alpha Centauri star system. Pandora's harmonious ecosystem is nurtured by the goodness of human-like blue-skinned beings called the Na'vi (perhaps derived from the Hebrew word *navi*, which means "prophet") who live in harmony with nature and worship a mother goddess called Eywa. Viewers cannot help but identify with the Na'vi and their fundamentally pacific, environmentally sensitive, and spiritually alive consciousness, and the movie draws us into their struggle to survive attacks from an interstellar capitalist empire seeking to expand once again to capture more wealth.

Obama too had some of this kind of allure. In 1996 Obama approached *Tikkun* and asked to speak at our national conference in Chicago—and he gave a rip-roaring pro-peace, pro-environment, pro-labor speech. In 2006 when I met with him privately in his office, he reassured me that he felt fully aligned with *Tikkun* not only on Israel but also on domestic policy and on our vision of a Global Marshall Plan (though he warned me he thought it would be a hard sell "inside the Beltway"). When he and I shared a platform in the Capitol at an event honoring what would have been the eightieth birthday of Robert F. Kennedy, he spoke eloquently of RFK's willingness to oppose the war in Vietnam and insist on a strategy of nonviolence for social change, implying that we should follow that same path today.



Avatar evokes an ecologically and spiritually mature culture under threat of destruction by corporate mercenaries. Sadly, it relies on a converted mercenary to rally the victims and save the day with brute violence.

There was little chance that Obama would have beaten Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries had he not gone out of his way to convince followers that he would challenge the warmakers, the corporate powers, the environmental polluters, the human rights violators, and the power of moneyed interests in ways that the Clintons had not done and were unlikely to do should they be restored to the White House. When he contrasted the war in Iraq with a more justifiable war in Afghanistan, his listeners understood him to be referring to the war that had been quickly won to overthrow the Taliban after they refused to surrender Bin Laden to the United States after September 11, *not* to a significant escalation of American involvement there should he become president (and most supporters heard his words on this as a kind of sop to the conservatives to show he would be "strong" as president).

When Obama talked about "change you can believe in" and told crowds of labor unionists, environmentalists, peace activists, feminists, and tens of millions of Americans who had become disgusted at the war in Iraq that it was we who were "the people we have been waiting for," he implied that he had a plan to make sure that finally our voices would be heard, while the corporate lobbyists and their power would be blocked.

It was these messages that energized millions of people to reach out to their neighbors and to strangers in states in which they did not live, as well as to donate generously to his campaign.

Why Obama's "Realism" Doesn't Work for Him or Us

NO WONDER THEN THAT OBAMA'S CORE SUPPORTERS FEEL disillusioned and despairing after his first year in office. Some have bought the notion that Obama did the best he could but couldn't possibly be expected to stand up to corporate interests, given the willingness of Republicans in Congress to do everything they could to block his agenda. Others believe that he intentionally lied to us and was simply another manipulative politician.

I doubt both of these explanations of Obama's behavior.

More likely is that Obama, once he won the nomination, was surrounded by corporate interests, bankers, congressional champions of the military-industrial complex, and powerful security and intelligence operatives who provided him with "inside information" that colored his viewpoints. Moreover, the media and Democrats did nothing to counter these forces because they have for decades portrayed capitulation to all the aforementioned special interests as the only "realistic" option in American politics.

I remember reading the supposedly liberal columnist E.J. Dionne celebrating how pragmatic, realistic, and non-ideological Obama had become. I knew that this was a kiss of death.

Let me explain why.

American politics, like most aspects of our lives, is shaped by two conflicting belief systems that most of us have internalized. On our right hand we have the worldview of fear, which is based on the idea that people are concerned only with satisfying their own desires and pursuing their own narrow material self-interests. To the extent that we accept this view of "reality," we come to believe that we must dominate and control others in order to achieve these goals, assuming that, if we fail, others will dominate and control us. So in this picture of "the real world," one has no choice but to seek power and control over others. Similarly, in the larger national sphere, this worldview holds that homeland security comes from power and domination over others. Domination can be "soft" (achieved through economic, media, and diplomatic power) or "hard" (achieved through military power), but the goal is the same: to get others to do what we want them to do—namely, advance our interests.

On the left hand we have the worldview of hope and love, based on our earliest experiences with a mother or "mothering" person who showed us love and caring in our earliest years when she or he had no reasonable expectation of a good return on her or his investment of time, money, energy, and love. She was "giving to give," not "giving to get." Our memories of that experience (an experience which most of us have shared at least partially, even if the situation was psychologically complicated and had neurotic elements as well), we come to recognize that there is another way to achieve security both for ourselves and for our country: to create caring and loving relationships with others and to manifest a spirit of generosity, open-heartedness, and recognition that our own well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else in this world, not to mention the well-being of the planet itself.

Now most of us have both of these stories in our head, and at any given moment we are on a continuum between the right hand and the left hand. And so it is for everyone else. Where exactly we are on that continuum is shaped by our childhood experiences, our adult life experiences, the worldviews we accept, the messages of

the religions and media to which we are exposed, and our sense of where the social energy is moving in the society around us. To the extent that we experience the social energy moving toward fear, as we did after September 11, the stories about not trusting others seem to have much more relevance, and those voices of fear lead us to accept policies, movies, TV shows, magazines, editorial commentaries, and political leaders who articulate the worldview of fear and domination. However, when the social energy seems to be moving more toward hope, the memories of hopeful and love-oriented experiences become more dominant in our consciousness, and those writers, poets, movies, media, political leaders, and social policies that reflect a spirit of generosity seem more plausible and rational to us.

And that's how it is all over the world, and all through history.

So when Obama seemed to embody this hopeful message, people allowed themselves to hope. But when Obama began to appear to capitulate to the special interests, then that hopeful part, which had been disappointed in most people many times before, started to go back into hiding. Tens of millions of people are now feeling embarrassment and even humiliation that they allowed themselves to hope in wake of the 2008 elections.

How Boldness Could Have Worked—and Still Could

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF REASONS WHY HOPE STARTED TO disappear. It began with Obama's selection of advisers in late 2008, well before he was being constrained by the Republicans. Obama had promised to "govern from the Center," and his supporters imagined that to mean that he would surround himself with advisers representing a wide variety of political perspectives. But instead, Obama only picked advisers who represented the center and right wings of the Democratic Party but no one representing the left wing of his own party, much less the social change movements that had made his nomination possible. No one can claim that Obama didn't have the freedom to make these choices from the start or that they would have never been confirmed in a Senate that had a sixty-vote Democratic majority and a strong tradition of letting the president pick his own advisers and Cabinet.

And of course, the problems go from there: the first was Obama's failure to close Guantánamo and to prosecute the criminals from Bush on down who had allowed or ordered or participated in torture, in violation of American and international law. The idea that he couldn't do it without congressional consent is nonsense. Obama could have used his power as commander-in-chief to order those detainees to a military base in the United States or to a military base abroad where they could have been given a trial in accord with U.S. constitutional standards.

Obama and the Democrats should have insisted on changing Senate rules to eliminate the filibuster and enable majority votes to prevail. And had the Republicans filibustered that, the Democrats should have allowed them to prevent the government from functioning for months, thereby letting the Republicans take the blame for a do-nothing Congress.

Obama and the Democrats also could have:

- Refused to give trillions of dollars to failing banks and investment companies until the banks agreed to tough new

regulations and until Congress allocated equal or more money to fund job creation and to save people whose newly raised mortgage payments made it difficult or impossible for them to stay in their homes

- Insisted that every dollar for defense be matched with an equal amount of dollars for education, the environment, and social welfare in the United States or with money to fund a Global Marshall Plan.
- Insisted that the minimum wage be raised to a "living wage" for all workers in the United States.
- Called for "Medicare for All" rather than for a deeply flawed health care reform involving huge giveaways to pharmaceutical firms and insurance companies that seemed to do little for ordinary citizens, whose health care and pharmaceutical costs have been rising at alarming rates.
- Reframed their program from a focus on "rights" and "entitlements" to a focus on our collective need to care for each other, identifying the government as our vehicle to show that we take seriously the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves, and that we understand that, in the globalized world, our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone on the planet.

But even if Obama did not have the support of his fellow Democrats to do any of this, he could still have done the one thing that would have fulfilled his promise: he could have told the truth as he saw it and used his four years in office as the way to convince people of a new worldview. Reagan did that—so even with a Democratic majority in Congress, he was able to convince the American public to trust in the capitalist market and in military solutions to global problems. He persuaded the public to distrust the government and to not care for the most disadvantaged, and his worldview eventually shaped policy not only during his own administration but also throughout the Clinton years and beyond.

Here are some actions that Obama should have taken and still could pursue:

- Call for a national bank to give direct support to create jobs and support homeowners and small businesses in accordance with the biblical principle of *no-interest* loans.
- Explain why "Medicare for All" makes more sense than continuing to allow the profit motive to shape our health care and pharmaceutical industries.
- Insist on a carbon tax to reduce emissions to less than 350 parts per million, explain why "growth" worldwide is inconsistent with planetary survival, and explain why we need to simplify our lives and reduce the production of goods that have little social value.
- Support a Global Marshall Plan and explain why a strategy of generosity toward the people of the world is likely to be far more effective than pursuing a "war on terrorism" (as commander-in-chief, he had the power to declare that war won and over, to explain that from now on marginal crazies such as the underpants bomber or the handful of al-Qaida members should be dealt with as common criminals and not as a serious threat to our survival, and to replace the militarists with generosity-oriented leaders in the Defense Department and throughout the Armed Services).
- Support all the ideas that strengthen Americans' confidence in the hopeful message that we are "all in it together and that our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet and of the planet itself."

Obama could have ensured electoral and legislative victories in the long run if he had strengthened the public's confidence in the possibility of a world based on caring for each other. His success is contingent on his ability to help us see through the pathetic calls to be "realistic"—calls that always lead to phony solutions and make us worse off down the line. He could have encouraged us to extend the same compassion and caring to the victims of global and domestic poverty (a structural disaster caused by global capitalism) that we now extend only to victims of hurricanes, earthquakes, or other natural disasters. And he could have prepared us for the inevitable assaults he would receive from people in both major parties and the ridicule that he would receive in the media, and urge us to turn to alternative media and to alternative candidates who were willing to join him in standing up for the change that Americans had mandated him to pursue with an electoral majority



In January China deemed *Avatar* subversive, banning it from all but a handful of 3-D theaters. The Guardian reported that the film censors feared unrest: "Parallels have reportedly been drawn between the plight of the Na'vi, who face the threat of eviction from their woodland home, and those in China vulnerable to displacement by predatory property developers."



Supporters cheer at a progressive "Change Worth Fighting For" rally on the one-year anniversary of President Obama's election in Chicago. Supporters marched to Grant Park where Obama held his election celebration to sign giant letters encouraging the president to work for change in health care, immigration reform, and other progressive issues.

larger than that achieved by any of the presidential candidates in the past twenty-five years.

If we had a president who would do that and who would speak equally honestly about his own political party and its immoral compromises with powerful interests, he could become an invincible political force capable of reshaping his own party to be more faithful to the principles that he articulated in 2008.

How *Avatar* Sheds Light on Obama

SO NOW WE COME TO THE GREAT PROBLEM OF BOTH *AVATAR* THE movie and Obama the political leader. In each case, the solution to the real problems that they dramatically show us—problems involving the forces of violence, environmental destruction, materialist greed and selfishness, and reliance on a morally blind version of technology and science—involves a lone hero straight out of an old cowboy Western movie.

In *Avatar*, Jake Sully (the white, paraplegic former Marine who through the wonders of science gets to explore Pandora in a Na'vi body) starts off as a spy for the imperialists but undergoes a transformation of ethical consciousness as he falls in love with the Na'vi princess Neytiri and becomes connected to the wisdom of nature and its goddess. In the end, he becomes the indispensable leader of a Na'vi resistance and the key to its success.

Similarly, the social movements that made Obama's election possible lionized him as a Black hero who would singlehandedly save us from the legacy of white supremacy and capitalism-gone-wild. But unlike in *Avatar*, where the native people join forces to defeat the violent imperialists, Obama was elected to lead the most powerful military nation the world has ever seen and has chosen to pursue its wars against the inhabitants of nations that had nothing to do with September 11. Instead of mobilizing for the foreseeable and quite inevitable struggle that would occur once Obama won,

the social movements that brought him to power retreated into passivity, imagining that their hero would become their savior. This was the kiss of death.

This is where the fantasy of the one great individual hero, so deeply rooted in human culture, undermines the value of much that has been accomplished. Had movie maker James Cameron the vision to do so, he could have shown the Na'vi's process of coming to understand their collective power, which is precisely what has happened historically to make it possible for many colonized peoples to resist the ongoing domination of Western imperialists. Cameron missed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to teach us all how to overcome our own self-doubts and our own fear of engaging in a struggle against overwhelming odds, a lesson that might have made it easier for Americans to identify and join with social change movements. Worse yet, Cameron glorifies violence in response to violence—not a solution that has worked very well in history, because as we've been watching in Africa, Asia, and Europe over the past few decades, the violence originally directed against the outside imperialists can easily become a violence directed internally against domestic minorities or neighboring tribes, ethnicities, religions, or nations. Meanwhile, American social change movements have missed a unique opportunity to reach out to the American public by using this film as a vehicle to recruit people into movements to heal and transform the world.

A similar once-in-a-lifetime opportunity was missed with Obama during the financial meltdown: we squandered the opportunity (based on the transparent failure of the free market to "deliver the goods" and the obvious ways that selfishness and materialism had been at the root of that failure) to mobilize Americans for fundamental transformations of our economic and political system. Obama's passivity and compromises with the powerful, on the one hand, and his failure to use his position to

legitimate and empower the very social movements that had helped him achieve the most powerful elected position in the world, on the other, combined with our own passivity and hero worship to contribute to this failure.

Imagine if Obama had pleaded with Americans in his Inauguration address (or even a year later in his 2010 State of the Union address) to become involved in a movement for social transformation, pointing them to a website identifying the two hundred most significant organizations doing work for peace, social justice, human rights, environmental sanity, and health care. And imagine if he had coupled that plea with an unequivocal statement of resolve to side with the powerless and the poor, the homeless and the hungry, and those all around the world who are seeking a world based on love and generosity. On the most practical level, those of us interested in continuing to build the movement that was emerging in 2008 were given no way to do that because the Obama operation transferred the millions of names and emails it had gathered in the campaign into a Democratic Party machine that spewed out calls to support Obama's agenda without ever letting us say what we thought might need change in that agenda. The grassroots energy of the campaign dwindled into a lifeless effort to get supporters to donate to Obama without having any way to influence the direction of his presidency.

Imagine if during his State of the Union Address in 2010 Obama had embraced a New Bottom Line and said that institutions, social practices, corporations, and government policies should be judged rational, efficient, or productive not only to the extent that they maximize money or power, but also to the extent that they maximize love and caring, kindness and generosity, ethical and ecological sensitivity, and awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of the universe! Imagine what could have happened had he insisted that we hold ourselves accountable to those values and told us that we should hold him accountable to those values: he could have excited Americans once again, helped them overcome the despair that he himself contributed to creating, and put the focus on movements rather than on what he himself might accomplish on his own.

From Fear to Hope, from Passivity to Action

SO HERE ARE THE CRITERIA WE SHOULD USE WHEN ASSESSING both *Avatar* and Obama: have they moved us from fear to hope, from passivity to action, from loneliness to a sense of community, from the individualism of the lone hero or even the lone voter to the energetic participant in a movement committed to healing and transforming the planet?

Well, the history isn't over yet, and what will happen is not fixed—it is, in the final analysis, your choice and mine whether all that is good in *Avatar* and in Obama can become a source of strength for us going out and making history. I know that we have huge problems in doing this—and that we need to find ways to make a social change movement feel nurturing to its participants and respectful to those whose power and wealth we challenge, even as we refuse to mute our critique of violent, war-oriented, and environmentally destructive, and morally insensitive policies and budgets.

We in the Network of Spiritual Progressives have exciting



The world welcomed Obama's election, but many have already concluded that he represents "imperialism with a mask of hope." In this November 2009 photo, demonstrators in Caracas, Venezuela, protest an agreement that allows the United States to expand its military presence in Colombia.

ideas, but I don't think we've yet been able to find the way to create local chapters that radiate the kind of warmth and nurturance to its members that reflect the ideals we articulate. And frankly, I don't really know how to make that happen without the local groups becoming so inwardly focused that those who want to change the world start to become alienated because they joined the NSP or the Tikkun Community not to have another support group but to get things done in the world. And I don't know how to help people in our movement understand that they need to recognize that in the category of "getting things done," one of the most important such things is changing how we think about the world, giving priority to our New Bottom Line, and challenging both in the Left and in the larger society the notion that passing some bill or getting some new policy is more important than changing the dominant worldview that makes truly significant policy changes possible.

So building these movements is something that takes a great deal of hard work and many types of approaches, some of which we have not yet developed and which we will have to try to create in future years. But there is no substitute for building a movement that has both a strong vision that can be conveyed to others and a strong sense of humility and commitment to embody more love, generosity of spirit, and forgiveness for ourselves and each other. In the final analysis, the healing this planet needs can only happen that way, when millions of us no longer look to some hero or savior, but really understand what was only a slogan for Obama: that *we* (with all our limitations, flaws, and mistakes) are the ones we've been waiting for! ■

Passing a Constitutional Amendment to Challenge the Supreme Court's Obeisance to Corporate Power

ANYONE WHO CARES ABOUT THE FUTURE OF American democracy must be deeply troubled by the recent Supreme Court decision to empower corporations by granting them the rights (but not the responsibilities) of "persons." Though liberals in Congress are certain to attempt new legislation to limit the impact of this decision, the Supreme Court is likely to strike down any legislation that would undermine what the court has now achieved—corporations' unchecked ability to influence U.S. elections through unlimited donations. The effect will almost certainly strengthen corporate power, which already shaped American economic life (that is, what we do all day long to make a living), the media (which corporations largely own), and much of electoral life, even before this decision.

It seems obvious to many progressives that restricting corporate power to shape our elections will require a constitutional amendment. But there are many spiritual progressives who argue that if we are to engage in the massive campaign necessary to amend the Constitution, we should frame an amendment that is broader and imposes a powerful set of restraints on corporate power. We could achieve this by requiring that corporations get a new corporate charter every five years; the charter would only be granted to corporations that could prove a satisfactory history of environmental and social responsibility.

We have posted one such proposal on our website—the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment (ESRA)—and there will be other proposals coming soon. We intend to get your feedback and participation in this project most fully at our *Tikkun*/Network of Spiritual Progressives conference in Washington, D.C., June 11–14. This is just one of the many reasons why it is so important for you to be there, and for you to invite others in your world who care about these kinds of issues.

Though our conference was originally framed as "Supporting Obama to BE the Obama Americans Thought They Elected," that formulation seems too limited and too focused on Obama. The main problem facing America is the vast power held by irresponsible corporations, the structure imposed on our lives by the capitalist system, and the ethical and spiritual consequences of the globalization of selfishness. We are living in a global economic/political/military empire whose bottom line is maximizing money, power, and global domination. The ethos of the



American empire produces a "look-out-for-number-one" consciousness that gushes through American culture and undermines solidarity and caring for others, thereby weakening our family ties and friendships. The spiritual challenge of our time is to promote a new way of thinking and a New Bottom Line that promotes love, kindness, generosity, ethical and ecological sensitivity, and awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of the universe.

Can such a movement be sustained in an era of cynicism and despair? Maybe. That depends in part on you, which is why it is so important for you to come to the June conference in D.C. Of course we know that financial considerations may make it difficult for some of our readers to get there and pay for accommodations. One thing we can offer members of the NSP and subscribers to *Tikkun*: if you look at the sliding fee scale and can't afford the registration fee at your level of income, go to the next level down or even the one below that. And if you can't afford any of the levels on our sliding scale, write me an email or a letter explaining why not and enclose a check for what you actually can afford—that will be fine, particularly if you assure me that you will be giving a few hours each week between now and then to convince friends, neighbors, and members of your political, cultural, or religious community to come to the conference, join the NSP, or subscribe to *Tikkun*. To register for the conference: www.spiritualprogressives.org/conference. To volunteer before and at the conference, send me a note at RabbiLerner@Tikkun.org or send a letter to Rabbi Lerner, *Tikkun*/NSP Conference, 2342 Shattuck Ave, #1200, Berkeley, California, 94704. ■

The Activist's Dilemma: Reform or Radical Change

by Allen D. Kanner

THE NEW YORK TIMES FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE on October 24, 2009, read: "No Einstein in Your Crib? Get a Refund." The article described how public health lawyers threatened a class action suit against Disney in 2009 for falsely advertising its Baby Einstein videos as educational. In response, Disney is offering a refund on the videos. The *New York Times* called the refund "a tacit admission that [the videos] did not increase intellect." Baby Einstein, which generates \$200 million annually, is itself part of a much larger marketing industry that routinely claims, without supporting evidence, that its toys, games, and videos enhance young children's cognitive development.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, of which I am a steering committee member, was responsible for exposing the Disney scam. This was easily our most successful action to date. Yet after an initial surge of enormously positive news coverage, we braced ourselves for a predictable response that we knew was on the way. Three days later it came when Whoopi Goldberg, on the popular ABC television show *The View*, took our campaign to task, saying, "I'm sick of people telling me what to eat, what to watch, who to be," and was interrupted by enthusiastic applause. Disney owns ABC. On its website, Disney posted a letter to parents who were seeking the refund, telling them, "Baby Einstein has been under attack by propaganda groups taking extreme positions that try to dictate what parents should do, say, and buy." Angry letters and emails began arriving, expressing similar sentiments.

Of course, there is a great deal of difference between informing parents of a scam and dictating to them how to raise their children. But when the advertising industry accuses us of being "nannies," it brings up a recurring dilemma of mine. It reminds me that as a member of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, I have chosen the path of reform, not radical change. Reformers work within the system to alter it, and therefore routinely advocate for stricter laws and regulations and more effective government enforcement.

*Allen D. Kanner, Ph.D., is a co-founder of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (www.commercialfreechildhood.org), co-editor of *Psychology and Consumer Culture* and *Ecopsychology*, and a Berkeley, California, child, family, and adult psychologist.*



Disney made big bucks from Baby Einstein products but was forced to offer refunds after the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood pointed out the falseness of its claims. Watching Disney's "Baby Mozart" videos doesn't make kids smarter or happier than noncommercial play does—like the kind that Einstein himself enjoyed.



NDANT **NATIONAL CLEAN ENERGY PROJECT:** BUILDING THE NEW ECONOMY **SECURIT**



Yet, over the years I have devoted much time to getting the government off of people's backs, be it in regard to censorship, immigration, marijuana, the draft, privacy—the list goes on and on. Ironically, when it comes to fighting rich and savvy corporations that are exploiting children, as a reformer I turn to the one entity that has some power to stop them, the government. This means more rules and regulations. The rebel within me squirms.

The question of whether major social change is best accomplished through incremental reform or radical action is an old one, but still pressingly relevant. For example, environmental and social activist Van Jones has proposed that the government solve our current economic crisis by subsidizing a “green-collar economy.” Large numbers of poor and working class people could be employed to massively overhaul the nation’s infrastructure so as to make it environmentally sound. In his book *The Green Collar Economy*, Jones anticipated that his plan would be criticized for leaving the root of the problem, the market economy, intact. He thought such a radical perspective was “justifiable—but foolish,” and instead suggested we follow the lead of early civil rights activists, whose success was built on incremental change.

In contrast, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, which I also admire, sees the more moderate approach as futile. Specifically, after extensively studying the history of corporations and corporate law, its members concluded that environmental regulations were a trap, since their very existence grants corporations the right to pollute. A more drastic approach requiring fundamental structural changes in corporate and constitutional law was needed. To this end, the legal defense fund has helped communities draft legislation that strips corporations of their right to pollute, as well as many other rights. Based on this legislation, communities have passed local laws that directly contradict Supreme Court rulings. The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund also officially consulted last year with Ecuador as the country approved a new constitution that recognizes the rights of ecosystems to “exist, persist, regenerate, and evolve.” In

Ecuador, nature is no longer merely property. But treating nature as property is essential to capitalism.

On the personal level, our reasons for adopting a radical or reformist position are worth examining. With its heroic image, the radical stance plays to the ego. It also provides seductive opportunities for venting anger, even when this puts people off. The reformist position is prone to a fear-driven mentality that loses sight of how compromised it can become and therefore misses opportunities for effective, bold action. These individual issues cloud our judgment as to whether, in any given situation, the more modest or far-reaching approach will be most productive.

In my own work, I often choose to speak of global marketing to children as a symptom of capitalism, a system I see as fatally flawed, and as yet another sign that our species is in profound practical and spiritual trouble. By raising these broader issues I risk putting off many who would otherwise be sympathetic to the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood’s crucial message. But the larger context looms. Do I remain silent? ■

*Top: Activist Van Jones, author of *The Green Collar Economy*, argues that, like civil rights activists of the 1960s, today’s radicals should pursue incremental changes.*

Bottom: In contrast, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), argues against incremental reform, claiming that the very existence of environmental regulations grants corporations the right to pollute. Here CELDF staff assist delegates to draft a radically pro-environment constitution for Ecuador.

Cash for Credits: Education in a Time of Hardship

by Svi Shapiro



AN INTRIGUING BIT OF NEWS FROM MY HOME STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA recently made it into the national media: Susie Shepherd, an elementary school principal in the small town of Goldsboro, suggested that as a way to raise much-needed funds for her school, students who brought in twenty dollars would be awarded twenty test credits. Students could apply ten credits each to two tests of their choice.

The notion that a school would actually reward such fundraising efforts with bonus points on classroom tests created, somewhat surprisingly, a storm of disapproval. Within a few days the principal had resigned under pressure from an embarrassed school board. Interestingly many parents rushed to her defense. She was, they said, an excellent and caring educator. And, besides, it was one way to help teachers who, in this city, were forced to purchase basic school supplies out of their own salaries. It is not hard to see their point concerning the latter. With schools under severe budgetary constraints, one might ask what was so bad about trying to give teachers a little extra financial help equipping their classrooms? As Shepherd noted, last year administrators tried to induce students to bring in cash with the reward of chocolates. That didn't work very well. So this year it was time to try a more direct approach—increasing students' test scores through monetary payments.

This story certainly provided fodder for the scorn of editorial writers who pointed to the educational travesty of the principal's behavior. It also provided material for late-night comics, who got laughs off of the apparent unseemliness of paying for test points, as if school were just another business.

Our classrooms are meant to be "catalysts for imagination, the joy of understanding, or the search for meaning and purpose," the author writes. But once education is seen as primarily about acquiring credits or test points, "then why not simply go out and buy them?"

Svi Shapiro is professor of education and cultural studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he is director of the Ph.D. program. His recent books are Education and Hope in Troubled Times (Routledge), and Losing Heart: the Moral and Spiritual Miseducation of America's Children (Erlbaum).



They've got money, so they can buy themselves some good grades. Is that what we want?

Yet, in the very same week that this event was reported, the *New York Times* carried a story about the lucrative business of teachers selling their lesson plans on the Internet. According to the article, thousands of teachers "are cashing in on a commodity they used to give away, selling lesson plans online for exercises as simple as M&M sorting and as sophisticated as Shakespeare." The article, "Selling Lessons Online Raises Cash and Questions," goes on to note that while some of this money is used to buy classroom supplies and books, some of it is used to supplement salaries and pay for mortgages, credit card bills, and food. Tellingly, one critic of this practice, Robert N. Lowry, deputy director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, questioned the ownership of these lesson plans and whether districts should be sharing in the proceeds! The money generated from this practice is not negligible. One of the online sites, Teachers Pay Teachers, has more than 200,000 registered users, according to the *Times*, and has recorded more than \$600,000 in sales since it started in 2006. A top seller, a high school English teacher in California, has made \$36,000 in sales. A retired teacher in North Carolina earns an average of \$750 a month (which has enabled her to remodel her kitchen).

Private Wealth, Public Penury

HOW SHOULD WE REGARD THIS PRACTICE? ONE PROFESSOR, JOSEPH McDONALD, DECRIES the way online selling of lesson plans "cheapens what teachers do." It undermines the culture of educators freely exchanging teaching ideas and plans. His point is well taken. Yet again it is hard not to feel compassion for sorely underpaid teachers who, under increasing financial pressure, are attempting to use their knowledge and skill to add something to their monthly income. Which of us may point the finger at these employees in this time of extraordinary economic pain and suggest they have no right to find ways to augment limited salaries? It is hard to be too critical of a behavior that might add a few hundred dollars to teachers' income at a time when the public purse is being used to ensure hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in income for bankers and Wall Street traders. As the expression goes, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Of course here there is hardly any parallel in the likely incomes of teachers or public employees and those on Wall Street. When greed on an unparalleled scale shapes the behavior of those who sit atop our financial institutions, who can begrudge the efforts of the nation's teachers to find a modest increase in their incomes or especially to offset cash-strapped school budgets?

Commodifying Knowledge

STILL, FOR THOSE OF US WHOSE INTEREST IS EDUCATION, THERE ARE TENDENCIES HERE that can only add to our sense of disquiet. Cash for test points and the sale of lesson plans on the Internet are surely sadder manifestations of the commodification and vulgarization of education. The "cash nexus," as Marx famously termed it, further frames and insinuates itself into that most sacred and precious experience in which a society seeks to pass to a younger generation its most valued knowledge and understanding. In the examples above we see again how our American society's "bottom line" values ever more starkly detract from education as a vehicle for human emancipation and the quest for a community of meaning, care, and human dignity.

McDonald is correct to criticize the selling of lesson plans because of the way it erodes the community of sharing among teachers. But that is only the tip of this particular iceberg. Our schools are already pervaded by what Elizabeth Gray calls the "culture of separated desks." The hidden curriculum of the classroom is one in which students are taught that learning is always a process of *individual* effort and achievement, and success inevitably a matter of invidious comparison. From the youngest age, when small children are taught to cover their work and not share their knowledge, the message is always that each individual should

see himself or herself as a separate, self-sufficient, and self-interested atom in a universe of disconnected competitors. In selling their lessons online, teachers are acting entirely in the same spirit as the children we teach; they are treating knowledge or skill as the "cultural capital" that could give them an edge in a world of possessive competitors. In such a world, a community of learners in which individual knowledge, skills, insight, and understanding are shared for the betterment of all is alien. The paradigm of self-interest and individual advantage is deeply insinuated into our collective vision of success. Knowledge exists to leverage personal advantage in a society that more and more comes to resemble the competitive marketplace.

We may go from George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" approach to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's "Race to the Top" method and see that they do not differ much in this regard. For each there is the same understanding that education is about competition, "getting ahead," and the relentless process of ranking and comparisons (with all that implies in terms of the obsessive focus on grades, numbers, and point scores). And, in each, learning and teaching are the means to deploy one's knowledge to individual advantage (or the advantage of the nation vis-à-vis other economies). One looks in vain here for some alternative vision of knowledge and learning as a shared resource for mutual human uplift, or as a vehicle by which we can move toward a loving and interconnected community.

De-Meaning Education

NOR SHOULD WE BE TOO SURPRISED AT THE GOLDSBORO principal's prescription for fundraising at her school. Even educational leaders have come to accept the way that learning is thoroughly implicated in the culture of commodification. School knowledge has become little more than another currency of exchange. What we learn accrues for us the credits and points that are the vehicles through which we may leverage our success via access to college and a place in the job market. The overriding message is a clear one. The value of what we learn is primarily to be found in its extrinsic payoff—in the way it can be converted into a measurable sum of money. As teachers know all too well, grades, credits, and points become the real aim of learning. "What'd ya get?" is the primary question students ask. If it's not on the test, why bother with it? And if it's not measurable and quantifiable, then it has no value as an instrument of school accountability or student ranking.

Of course such a view of education increasingly precludes the possibility for classrooms to be places of inspiration, moral concern, and the firing of curiosity, or to be catalysts for imagination, the joy of understanding, or the search for meaning and purpose. All of these speak to the intrinsic purposes of human development and enrichment, and education's contribution to our communal betterment. Simply put, if learning is about acquiring credits or test points, then why not simply go out and buy them? Indeed the Internet is full of opportunities for purchasing term papers and projects that can enable students to short-circuit the inconvenient and time-consuming process of critical and creative thinking. Or as increasing numbers of students do, one can simply cheat to assure the needed currency of school success. For those of us who teach in universities, the pious rhetoric of academia's mission concerning human uplift and liberation is belied by the institution's increasing focus on money and status, as evident in big-time athletics, the hiring of highly paid star professors, the concern with entrepreneurial spin-offs, corporate sponsorships of programs, the focus on receiving grants and contracts, the shopping-mall ambience of the student union, and so on.



Schools should be places "where young people are encouraged and equipped to participate in the making, or remaking, of their world—a world of more justice, peace, and dignity for all." Here students at Roosevelt High School in Seattle talk about their experiences in school, thoughts on testing, and No Child Left Behind.

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Education Beyond the Culture of Consumption

OF COURSE SCHOOL MERELY MIRRORS THE LARGER CULTURE IN ALL OF THIS. THE commodification of learning is but one more dimension of a culture in which more and more human activities are measured by their price, not their value to a life of authentic meaning. They have become part of the culture of "having" rather than "being." Increasingly every aspect of human experience and need are subject to the mechanisms and the mystique of the marketplace. Indeed it becomes harder for us to imagine a world in which what we do, desire, or want are not things that can be bought in some part of our shopping mall culture.

Yet, despite this, the struggle for an alternative life continues. We see this in the counter-politics of health care, where there is still a vision of medicine and healing predicated on something other than profit and the actuarial tables of the insurance business. There is a growing desire for food that neither threatens our bodies' well-being nor harms the earth and assaults other life-forms. And in education there is growing disquiet over the narrowly defined, restrictive and debilitating direction of educational policy and practice. Perhaps the furor over the principal offering to exchange cash for test credits indicates some level of awareness, and shame, at such crudely materialistic behavior in the context of public education.

Yet even where a halt is called to the debasement of learning, there is still, sadly, little indication that there is some deeper notion of a different or alternative bottom line for education. For the most part there is an absence of an educational vision for the twenty-first century that links learning to democracy and citizenship in our globally interconnected and interdependent society (a number of states are now suggesting reorienting teacher education around "twenty-first-century skills," but this usually turns out to mean more testing for students and more accountability measures for teachers). Such a vision might have at its center human beings who have developed an ethic of responsibility and care for the well-being of our earth community. It would take seriously the development of those critical and

creative capabilities that enable individuals to think beyond the passive memorization and regurgitation of unquestioned assumptions and beliefs that may be destructive to our collective well-being. And it would offer a space in which young people would be challenged to consider how they might live lives of authentic meaning and purpose in a world of growing inequality, violence, and material waste.

Teaching to Remake the World

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION FOR EDUCATION WOULD imply reclaiming schools as what Henry Giroux has called an *emancipatory public space*. It would mean seeing school neither as a place primarily aimed at individual achievement, success, and social mobility, nor as a vehicle for supplying trained workers to the state or business world, which seems to be a common feature of Democratic and Republican educational platforms. Instead, education would be a site where young people are encouraged and equipped to participate in the making, or re-making, of their world—a world of more justice, peace, and dignity for all.

This vision is not entirely alien to the American tradition. It echoes what the great American philosopher John Dewey said many years ago—that education, at root, is about the "making of a



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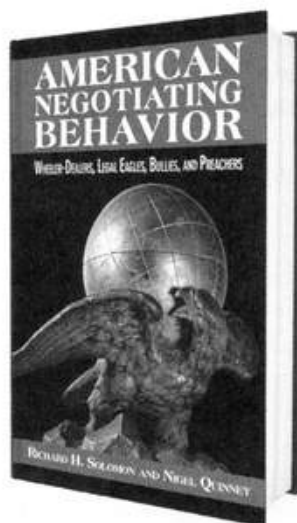
**RICHARD H. SOLOMON
and NIGEL QUINNEY**

Forewords by MADELEINE ALBRIGHT
and CONDOLEEZZA RICE

"American Negotiating Behavior is a truly unique study of the American negotiator because it explores the foreign perception of American negotiators."

—Zbigniew Brzezinski,
Counselor and Trustee, Center for Strategic and International Studies

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world." Education is, or should be, the expression of our best collective aspirations and hopes as a people. It is apparent that such an education is at once a cognitive, ethical, *and* spiritual task (spiritual in that it touches upon matters of ultimate meaning, value, and purpose). Of course there is here no pretense or illusion of education as a morally *neutral* field of human activity. Indeed no such education exists. All efforts to teach the young inevitably embody some understanding of the good and the worthwhile—some vision of what we value in a human life, and what our individual as well as our collective goals and purposes should be. To suggest that educational achievement should be traded for cash implies one such vision—one that embodies our current educational preoccupations and its debasement into a zone of moral crassness and tawdry meanings. Other things around us—growing poverty and social injustice, alienation, human suffering, violence, and environmental degradation—call out to us to offer another vision of why we educate. For the sake of our children, and for the sake of those who teach them, it is time for an education that genuinely responds to the deep crises in our individual and national life. Beyond online sales of lesson plans and cash for credits, what we really need are schools in which a younger generation might begin to envisage how they may help to heal our broken and suffering world. ■

Healing in Community

by Lauren Reichelt

THE PLAYGROUND GREW OUT OF A RECURRING DREAM. Years ago, during childhood, I dreamt a terrifying dungeon, its only window barred: the window of the state psychiatric facility where I'd once visited my mother.

I thought Mom was in jail then. I knew she hadn't committed a crime. I imagined she'd been imprisoned for something I had done. I just didn't know what it was.

As I grew older, the dream dungeon became a house with its balcony built around a courtyard, many closed doors beckoning, promises of marvelous hidden rooms. Oh how I longed to open those doors!

I was the mother of a newborn living in Española. The dream seemed more real than my surroundings.

I'd been dwelling in this sandy, faded northern New Mexico town for three years without meeting anyone. Española was a *barrio*. I was vaguely afraid of its residents, having been assured by other Anglo friends in Santa Fe that Española was full of criminals. I'd paid as much attention to my neighbors as I had to shadows in the years preceding my daughter's birth. Now I resolved to remove self-imposed



When the barrio built its own playground, neighbors opened up to each other. Here city councilor Peter Valdez and a young boy check freshly laid bricks with a level.

Lauren Reichelt is the director of Health and Human Services for a county in Northern New Mexico. She has served as a successful community organizer in Japan and the United States and is writing a book about organizing as a healing process.



Lauren Reichelt tests the new swings while a friend holds her daughter, Chloe, who was a newborn when Reichelt started to ask her neighbors to help create a playground. "You'll never find volunteers," she was repeatedly assured. Turns out that was wrong.

to use volunteer labor, because in the past, whenever people needed a house or a barn, the whole community came together to build. We're reviving indigenous customs."

Actually, I knew nothing about Española's customs. My scribbled design resembled a Japanese dojo. Most of my ideas about cultural relevance and volunteerism had been gleaned from my grad-school reading list of Japanese Meiji era scholars.

"You'll never find volunteers," I was repeatedly assured. "People in Española don't volunteer."

Nobody seemed to mind the Zen-like quality of my design. Every neighbor I approached offered something. The newspaper interviewed me an hour into my campaign. Two days later a local bank contributed \$2,000. City government supplied land. The home improvement store donated trucks and sand. A high school AutoCAD class developed a concept sketch, and a video class filmed a documentary. Later, I would convince a news network to air the short video statewide. County welders crafted my barred windows. "But we'll only have two walls," I told the welder. "No child should ever feel trapped. They should be able to run to their parents."

People I had never met held pancake breakfasts to raise money. A board of directors formed. Each new participant added his or her story.

"The *viejitos* say they never noticed the Depression. They didn't know they were poor. One *vecino* grew corn, one grew chiles, and at harvest time they traded. The *pleve* helped each other out."

"Folks around here always used to do things for themselves. We didn't have no grocery stores back then. We relied on our families."

"¡Y jolé! When I was a kid we didn't need a garbage dump, because we reused things. We didn't need plastic, *que no?* We used clay."

Our new board of directors (composed of neighbors I had not previously known) decided to hold a "name-the-playground" contest in the schools. I wheeled my wobbly stroller to schools in town, talking to each class. Dark hopeful eyes glistened with excitement as children contributed ideas.

The winning submission was "Venessa's Hideaway," a memorial to a nine-year-old girl

bars. Had I still been in Chicago, I might have strolled to a neighborhood tot lot to meet other mothers, but my new home had none. So on this particular day, upon awakening from my dream, I scrawled a playground design on a piece of notebook paper and began knocking on doors.

I showed it to anyone willing to listen.

"I want to build a developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant tot lot out of recycled materials here in Española," I bubbled enthusiastically. "Our playground will resemble a Spanish castle so it'll inspire kids to ask questions about their own history and culture. I want to use volunteer labor. That way we'll build social networks while creating public infrastructure. It doesn't seem right that Española moms have to feed their kids fast food at McDonald's just to let them run around on a play structure. And it makes sense

who was murdered when she surprised a heroin addict ransacking her home for syringes. Venessa Valerio had been diabetic. She was a glowing girl with a winning, gap-toothed smile and hair that fell to the back of her knees. She was the second child in her fourth grade class to be killed that year in a drug-related shooting. Española, it turned out, led the nation in drug overdose deaths.

Venessa's mother, Annette, became the playground's champion. As beautiful as her daughter, Annette bore a striking resemblance to the Virgin of Guadalupe, even wearing her boxy brown UPS uniform. Hair streamed down her back like a veil. When she carried her photo of Venessa before her, people parted to let her pass. When she talked about her daughter's last day on earth, they cried.

Annette's huge extended family of aunts, uncles, in-laws, *compadres*, *comadres*, and cousins flocked to Valdez Park each weekend over the summer of 1995, a weekly building pilgrimage. Venessa's grieving classmates painted the sign. We were joined by released jail inmates from the Rock Christian Outreach, gang members living in projects across the street, and assorted townspeople. One day a girl with no legs wheeled up and began to lay brick. The county hired me to finish the project and to organize in other communities. As we built, the city planted. Our once dusty park turned green. The city installed picnic tables. Families began using the park.

Picnickers joined us. "What are you doing?" they asked.

We explained, "We're building Venessa's Hideaway."

One couple answered, "Bless you. Our *jita*, Melissa Salazar, God rest her soul, was murdered last year. She was just twenty-two. They found her by the side of the road, *pobrecita*."

Annette hugged them. "Nessie was such a special child," she reminisced. "She died in my arms. Her last words to me were, 'Mommy! Mommy!'"

In time, other grieving parents joined. We told stories as we worked, soothed by the familiar smell and sticky texture of cement, mud, soil, and paint. The work made us whole again. It healed torn souls. "I feel like we're building a shrine," I said to Annette, "a shrine for children to play in." When the tot lot was complete, we planned a celebration. We invited every district child.

"It can't be done," I was told. "The schools never participate. Española kids are too wild. They'll get in fights. It will be a disaster."

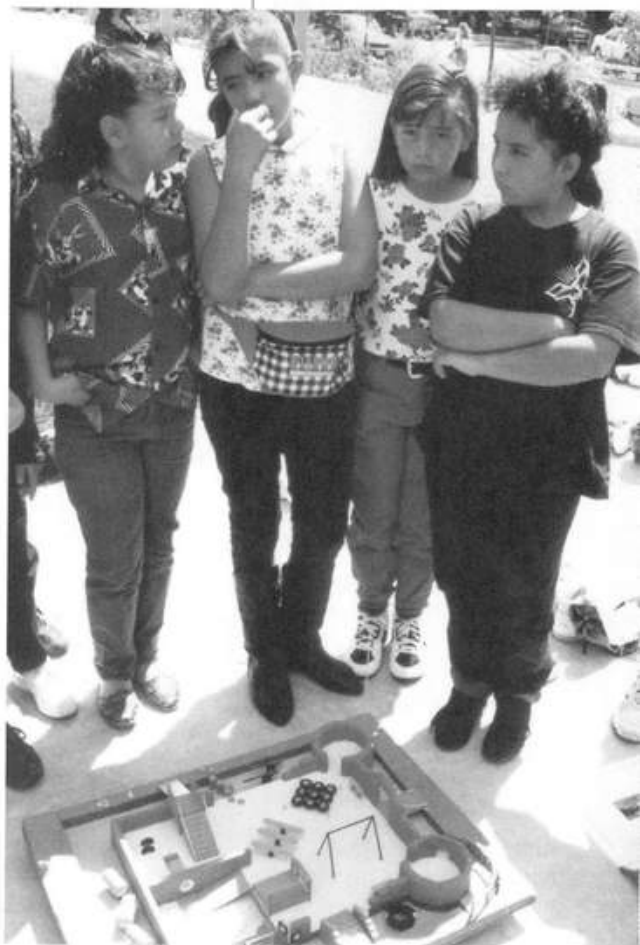
We decided to hold a nonviolent event. I invited the Santa Fe Children's Museum to teach cooperative games. A local political aspirant invited the National Guard, the fire department, and the police. We had puppeteers, tanks, Ronald McDonald, Sparky the Firedog, twenty-four police cars, a fire engine, a rescue helicopter, hot dogs, hamburgers, magicians, face painting, clowns, a purple poison-control dinosaur everyone mistook for Barney, volleyball games, and a police anti-drug rock band.

The schools bused in 2,000 students, nearly one-quarter the population of the entire town, in shifts. Children frolicked on tanks and set off sirens. They played cooperative games. They sat in the helicopter. They ate hot dogs and hamburgers. They listened to speeches. They remembered the dead.

There were no fights. There was not a single report of unruly behavior.

After the playground was complete, Linda Pedro, a civil rights activist, asked me to help coordinate a pilgrimage. I drove down a dirt road past cottonwoods, a weaving gallery, horses, and chile fields while dogs charged my car. Linda lived in Chimayo, in an ancient adobe home modified to accommodate her needs. She was quadriplegic. She lived at the epicenter of Rio Arriba's underground heroin trade.

"We have to do something about drug violence," she exhorted, rolling her wheelchair into the kitchen. "I'm surrounded by dealers. All night, I hear shooting. I'm terrified. In the old days, the *Hermanos* would never have tolerated lawlessness." She was referring to the secretive, indigenous religious brotherhood that had evolved in the absence of Franciscan priests



Four girls look at the playground model made and donated by the author's father-in-law.



The winning entry in a "name-the-playground" contest in the schools was "Venessa's Hideaway." Venessa Valerio, above, was nine when she was murdered by a heroin addict ransacking her home for syringes. Her grieving classmates helped paint the sign for the playground.

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in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in New Mexico's remote communities. "I'm going to ask them to lead a pilgrimage to the *Santuario de Chimayo*." Every year on Good Friday, thousands of pilgrims lined the road, walking from Santa Fe and Española to the Santuario. "We'll have a public interfaith ceremony there. It'll be the Hermanos' first public prayer in four hundred years. I need your help."

"Me?" I asked incredulously. "What can I do? I don't know anything about the *Penitentes*." I'd been told that they were a voodoo cult and they shot anyone who spied on their secret ceremonies.

"No. But you know the *mothers*. I want them to walk in front of the procession carrying photos of their children. The Hermanos will follow, chanting, and then the other houses of worship. Also, you're with the county. I need porta-potties, a police escort, and some ambulances. We're praying for healing."

"Drugs are an epidemic requiring a public health response," I concurred.

"Exactly," she said. "No child should ever have to visit a parent in jail. No parent should lose a child."

I gathered the mothers. We made buttons of their children's faces, telling stories as we worked. "My Ricky was such a good boy," mourned Donna, Annette's next-door neighbor. Her seventeen-year-old son, Erik Sanchez, had been thrown off the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge by carjackers, his body shattered on rocks six hundred feet below. "The police told me his fingers were crushed," sputtered Donna. "He tried to hold onto the bridge but those *pinche tecatos* stomped on his hands! He built his car himself."

"My Ricky loved his car, too," Martha reminisced. Ricky Martinez, also seventeen, was killed by a drunk driver. Eva, Juanito's mother, sobbed without speaking. Eleven-year-old Juanito perished fighting off Eva's estranged husband, who knifed him after slitting her throat. When Eva awoke from her coma, Juanito was gone. Buried.

The smiling faces of the dead piled up in a cardboard box.

Several hundred men, women, and children pinned buttons over their hearts and hiked solemnly eight miles up a winding, two-lane mountain road through rain, wind, and snow. Linda led the way, using her wheelchair, surrounded by mothers carrying framed photos of their murdered loved ones. Members of the *moradas* (or neighborhood chapels) followed, chanting prayers. Churches of many faiths made pilgrimage behind them. After checking to make sure that the ambulance, porta-potties, sheriff's escorts, and refreshment tables were all in place, I took up my place at the end of the line, walking beside Lynn Gottlieb, a rabbi from Albuquerque.

I regaled Lynn with my theory. "A shrine is a psychic mass fueled by lost lives. When we make pilgrimage to a shrine, we increase its energy, its *mana*. That was the purpose of human sacrifice in ancient times. It's more ethical to fuel a shrine with lives that have already been lost."

"There are plenty in the modern world," Lynn observed.

I continued. "I think I'm beginning to understand the Zohar." I was referring to a book of Jewish mysticism written in twelfth-century Spain. I took a breath, unsure of myself, and ventured, "De Leon translated the first line of the Torah: 'With Beginning [the ineffable One] created God.' The 'I' within is the ineffable One. When we become blank slates, casting out prejudice in order to listen, opening ourselves up to our fellow man, we bring God into the physical world. The line means, 'With Beginning, I created God.'"

Several hours later I stood with other mothers and our young children under a gray and blustery sky, listening, candles burning in our hands. A Pentecostal Minister prayed ecstatically, Lynn and the other clergy beside her. The minister beseeched, "If you're there God, give us a sign!"

A tremendous gust of wind blew my daughter's umbrella inside-out. A clap of thunder shook the trees. Our candles went out. It began to hail.

Nobody moved. Not one person ran for shelter. ■

A Spiritual Perspective on Family Courts

by Bruce Peterson

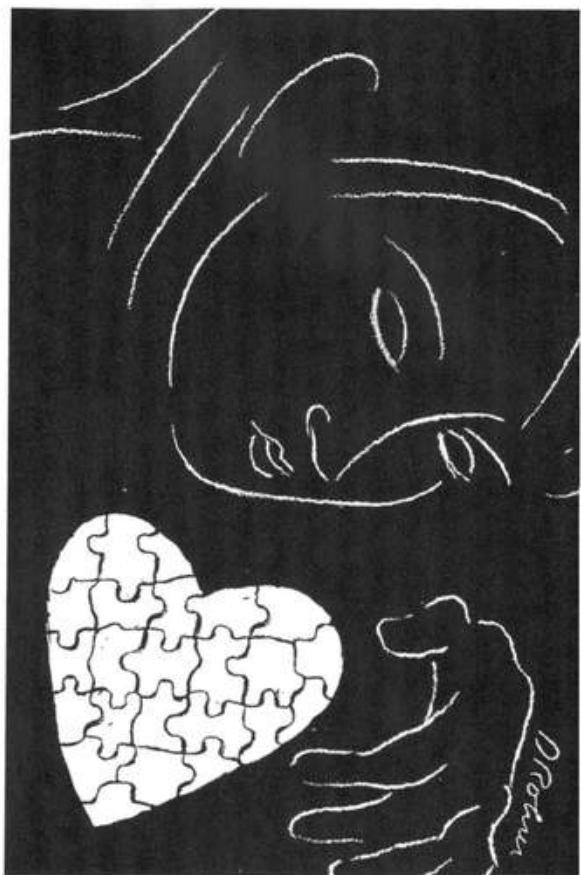
SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES BELIEVE THAT PRACTICAL PUBLIC POLICIES FLOW from the application of spiritual principles to national problems. Our spiritual consciousness isn't just some warm glow—rather, it provides practical guidance in a complicated world. This magazine often thoughtfully advocates very specific, spiritually grounded responses to pressing issues such as terrorism, financial collapse, a sick health care system, and global warming. Equally urgent is the need for a better family policy, but the components of a coherent spiritual progressive approach tend to get lost in the furor over abortion, gay marriage, and marriage promotion programs.

Over the last seven years I have observed thousands of families in crisis while serving as a family court judge in Hennepin County, Minnesota, which includes Minneapolis. I have watched how cases of divorce, parenting disputes between unmarried parents, domestic abuse, and child support enforcement regularly generate gut-wrenching anger, pain, anxiety, and grief.

I have also seen how children, who at times can reduce adults to their most fearful, narrow-minded selves, also have the capacity to bring out the most noble, selfless, loving aspects of our character. Children can transform us. No one but a dedicated parent as readily gives up drugs, or abandons a high-level job with too much travel and evening work, or takes two buses to a day care, works long hours, and then goes to night school. Given the raw emotional power generated in family court and the sheer number of Americans experiencing this public institution firsthand, I have become convinced that it is a logical place to start building a workable spiritual agenda for families.

These days about half of all marriages end in divorce, and many children endure the trauma and sadness of their parents' hate-filled court battles. In this article, speaking only for myself and definitely not as a representative of the judiciary, I will offer a spiritual perspective on family conflict and make some practical suggestions for how to reorient our country's institutions to promote healing and support for families of all kinds.

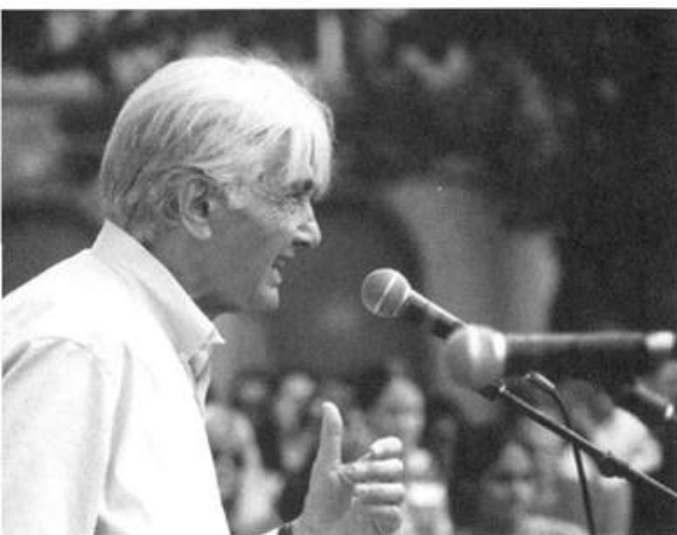
I have been proud to serve in one of the best family courts, one that has continuously improved its legal dispute resolution services. But we need to move beyond the dispute resolution paradigm. We need to get the courts out of the divorce business by instituting a simple system of administrative divorce and thereby moving toward a public understanding of divorce not as a fight, but as a difficult yet growth-enhancing life passage. We need to explore reconciliation and restorative justice processes that could help some parents heal their relationships with or without divorce. And, now that nearly 40 percent of children are born to unmarried parents (as opposed to 6 percent in 1960), we need new institutions such as "Co-Parent Courts" to support unmarried parents.



Bruce Peterson is a judge in Minneapolis, Minnesota. From 2006 to 2008 he was the presiding judge of the Hennepin County Family Court. He was the first chair of the Minnesota Chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

Long Live Zinn

by Fred Branfman



Howard Zinn, historian and activist, died on January 27, 2010, at the age of eighty-seven. Here he speaks at a rally in Copley Square in Boston on September 23, 2001.

MUCH WILL AND SHOULD BE WRITTEN ABOUT HOWARD Zinn's contributions to the world: how his *A People's History of the United States* changed how many of us understand America and, like all great histories, shed the great light of truth upon our present, explaining what cannot be understood by official propaganda; how he played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement during tough years when he, like so many others, took enormous physical risks for simply wanting justice; how thousands of people's lives were politically transformed by their encounters with him.

And the personal remembrances of Howard the human being will be no less moving and true. I first met him forty-two years ago, when he and Dan Berrigan passed through Laos on the way to pick up U.S. POWs in Hanoi, and I was struck by his genuine delight in meeting the rice farmers in the village where I was living. Howard was by far the most honest, human, open, kind, generous, gracious, humorous, and charming of all the political people I've met. He looked you in the eyes. He listened. He reacted appropriately to what you were saying. Looking back on his life, he was as open and honest

about his regrets and satisfactions as anyone I have ever met.

But to me there is an even more important aspect of his life—an aspect like that of his friend and colleague Noam Chomsky—that transcends the personal.

To many of us, "Zinn" and "Chomsky" have not only been admirable human beings. They have also been something far more, something difficult to put into words, something perhaps even risky to try to capture—but something that, nonetheless, one feels driven to express at a moment like this.

Many of us were upended on the deepest possible level during the 1960s. Growing up in the aftermath of the "Good War," many of us were the children or grandchildren of immigrants who believed deeply in the America to which they owed their very lives. As a result, we had a profound faith in America's goodness and decency. And when we saw both our leaders and an entire older generation not only betray but also spit upon and destroy these values in what was then known as Indochina, we were undone. When we saw them mercilessly, pitilessly, amorally, criminally, deceitfully, and undemocratically murder millions of innocent civilians week after week, month after month, year after year for over a decade—each week a lifetime of agony—we were thrown into an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual abyss, from which we have never really fully emerged. Our moral universe—the basic set of understandings needed to remain human—was shattered.

It was during those morally chaotic years that Zinn and Chomsky became more than people to many of us. As elders who did not sell out, who acted as well as taught, who did not compromise, who did not abandon genuine American values and ideals, who did not lose their passion for social justice, who did not fail to side with the poor and downtrodden and victimized, and who above all spoke the truth, they became some of our most important symbolic figures. Even if we did not always agree with a particular position *(continued on page 75)*

Fred Branfman, after four decades of psychological, spiritual, and political work on behalf of the environment, information revolution, and peace, focuses today on cultivating a "life-affirming death awareness," as described on www.trulyalive.org. Email: fredbranfman@aol.com.

Rethinking Religion

Notes on Silence

by Yahia Lababidi

IT MAY SEEM LIKE A BETRAYAL TO SPEAK OF SILENCE, TO BREAK an unspoken pact. Yet, whether we are conscious of it or not, it is there, inextricably woven into the fabric of our lives. As the Sufi poet Rumi put it: "A person does not speak with words. Truth and affinity draws people. Words are only a pretext." Silence exists in the gaps between our words and our encounters with the natural world. In fact, silence is a platform from which we observe and interrogate ourselves and our world.

What's more, silence is a prerequisite for certain vital solitary activities, such as contemplation, meditation, prayer, and healing, as well as over-hearing the dictates of our conscience.

But ubiquity does not ensure intimacy. Thus, silence, this quiet capital of riches, is both under-considered and undervalued. Perhaps by learning to recognize our silences in their many guises, we may begin to demystify them and become more intimate.

Whether longed for or reviled, summoned or thrust upon us, silence is an inescapable force in our lives. Yet curiously, as a discipline, Western philosophy seems not to have deeply investigated this constant presence—leaving it up to spirituality, poetry, and psychology to explore this elusive territory. Perhaps for philosophers, maddened by their own music—as they tend to be—this slippery subject is perceived as a kind of rebuke to philosophy's lust for logic and systems. In the words of that rare Western philosopher, Wittgenstein, who acknowledges the limits of reason and the sayable, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Yet contemplatives, poets, and thinkers alike have long hinted at a wisdom beyond words, straining at the limits of language and sense to describe the ineffable. And even if this love of silence (and attendant solitude) is not explicitly expressed in works of philosophy, it is behind the scenes in the lives of philosophers, often informing their utterances and positions. This is the case of that great solitary thinker Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, who wrote in *Zarathustra*: "It is the stillest words which bring the storm. Thoughts that come on doves' feet guide the world." Likewise for Samuel Beckett who, in his plays, seemed to be heading toward silence: in works such as *Breath or Act Without Words*, silence almost comes to overtake speech—it is an ideal that in his correspondences he referred to as "literature of the non-word." He elaborates further:

More and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it ... Is there any reason why that terrifyingly arbitrary materiality of the word surface should not be dissolved, as, for example, the sound surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is devoured by huge black pauses, so that for pages on end we cannot perceive it as other than a dizzying path of sounds connecting unfathomable chasms of silence?



In the rush and babble of the modern world, silence is needed more than ever.

Yahia Lababidi is the author of *Signposts to Elsewhere* (Jane Street Press), which was selected by the Independent (UK) as one of its 2008 Books of the Year. For more information, please visit www.janestreet.org/press.

Still, rather than being defined negatively—as the absence or perhaps failure of words—silence may instead be viewed positively as somehow existing before and beyond representation, a primordial essence that lurks beneath our constructed world. In the immortal formulation of the *Tao Te Ching*, “Returning to the root is silence / Silence is returning to being.” Just a pause in speech can offer us an unexpected glimpse of this—sending us spiraling down the black hole of silence, where matters are more dense, and consciousness itself seems more intense. As the silence-revering writer Emile Cioran observes, “A sudden silence in the middle of a conversation suddenly brings us back to essentials: it reveals how dearly we must pay for the invention of speech.”

It is in silence that things patiently unfurl, open up and trust us with their secrets, or reveal their hidden natures—be they shy ideas or creatures, daybreak, or a work of art. In this fundamental and seemingly privileged state, what seems to elude the world of words and sound may otherwise appear to dawn on us, perhaps since we are now in the position to overhear ourselves and tell ourselves that which we already know. Unsurprisingly, realizations and revelations are forged in this realm. Silence is, after all, the best response and conduit for our most profound experiences: Awe, Love, Death.

The Many Silences

CULTIVATING SILENCE CAN ALSO MEAN CULTIVATING ATTENTION, SO THAT WE ARE PRESENT to ourselves and the deeper life that is continually unfolding within and around us. We may begin to do so by investigating the silences available to all of us, knowing them better and learning their judicious uses. Three categories we can explore in some depth are silence as language (wordless communication), silence as entity (physical presence in nature), and silence as a kind of metaphysical portal (for contemplation, meditation, and transcendence).

As language, silence can be the thing and its opposite: eloquent or clumsy, despairing or serene. It can be polite, communicating respect, empathy, or even a form of restraint—i.e., abstaining from unkindness or from being drawn into argument or pernicious gossip.

Or it can be impolite, transmitting anger or hostility—such as a sullen, resentful silence.

Moreover, it can mean varying things within different cultural contexts. For example, a silence that is considered socially embarrassing or awkward in a Western setting is not at all so in parts of the Far East such as China or Indonesia. In fact, the contrary can be true. Most notably in Japan, where silence is deeply valued, it is eloquence that is regarded with suspicion, since verbosity is often associated with a certain superficiality.

In Japanese, there is even a word for wordless communication—*haragei*—used to refer to the preferred modes of expressing emotional matters.

Which is to say, as a means of wordless communication, silence is as fluid and protean as the emotions and situations it is born of, often conveying what words cannot. As poet Rainer Maria Rilke confesses, “Things aren’t so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that no word has ever entered.”

With their arsenal of ravishing phrases, poets are perhaps most acutely aware of how words fail us, how words are not there when we reach for them and don’t always come out right. Here is T.S. Eliot elegantly bemoaning the shortcomings of his bread and butter:

Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension,
slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place / Will not stay still.

What’s more, not all of us have the right words, or find them at all times, such as when silence lodges itself in our mouth or throat, when we are handed an unexpected piece of bad news, leaving us stunned and speechless. Confronted with the enormity of a situation, we are simply left with a silence that is as authentic, integral, and universal as body language, shrugging off the need for words, altogether.

As an entity, too, silence can be difficult to define. For it is not merely the absence of sound, but may be perceived as an actual physical presence, as well. The elemental silence found in

the natural world is a case in point: whether it is relative (in the forest or underwater) or absolute (as within the desert, before a storm or, ultimately, in outer space). There may be grades to silence in the natural world, but such encounters with it as an entity may be said to represent a kind of auditory equivalent to stillness.

Anyone who has crept upon a morning for a stroll at dawn knows this holy hush. Just as someone who has experienced sound swallowed whole in the mysterious silent underworld of the ocean/sea or drunk deeply of the quietude of desert air will also be familiar with this sense of the numinous—where Time appears to collapse and one is afforded glimpses into Eternity. Great beauty silences. Even if accompanied by the rich tapestry of the sound of creatures quietly going about their daily affairs, silence is the solemn companion of nature enthusiasts and can seem like taking the pulse of Being.

Here is how the spiritual teacher Krishnamurti describes this mystical state: “And it is only where there is space and silence that something new can be that is untouched by time/thought. That may be the most holy, the most sacred—may be. You cannot give it a name. It is perhaps the unnamable.”

Grappling with such mysticism and the unnamable is harder for philosophy, but the younger Kant makes an attempt at it: “In the universal silence of nature and in the calm of the senses the immortal spirit’s hidden faculty of knowledge speaks an ineffable language and gives [us] undeveloped concepts, which are indeed felt, but do not let themselves be described.”

Yet another category of silence is that of portal. One is said to enter and emerge from this state, as though it were an actual physical territory. We cannot forcibly break in and enter, or rush through this portal to arrive at a meditative-reflective state; instead we must patiently wait to be granted access. Auguste Rodin’s *Thinker* sculpture is a monument to this invisible art of turning inward. He is not seen surrounded by others, in the midst of conversation, but rather depicted quite alone—lost in thought and found in silence.

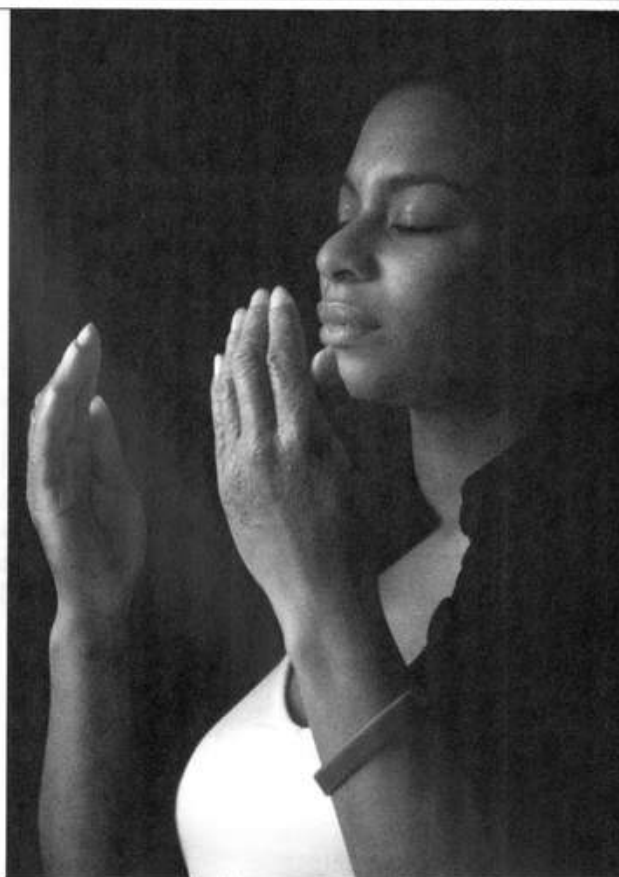
There are also temples of silence—secular spaces of worship, study, and healing where silence is cultivated—such as libraries, museums, hospitals, and cemeteries. On account of the intellectual, moral, or spiritual seriousness of such spaces, they foster a certain respectful reflection, thereby permitting us to pass through this silent portal.

Reading can act as a springboard to access this region of the soul where one is transported and one’s external surroundings seem to fall away, like so much dead skin (to the extent we may even become oblivious of our own bodies). Extolling the pleasure and spiritual edification of the written word, bibliophile Susan Sontag described reading as “that disembodied rapture ... trance-like enough to make us *feel* egoless” (italics mine).

Quiet reverie, or the art of (apparently) doing nothing, may be another route to “disembodied rapture” and can also serve as an escape from the tyranny of self, space, and time. Within this realm, we are free to travel backward and forward, conjuring up both memories and fantasies. Not as frivolous as this may seem, such flights of imagination are necessary for our sanity, affording us a creative space for playful inner work and a restorative psychic flushing out of daily toxins such as pressure or worry.

Obviously, prayer is a central portal to access this condition of blissful silence. We see it prescribed in Sufi wisdom writings, which stress the significance of seeking inner silence, or in Buddhist injunctions to let the mind become silent to attain enlightenment, or in Quakerism, as a feature of worship, where silence is an occasion for the divine to enter the heart. More extremely, in the case of Trappist monks, a lifetime commitment to silence aims to foster solitude in community as well as a mindfulness of God. All of these varying notes reverberate in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s inclusive definition of prayer as “the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul.”

Meditation, without silence, is inconceivable. Here, stillness and self-emptying are requisite in order to attain any kind of calm or peace. In mysticism—perched as it is on the precipice of all organized religions—Rudyard Kipling is repeatedly refuted, and the East and



West *do* regularly meet. Christian philosopher Max Picard, who devoted an entire book of thoughtful meditations to this subject, says, "Silence is listening." And, as attentive practitioners of this metaphysical art may sense, it can sometimes be unclear who is doing the actual listening ... us, or Silence itself.

Otherwise, dissimilar spiritual traditions—Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Native American—all agree on the importance of observing silence as a tool for inner growth and self-transformation. More recently, based on scans of Buddhist monks' brains, the young science of neuroplasticity indicates that meditation actually alters the structure and functioning of the brain. In other words, our thoughts and silences can, in effect, change our minds, and even our lives—the ultimate goal of philosophy or religion.

Moreover, these three categories of silence—communication, entity, and portal—need not inhabit separate spheres and exist in the same medium. For example, while in media technology—i.e., television and radio—silence is perceived as "dead air," the three silences are successfully employed to dramatic effect within the arts. This is evident in theatrical work, or in a piece of music, or even in stand-up comedy, where silence may be used to communicate nuance and depth, or else serve as an opportunity for viewers/listeners to pause for reflection.

Culture of Noise

PERHAPS MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, IT HAS BECOME NECESSARY TO SPEAK UP IN PRAISE OF silence, as an attempt to redress the balance in a cacophonous contemporary culture that appears alternately suspicious or outright contemptuous of silence. Living as we do, in the busyness of this modern world—hooked up, beeping, and under the false imperative of needing to keep in touch with everything—we find ourselves in the unhealthy situation of losing our silences and the sustenance that comes with them.

So we desperately rush, hurling ourselves from one activity to the next, without ever pausing to process what it is we've learned, or dilute the concentration of experience with reflection. To combat the distraction of noise, we may turn to the discipline of silence, which, practiced consciously, can be as much of a renunciation as fasting—or the ascetic exercise of denying the physical body in order to nourish our spiritual entity.

As it is, the erosion of silence in our lives is unmistakably connected with our noise-ravaged nerves or increased stress levels, as well as increasingly shortened attention spans. This, in turn, negatively affects our ability to both think and feel deeply in order to sift through the deluge of stimulus that informs our hurried and harried days. To the list of offenses resulting from the loss of our silences, we may add the corruption of the art of conversation, since no matter how effortless or ephemeral good talk may sound, it is invariably rooted in, and the product of, sustained private reflection.

Previously a portal to silence, the culture of reading is currently imperiled in favor of "information snacking" to accommodate our hectic schedules. This, coupled with the media's shrill and insistent competition for our attention, makes it necessary to guard our silences even more vigilantly. In this context, for example, we can more closely examine how the Internet affects our concentration and capacity for critical thinking. Author Nicholas Carr's critical and provocative article "Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains" (*The Atlantic*, July/August 2008) might serve as a thoughtful point of entry regarding this controversial debate.

If French philosopher Blaise Pascal is right that "all of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone," then the proliferation of talk and reality shows may be seen as symptomatic of our cultural malaise. Namely, reality shows, which actually serve to distract us *from* reality, or being present to ourselves, are precisely a reflection of our collective "inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

Just like silence, noise, too, can be the absence of sound. Noise is also the silent invasion of our inner spaces by the clutter of undigested information and unsorted emotions that pile up throughout the days and weeks. With our private spaces thus encroached upon, we risk becoming alienated from ourselves until our lives are something foreign to us.

Rather than allow ourselves to be shoved into the bathroom—perhaps the last sanctuary of personal space and reflection—we should instead question the necessity or (*continued on page 72*)

NOTES ON SILENCE

(continued from page 32)

merit of amusing and multi-tasking ourselves to death. Against the odds of what at times appears to be a conspiracy of noise, we must try to assert our birthright to retreat, reflect, and regenerate.

Solitude tends to produce an understanding of our own limitations, and it forces us to seek our own council in dealing with them. And, in turn, the insights and greater self-awareness attained in solitude eventually need to be tested in the company of others.

Emerson sums this up succinctly: "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."

Yet silence, like any controlled substance, must be handled with care. Initiates, or masters of silence—such as solitaries, thinkers, monks, hermits, and ascetics—have long known how to mine it for fortitude and insight, or to arrive at *ecstasis* ("to be or stand outside oneself"). But it is up to each individual to determine how much is desirable or useful; too much of this good thing may be counterproductive for some, even dangerous—leading to despair, madness, or even suicide.

Just as the silences of monasteries and institutional spaces are not for everyone, so too extended travels to the foreign land of silence are not for tourists. Snake-handlers of the spirit—those versed in playing with dangerous things—may engage deeply with the death-in-living that is desert dwelling, the soul-trials of solitude, or even their own shifting images in the mirror. Others, less practiced, might not endure such extreme experiences (tastes of the Limit), and might emerge damaged. Striking out fearlessly into treacherous, interior territories is not for dilettantes: deep and prolonged silence might prove the undoing of those who flirt with it, ill equipped.

"Social intercourse seduces one into self-contemplation," muses writer Franz Kafka. The aim, then, is to try to find that healthy balance—between silent fasts and noise feasts—on the slippery road to moderation. ■

SACRED EVOLUTION

(continued from page 40)

many sources. Each of these represented a particular human community or interest group. What, then, was left of revelation? Where was the authority of Scripture, if the text was *merely* human? I struggled with what it could mean to claim that God had "given us His Torah" when the Torah text itself seemed to "evaporate" into so many documents. Without that, I had no basis for believing in a God who had commanded specific forms of religious behavior. (This seemed to be the essential "payoff" question in Judaism.) So the pillars of naive faith had given way and its edifice lay in ruins. I had no answers to the great questions around which my religious life had been constructed.

I was no longer a believer, in the usual sense of that term, but I learned rather quickly that I was still a religious person, struggling with issues of faith. I still sought after God, perhaps even more so once I had given up on my naive understandings of reality. That was the true beginning of my quest, one in which the only questions that mattered were the unanswerable ones. I absorbed much of Nietzsche, Kafka, and Camus in those years of questioning. From Nietzsche came the moment of joy at the death of my childhood God and the liberation from all that authority. But this gave way rather quickly to the bleak and empty universe Kafka so poignantly described, a joyless world from which God was absent and there was no air left to breathe, no room left to live, to love, or to create. From Camus and Nikos Kazantzakis came the noble call to make meaning on my own, to defy meaninglessness with creativity and moral action. But the more I sought to *create* a framework of meaning, picking up the shattered tablets of my one-time Jewish life, the more I came to realize that I was in fact only *rediscovering* patterns that were there to be seen, and had indeed been seen and articulated by countless generations before me.

It was in the course of this re-creation that I had to come back to the question of God. Who or what was the God I still

sought—and still seek today, half a century later!—once I had accepted that I was such a "nonbeliever" in the God of my childhood? The question seemed to be whether we post-naïve seekers dare to use the word "God" any more and what we might—or might not—mean by it, while remaining personally and intellectually honest.

To explain this, I have to go back to the phrase "I was still a religious person." What can it mean to "be religious," in a Jewish (and not Buddhist) context if one does not "believe in God," at least as defined by the above parameters? It means that I still consider the sacred to be the most important and meaningful dimension of human life. "The sacred" refers to an inward, mysterious sense of awesome presence, a deeper reality than we ordinarily experience. Life bears within it the possibility of inner transcendence; the moments when we glimpse it are so rare and powerful that they call upon us to transform the rest of our lives in their wake. These moments can come upon us without warning, though they may be evoked by great beauty, by joy, by terror, or by anything that causes us to stop and interrupt our ordinary all-encompassing and yet essentially superficial perception of reality. When that *mask of ordinariness* falls away, our consciousness is left with a moment of nakedness, a confrontation with a reality that we do not know how to put into language. The astonishment of such moments, that which my most revered teacher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, termed "radical amazement," is the starting-point of my religious life. I believe, in other words, in the possibility and irreducible reality of religious experience. Such experience stands behind theology; it is the most basic datum with which the would-be theologian has to work. The awareness that derives from that range of human experiences, distilled by reflection, is the basis of religious thought, and therefore of my own work, as well.

What is the nature of this experience? It is as varied as the number of individual humans there are in the world, and potentially as multifarious as there are moments in each of those human lives. In the midst of life, our ordinariness is interrupted. This may take place as we touch one of the edges of life, in a great confrontation with the

SPECIAL SECTION: GOD AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The idea that our understanding of God transforms as we transform and grow as individuals and as a species has deep roots in contemporary theology in the Jewish and Christian worlds. Jewish thinkers put it this way: the God of Moses (the one who led us out of Egypt) is not the God of Moses Maimonides (the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages). Yet these ideas have yet to penetrate popular consciousness and reshape the way the majority of Christians and Jews think about, worship, and serve God. Nor have the "new atheists" responded to much of this thinking of the past two hundred years—they prefer to attack the more ancient and hence more easily ridiculed versions of religious thought. So when Art Green—my former schoolmate at Temple B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey, and at the Jewish Theological Seminary, who has become one of America's most respected Jewish thinkers and has been a member of our editorial board since *Tikkun* began in 1986—sent me the manuscript of his forthcoming book *Radical Judaism*, I asked him if we could use some excerpts to start a new discussion about God for our readers. We then asked some of the world's most significant and creative religious thinkers to tell us how they understand God. I hope you'll read and respond not only to Art Green, but also to the other thinkers who have miraculously kept their pieces to the short amount of space we offered them! Please send responses to letters@tikkun.org. If you'd like to share your ideas about God or respond to the perspectives presented in this section, we'll try to post them in the letters section at www.tikkun.org.

—Rabbi Michael Lerner

SACRED EVOLUTION

A Radical Jewish Perspective on God and Science

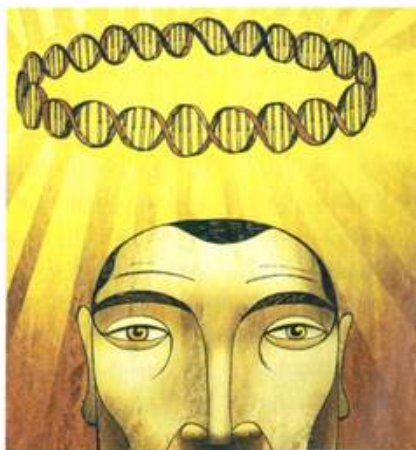
by Arthur Green

OPEN WITH A THEOLOGICAL ASSERTION. AS A RELIGIOUS person I believe that the evolution of species is the greatest sacred drama of all time. It dwarfs all the other narratives, memories, and images that so preoccupy the mind of religious traditions, including our own. We Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all over-involved with proclaiming—or questioning—the truth of our own particular stories. Did Moses really receive the Torah from God at Mount Sinai? Did Jesus truly rise from the tomb? Was Muhammad indeed God's chosen messenger? We refine our debates about these forever, each group certain as to its own narrative's place as the center of universal history. In the modern world, where all these tales are challenged, we work out sophisticated and non-literalist ways of proclaiming our faith in them. But there is a *bigger* story, infinitely bigger, and one that we all share. How did we get here, we humans, and where are we going? For more than a century and a half, educated Westerners have understood that this is the tale of evolution. But we religious folk, the great tale-tellers of our respective traditions, have been guarded and cool toward this story and have hesitated to make it our own. The time has come to embrace it and

to uncover its sacred dimensions.

I believe that "Creation," or perhaps more neutrally stated, "Origins," a topic almost entirely neglected in both Jewish and liberal Christian theology of the last century, must return as a central preoccupation in our own day. Yes, this does have much to do with the ecological agenda and the key role that religion needs to play in changing our attitudes toward the environment and resources amid which we humans live. But it also emerges from the growing

acceptance in our society of scientific explanations—those of the nuclear physicist, the geologist, the evolutionary biologist, and others, for the origins of the world we have inherited. The finality of this acceptance, which I share, seemingly means the end of a long struggle between so-called scientific and religious worldviews. This leaves those of us who still speak the language of faith in a peculiar situation. Is there then no connection between the God we know and encounter daily within all existence and the emergence and history of our universe? Does the presence of eternity we feel (whether we call ourselves "religious" or not) when we stand atop great mountains or at the ocean water's edge exist only within our minds? Is our faith nothing more than one of those big mollusk



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shells we used to put up against our ears, convinced we could hear in them the ocean's roar? Is our certainty of divine presence, so palpable to the religious soul, *merely* a poetic affirmation, corresponding to nothing in the reality described by science? Yes, we accept the scientific account of how we got here, or at least understand that the conversation about that process and its stages lies within the domain of science. Yet we cannot absent God from it entirely. Even if we have left behind the God of childhood, the One who assures and guarantees, the presence of divinity within nature remains essential to our perception of reality. A God who has no place in this process is a God who begins in the human mind, a mere *idea* of God, a post-Kantian construct created to guarantee morality, to assure us of the potential for human goodness, or for some other noble purpose. But that is not God. The One of which I speak here indeed goes back to origins and stands prior to them, though perhaps not in a clearly temporal sense. A God who underlies all being, who *is* and *dwells within* (rather than "who controls" or "oversees") the evolutionary process is the One about which or—"whom"—we tell the great sacred story, the story of existence.

I thus insist on the centrality of "Creation," but I do so from the position of one who is not quite a theist, as understood in the classical Western sense. I do not affirm a Being or a Mind that exists separate from the universe and acts upon it intelligently and willfully. This puts me quite far from the contemporary "Creationists" or from what is usually understood as "Intelligent Design" (but see more on this below). My theological position is that of a *mystical pantheist*, one who believes that God is present throughout all of existence, that Being or Y-H-W-H underlies and unifies all that is. At the same time (and this is pantheism as distinct from pantheism), this whole is mysteriously and infinitely greater than the sum of its parts, and cannot be fully known or reduced to its constituent beings. "Transcendence" in the context of such a faith does not refer to a God "out there" or "over there" somewhere beyond the universe, since I do not know the existence of such a "there." Transcendence means rather that God—or Being—is so fully present in the here-and-now of each moment that we could not possibly grasp the depth of that presence. Transcendence thus dwells *within* immanence. There is no ultimate duality here, no "God and world," no "God, world, and self," but only one Being and its many faces. Those who seek consciousness of it come to know that it is indeed

Ein Sof, without end. There is no end to its unimaginable depth, but so too there is no border, no limit, separating that unfathomable One from anything that is. Infinite Being in every instant flows through all finite beings. "Know this day and set it upon your heart that Y-H-W-H is *elohim* (Deut. 4:39)"—that God within you *is* the transcendent. And the verse concludes: "There is nothing else."

By *mystical pantheism* I mean that this underlying oneness of being is accessible to human experience and reveals itself to humans—indeed it reveals itself everywhere, always—as the deeper levels of the human mind become open to it. Access to it requires a

lifting of veils, a shifting of attention to those inner realms of human consciousness where mystics, and not a few poets, have always chosen to abide. The "radical otherness" of God, so insisted upon by Western theology, is not an ontological otherness, but an *otherness of perspective*. To open one's eyes to God is to see Being—the only Being there is—in a radically different way. Such a unitive view of reality is *entirely other* from the way we usually see things, yet it is the same reality that is being viewed. I am also one who knows that religious truth belongs to the language of poetry, not discursive prose. I recognize fully and without regret that theology is an art, not a science. We people of faith have nothing we can prove; attempts to do so only diminish what we have to offer. We can only testify, but never prove. Our strength lies in grandeur of vision, in an ability

to transport the conversation about existence and origins to a deeper plane of thinking. My faith, but also my human experience, tells me that this shift profoundly enhances our understanding of our own lives and of the world in which we live. Opening our minds, and ultimately the mind of our society, to the truth accessible from that inner "place" constitutes our best hope for inspiring change in the way we live on this earth. There is nothing *mere* about poetic vision.

This point in the discussion calls for a greater clarification of the terms "One," "Being," and "God," which I now appear to be using quite interchangeably. Am I speaking of a "what" or a "who," the reader has a right to ask. When I refer to "God," I mean the inner force of existence itself, that of which one might say, "Being *is*." I refer to it as the "One" because it is the single unifying substratum of all that is. To speak of Being as a religious person, however, is to speak of it not detachedly, in scientific "objectivity," but rather with full engagement of the self, in *love* and *awe*. These two great



emotions together characterize the religious mind and, when carried to their fullest, make for our sense of the holy. A religious person is one who perceives or experiences holiness in the encounter with existence; the forms of religious life are intended to evoke this sense of the holy. In a mental state that cannot be fully described in words, such a person *hears* Being say, "I am." All of our personifications of the One are in response to that inner "hearing."

In biblical language, the "I am" of Sinai is already there behind the first "Let there be" of Genesis. Creation *is* revelation, as the kabbalists so well understood. To say it in more neutral terms, we religious types choose to *personify* Being because we see ourselves as *living in relationship* to the underlying One. I seek to *respond* to the "I am" that I have been privileged to hear, to place myself at its service in carrying forth this great mission of the evolving life-process. To do so, I choose to personify, to call Being by this ancient name "God." In doing so, I am proclaiming my love and devotion to Being, my readiness to live a life of seeking and responding to its truth. But implied here also is a faith that in some mysterious way Being *loves me*, that it rejoices for a fleeting instant in dwelling within me, delighting in this unique form that constitutes my existence, as it delights in each of its endlessly diverse manifestations.

Creation: Reframing the Tale

WITH REGARD TO "CREATION," I UNDERSTAND THE TASK OF THE theologian to be one of *reframing*, accepting the accounts of origins and natural history offered by the scientific consensus, but helping us to view them in a different way, one that may guide us toward a more profound appreciation of that same reality. The tale of life's origins and development, including its essential building block of natural selection, is well-known to us as moderns. But what would it mean to recount that tale with our eyes truly open?

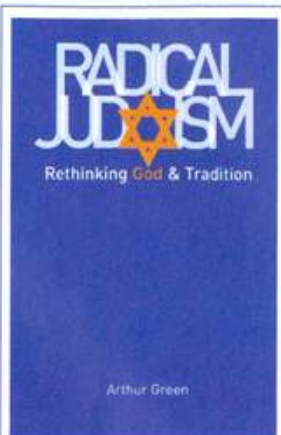
We would understand the entire course of evolution, from the simplest life-forms millions of years ago, to the great complexity of the human brain (still now only barely understood), and proceeding onward into the unknown future, to be a *meaningful* process. It is a place—perhaps even *the* place—where the sacred waits to be discovered. There is a One that reveals itself to us within and behind the great diversity of life. That One is Being itself, the constant in the endlessly changing evolutionary parade. Viewed from our end of the process, the search that leads to such discovery of that One is our human quest for meaning. But turned around, seen from the perspective of the constantly evolving life-energy, evolution can be seen as an ongoing process of *revelation* or self-manifestation. We discover; it reveals. It reveals; we discover. As the human mind advances (from our point of view), understanding more of the structure, process, and history of the ever-evolving One, we are being *given* (from its point of view) ever greater insight into who we are and how we got here.

This ongoing self-disclosure is the result of a deep and mysterious inner drive, the force of Being directed from within, however imperfectly and stumblingly, to manifest itself ever more fully, in

ever more diverse, complex, and interesting ways. That has caused it to bring about, in the long and slow course of its evolution, the emergence of a mind that can reflect upon the process, articulate it, and strive toward the life of complete awareness that will fulfill its purpose. Here on this smallish planet in the middle of an otherwise undistinguished galaxy, something so astonishing has taken place that it indeed demands to be called by the biblical term "miracle," rather than by the Greco-Latin "nature," even though the two are pointing to the exact same set of facts. The descendents of one-celled creatures grew and developed, emerged onto dry land, learned survival skills, and developed language and thought, until a subset of them could reflect on the nature of this entire process and seek to derive meaning from it.

The coming to be of "higher" or more complex forms of life, and eventually of humanity, is not brought about by the specific and conscious planning of what is sometimes called "intelligent design." But neither is it random and therefore inherently without meaning. It is rather the result of an inbuilt movement within the whole of being, the underlying dynamism of existence *striving to be manifest* ever more fully in minds that it brings forth and inhabits, through the emergence of increasingly complex and reflective selves. I think of that underlying One in immanent terms, a being or life force that dwells *within* the universe and all its forms, rather than a Creator from beyond who forms a world that is "other" and separate from its own Self. This One—the only One that truly is—lies within and behind all the diverse forms of being that have existed since the beginning of time; it is the single Being (as the Hebrew name Y-H-W-H indicates) clothed in each individual being and encompassing them all.

If we could learn to view our bio-history this way, the incredible grandeur of the evolutionary journey would immediately unfold before us. We Jews revere the memory of one Nahshon ben Aminadav, the first person to step into the Sea of Reeds after Israel left Egypt. The sea did not split, the story goes, until he was up to his neck in water. What courage! But what about the courage of the first creature *ever* to emerge from sea onto dry land? Do we appreciate the magnificence of *that* moment? Or the first to fly, to take wing into the air? Or the moment (of course each of these involves a long, slow process rather than a "moment," but the drama is no less great) when animals were divided from plants, when one sort of being was able to take nourishment directly from the soil while another was able to exist without it, developing the mechanism to "feed" on plant, and then animal, life. How is it possible, with all of them descending from the same single-celled creatures?



This article combines the first chapter of Arthur Green's forthcoming book, *Radical Judaism*, with its introduction, here titled "My Own Roots and Beginnings."

The incredibly complex *interplay* of forces and the thick web of mutual dependency among beings are no less amazing than the distance traversed in this long evolutionary journey. The interrelationship of soil, plants, and insects, or that between climate, foliage, and animal life, leave us breathless as we begin to contemplate them. Yes, it is these very intricacies and complexities that have led the fundamentalists to hold fast to the claim that there must be a greater intelligence behind it all, that such complexity can only reflect the planning of a supernatural Mind. But they miss the point of the religious moment here. Our task as religious persons is not to offer counter-scientific *explanations* for the origin of life. Our task is to *notice*, to pay attention to, the incredible wonder of it all, and to find and praise God in that moment of paying attention.

Yes, there is something “supernatural” about existence, something entirely out of the ordinary, beyond any easy expectation. But I understand the “supernatural” to reside wholly *within* the natural. The difference between them is one of perception, the degree to which our “inner eye” is open. The whole journey is indeed a supernatural one, not because some outside Being made it happen, but because Being itself—residing in those simplest and most ancient of life-forms, pushing ever forward, step after simple step, to reach where we are today—continues to elude our complete understanding. The emergence of both bees and blossoms, and the relationship between them, took place over millions of years, step by evolutionary step. How could that have happened? There is an endless ingenuity to this self-manifesting Being, an endless stream of creativity of which we are only the tiniest part. If we do not destroy or do too much irreversible damage to our planet, it will continue to bring forth ever more diverse and creative manifestations of being, long after we are gone.

The poetic reframing of our contemporary tale of origins that I am proposing here might be better understood by reference to a prior example, one with which we happen to have an intimate bond. I refer to the opening chapter of the Hebrew Bible. The authors of Genesis 1 effected a remarkable transformation of the creation myth that existed in their day. The common theology of the ancient Near East, reflected in both Canaanite and Mesopotamian sources, featured the rising up of the primal forces of chaos, represented by Yam or Tiamat, gods of the sea, against the order being imposed by the younger but more powerful sky gods. The defeat of that primordial rebellion was the background of creation; earth was established upon the carcasses of the vanquished. That tale of uprising and its bloody end, now largely forgotten, was well known to the biblical writers and their audiences. It is reflected in various passages in the prophets, Psalms, and Job, and is subtly hinted at even within the Genesis narrative. But those who wrote Genesis 1 reframed the story completely. Everything was created in harmony, willfully, by a single God who kept saying: “Good! Good!” in response to His creations, giving His blessing to each.

That reshaped tale helped to form and sustain Western civilization for several thousand years. The faith that God loves and

affirms Creation provides the moral undergirding for all of Western religion, manifest differently in each of three faiths. Some believed it naively and literally; others interpreted it and tried to reconcile it with various other ways of thinking. I am suggesting that we need to undertake a similar effort of transformation for our current “Creation” story. Our civilization has been transformed in the last century and a half in no small part by our acceptance of a new series of tales of origin, an account that begins with the Big Bang (which itself may turn out to be myth) and proceeds through the long saga of the origins of our solar system, the geo-history of our planet, the emergence of life, and biological evolution. Nuclear physicists and cosmologists have become the new kabbalists of our age, speculating in ever more refined ways on the first few seconds of existence, much as our mystical sages meditated on the highest triad of the ten divine emanations. The picture science offers is one of unimaginably violent explosion, of particles hurtling through indescribably vast reaches of space, and only then of the incredible emergence of an order—solar systems, gravity, orbits, air, and water—that makes for the possibility of life’s existence. As living things emerge and develop we again are presented with a tale of violent and bloody struggle, that of each species and creature to eat and not be eaten, to strive for its moment at the top of the evolutionary mound of corpses. This story too, I am suggesting, is in need of reformulation by a new and powerful harmonistic vision, one that will allow even the weakest and most threatened of creatures a legitimate place in this world and will call upon us not to wipe it out by careless whim. This is the role of today’s religion.

How would such a reframed tale read? It would be a narrative of the great reaching out by the inner One that inhabits each of us and binds us all together, a constant stretching forth of Y-H-W-H (“Being”) in the adventure of becoming HWYH (Hebrew for “being” or “existence”), or of the One garbing itself in the multi-colored garment of diversity and multiplicity. Every creature and each cell within it would be viewed as part of this tale, a mini-adventure within the infinitely complex narrative web that embraces us all. The meaning of this great journey would remain quite mysterious, but with a glimmer of hope that somewhere in the distant future “we” might figure it all out. The evolutionary movement forward would be seen as a striving toward complexity, toward ever-thicker and ever-richer patterns of self-manifestation.

Does this One know where it is going? Here I come trickily close to, yet remain distinct from, the Intelligent Design advocates as they are usually understood. On the one hand, I do not attribute human-like consciousness to the One. There is no “plan” of Creation, no sense that humans are the apex or final goal of the process. I do not believe that the complexity or intricacy of the natural order is *evidence* of such design. As I said, we religious folk have no evidence, only testimony. Any attempt to claim otherwise only confuses the picture. On the other hand, however, it is fair to say that all of mind and consciousness ever to exist are part of the One. Mystics have always understood that this One transcends time, as the name Y-H-W-H itself indicates. All minds are thus one



with Mind, as all beings are contained within Being. In this sense we can say that the fullness of Being's self-manifestation, including our understanding of it, is there from the start, not in the sense of active or intentional foreknowledge, but as potential that is ever unfolding. The One "knows" all because the One *is* all, all that ever was, is, and will be, in an undivided Self.

The reader who is aware of Jewish mystical language will understand that this work is a rereading of contemporary evolutionary theory in the light of kabbalistic thought. Kabbalah understands all of existence as eternally pouring forth from *chochmah*, primordial Wisdom or Mind. *Chochmah* is the primal point of existence, symbolized by the Hebrew letter *yod*, which is itself hardly more than a dot. This point, infinitesimally small, is the proverbial "little that contains a lot." Within it lies the entire unfolding of existence, every stage in the evolutionary journey, every plant and animal as it will live, reproduce (or not) and die, all of humanity and all that lies beyond us in the distant future. It all exists in a literal sense of *potential* (meaning that its potency, its power, is all fully present) in that primal point. In our contemporary language, that point is the instant of the Big Bang, the moment that contains the energy of existence in all its intensity. From there it flows forward into existence, garbing or "actualizing" itself at each stage in endless forms of existence.

To say this in another way, also derived from kabbalistic language, I am depicting the entire course of evolution as the infinitely varied self-garbing of an endless energy flow. All being exists in an eternal dialectic of *hitpashtut*, the emanatory flowing forth of that single energy, and *hitlabeshut*, the garbing of that energy in distinctive forms. But now we add an important post-Darwinian caveat to that mystical view of existence.

The only means this One has in this process of self-manifestation are those of natural selection and its resulting patterns of change and growth. It *is* nature (yes, "nature," if its awesome and mysterious self is acknowledged, could be another name for that which I have called "God," "the One," and "Being"). Hence the length and slowness of the journey. But precisely in this lies the utterly marvelous nature of what has come forth, step after single step. To see that process with the eye of wonder is the starting point of religious awareness.

As more highly developed forms of animal life emerge, the move forward of natural selection takes place partly in the form of aggression and competition, each creature and species grasping at its chance to survive and prosper. The competition for food and other resources, the devices created by males and females of various species to attract mates and reproduce, the struggle to find and eat one's prey rather than be consumed by one's predators, are all essential parts of the story, indeed *our* story. This is an aspect of our biological legacy that we need to own and confront. We will not understand our own human nature without taking into account the fierce struggle we underwent to arrive and to achieve the dominance we have over this planet, for better and worse. But that same mysterious inner process also brings about more cooperative forms of societal organization, in which such creatures as ants, bees, and humans learn to work together toward fulfilling their species' goals. All of this is part of our biological legacy. Indeed it is in grasping how these two trends, the competitive and the collaborative, combine and interact that we come to understand how our species survives, and perhaps even catch a glimpse of what humanity essentially is. More importantly, because we can achieve this understanding, we can make the value decisions as to which

aspects of that biological heritage we want to take the lead as we proceed with our lives, both as individuals and as a species.

But it would also be disingenuous of me as a human to say that the emergence of human consciousness, even the ability to be thinking and writing about these very matters, is nothing more than a small series in the unfolding linear process wrought by natural selection. Yes, that is indeed *how* we came about. But there is a different *meaning* to human existence that cannot be denied. The self-reflective consciousness of humans, combined with our ability to take a long bio-historical view of the whole unfolding that lies behind (and ahead of) us, makes a difference. Yes, all creatures are doing the “work of God” by existing, feeding, reproducing, and moving the evolutionary process forward. But we humans, especially in our age, are called upon to do that work in a different way. We have emerged as partners of the One in the survival and maintenance of this planet and all the precious attainments that have evolved here. Without our help, it will not continue to thrive. Being has thus turned a corner, or come back in a self-reflexive circle, as it manifests itself in the human mind.

The Call to Adam

IN THE LONG MARCH TOWARD INCREASED COMPLEXITY AND ability of species, the emergence of the human brain is an important and transformative “moment.” We humans represent a significant step forward in the evolutionary path toward the self-articulation and self-fulfillment of that One. If the purpose of the journey is one of manifestation or becoming known, the development of our powers of reflective consciousness are surely key. But let me say immediately that I do not view us humans—surely not as we are now—to be the end or purpose of evolution. We, like all other species, are a step along the way. If existence survives on this planet, Mind will one day be manifest to a degree far beyond our present ability to comprehend or predict. On *that* day, Scripture says, “earth will be filled with knowledge of Y-H-W-H as water fills the sea” (Isa. 11:9)—just that wholly and naturally.

Because we humans represent a new and important step in this journey, the One manifest within us calls out to us in a particular human way. It addresses each of us with something more than the cry “Survive!” that is its instinct-borne call to every creature. We children of Adam (that’s how you say “humans” in Hebrew, and note that here the language itself leads me to migrate farther into the realm of myth) are addressed with the word the God of Genesis used to call out to the first human: *Ayeka?* “Where are you?” The indwelling One asks this of every person, of every human embodiment of its own single Self. This question means “Where are you in helping Me to carry this project forward?” Are you extending My work of self-manifestation, participating as you should in the ongoing evolutionary process, the eternal reaching toward knowing and fulfilling the One that is all of life’s goal? That is why you are here, tumbling and stumbling forward from one generation to the next! *What are you doing about it?*

“Where are you?” calls out to us in three distinctly human dimensions. The first of these is mental or intellectual: “Are you stretching your mind to move forward, to carry on the evolutionary process in the realm of understanding, as we think in ever more sophisticated and refined ways about the nature of existence and its unity?” Evolution does not end with the emergence of humanity. The process continues unabated, reflected in the growth of societies and civilizations over the millennia. The imperative to stretch the mind includes scientific thought, the ongoing attempt to understand and unpack the mysteries of our universe. But it also embraces the humanities and the arts, the expanding of human consciousness in more subtle ways. Some of the highest manifestation of this ongoing evolutionary process are to be found in our ideas and images of God, as we move from primitive tribal gods and local nature deities through classical polytheism (the “pantheon” of gods), on to primitive monolatry (there is but one god worthy of worship), into true universal monotheism, and then toward greater abstraction and depth of thought. All of these are stages on the road toward that total comprehension of Being in its oneness that lies somewhere in our future. In our own day this quest takes place both in the scientific community, in the search for a contemporary understanding of the life force or a unified field theory and in the growing interest in monistic philosophies, including those rooted in Vedanta or Buddhism, that have begun to take root in the post-modern West. “Where are you?” Are you stretching your mind to its fullest to know the One?

The second way in which this “Where are you?” calls out to us involves a stretching of the human heart to become more open, more aware. If you believe as I do that the presence of God is everywhere, our chief task is that of becoming aware. But that job is not only an intellectual one; it involves heart as well as mind. God is everywhere, but we build walls around ourselves, emotional walls, barricades of defensiveness, because we are too threatened by the oneness of Being to let ourselves be open to it. “Where are you?” demands of us a greater openness to our own vulnerability



DETAIL FROM "BLUE MOUNTAINS OF LONGEVITY" BY IMAGO DEI (WWW.IMAGODEIART.COM)

and dependence on forces beyond ourselves than our frail ego is willing to accept. The walls behind which we barricade ourselves are the illusions of our strength and individual immortality, the sense that there is nothing more important than our own egos and the superficial pursuits toward which most of our lives have somehow become devoted. Liberation into the life of the spirit means doing the hard work of breaking through those self-created protections and coming face to face with the ultimate frailty of our lives and the great religious question that hovers over us. Only as we face this challenge do we begin to let go of that which separates us from the totality of being or the all-embracing presence of the One. The spiritual work that each of us has to do consists primarily of letting go, allowing that presence to enter our consciousness and transform us. In the course of this process we enable ourselves to become *givers* or fonts of blessing in the grand economy of existence, rather than *consumers* who simply take all for ourselves without giving back to life. "Where are you?" Are you stretching your heart to open as widely as it can?

The third area in which "Where are you?" calls upon us is that of the human deed. It is not enough to reach forth with mind and heart; these alone will not transform the world. *Every* human being is the image of God. Every creature and life-form is a garbing of divine presence. The way in which we treat them and relate to them is the ultimate testing-ground of our own religious consciousness. The One seeks to be known and loved in each of its endless manifestations. The purpose of our growing awareness is to reach out and appreciate all things for what they really are. This is especially true with regard to our fellow humans. That every human being is the image of God is Judaism's most basic moral truth. We need to help all humans to discover this dimension of their own existence in whatever terms they may choose to articulate it. We recognize that this truth may be depicted differently in the varied religious and secular languages of human culture. We do not require others to accept the language of Judaism, but we do see justice, decency, and civility to one another as universal human imperatives that stem directly from the reality that we call *tselem elohim*, the image of God. A person cannot be expected to discover the image of God within him or herself as long as he is hungry, or as long as she is homeless or degraded by poverty, addictions, or the seemingly overwhelming burdens of everyday life. Our task has to be to lessen and lighten those burdens as ways of helping all to see the radiant presence that surrounds us and fills us in each moment. In the realm of "heart" it was illusory walls we had to remove in order to see that light. But in the realm of "deed" the forces that block out the light are quite concrete—social, political, or economic barriers—and they too have to become the object of our attention as people and communities of faith. "Where are you?" Are you engaged in the work given to you by the call of God?

All of these aspects of the call are the stuff of Jewish moral theology. In a sense I am commenting here on the opening teaching



of the Talmud, the great treasury of rabbinic law and wisdom. Although the Talmud seems to begin with discussion of prayer and its proper hour, buried within it lies a little treatise called *Avot*, "Principles," an eternal favorite of Jewish moral teachers. This tractate was meant to serve as an introduction to the Talmud (or perhaps a concluding summation?). Hence it begins with a superscription, telling us whence authority for the Law is derived: "Moses received Torah from Sinai and gave it to Joshua, who gave it to the judges, who gave it to the prophets, who gave it to the elders" and so forth. But then the first teaching is stated: "*The world stands upon three things: on Torah* (teaching, wisdom, the cultivation of awareness), *on Worship* (the struggle to open the heart), and *on Deeds of Kindness* (the active transformation of the world; the bringing about of "God's kingdom")."

In asserting that humans are "called" in a distinctive way by the One that dwells within us, I also realize that I am making a claim for our species that sounds like we are the apex or final goal of this ongoing self-disclosing process that takes place within all creatures. Far from it! I do believe that there is an inbuilt drive toward greater complexity and higher forms of consciousness, in which the emergence of the human brain is a most significant step. But again I want to acknowledge that the ultimate stages of this process lie far, far beyond us, as far beyond our awareness and sensitivities as our mind is from those we consider much simpler and more "primitive" forms of life. Living as we do at the dawn of a new age, one in which the human mind will be augmented and

THE GAP GOD OPENS

by John D. Caputo

GOD AS A HIGHEST BEING—A STEADY HAND AT THE WHEEL of the universe, ordering all things to good purpose, the spanning providential eye o'erseeing all—has had a good run. But in our postmodern condition we acknowledge the instability of traditional foundations, the ambiguities of the old absolutes, the complexity of endlessly linking systems without closure (the "Internet" is very postmodern). The world is neither a neat, divinely run cosmos nor pure chaos, but rather what James Joyce called so prophetically "chaosmos," a dance of probabilities sometimes producing improbable results.

That fits with biblical creation: in the beginning, at the time God was creating the world, the elements were already there, as old as God. The Bible begins with a "B" (bet, *bereshit*), not an A (aleph). The first is already invaded by the second (just as "deconstruction" would predict). The biblical elements were too feminine for the later *ex nihilo* theologians, who preferred a show of divine testosterone. The creator had to do the best he could with what he had to work with, then hope for the best, like the rest of us. Faith is not a safe harbor, but risky business. God is not a warranty for a well-run world, but the name of a promise, an unkept promise, where every promise is also a risk, a flicker of hope on a suffering planet.

I do not believe in the existence of God, but in God's insistence. I do not say God "exists," but that God calls, God calls upon us, like an unwelcome interruption, a quiet but insistent solicitation, which may or may not come true. The work of theology is not to spell out the bells and whistles adorning a heavenly being, but to meditate upon everything we are here called to, everything we are trying to recall, in and under the name of God. In a postmodern world, this monotheistic name does not have a monopoly. God emerges here and there, often under other names, not in the bound volumes of theology but in loose papers that describe a more underlying and insecure faith, a more restless hope, a more deep-set but unfulfilled promise or desire, a desire beyond desire that is never satisfied. I do not know what I desire when I desire God, where that non-knowing is not a lack but the open-ended venture in the human adventure, the promise/risk, the very structure of hope and expectation, not this Messiah or that, but a messianic expectation not immune from

secretly hoping the Messiah never shows up.

God does not bring closure but a gap. A God of the gaps is not the gap God fills, but the gap God opens. The name of God makes the present a space troubled by an immemorial past and an unforeseeable future. "Good, good," indeed very good. That is not a declaration of fact, but a promise on which we are expected to make good. And nobody is guaranteeing anything. ■



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THE GOD OF A TALMUDIST

by Aryeh Cohen

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD (MENAHOT 29B) SAYS THAT when Moses arrived at the peak of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, he found God attaching the flourishes to the tops of the letters of the Torah scroll. Moses demanded to know why, with all of Israel waiting for the Torah, God was tarrying with this bit of rococo. God replied that in the future there would arise a sage by the name of Akiva who would derive great wisdom from these jots and tittles.

In this telling, the Torah that Akiva teaches is way beyond Moses's grasp, and God's decision to use Moses as the lawgiver is inscrutable.

The practice of Talmud—the documentation and interrogation, reading and constructing of legal difference and distinction—is not mythic storytelling, but it is grounded in this mythos. This practice, which splits hairs and has caused the hair-pulling of many mystics, is exactly what Akiva taught. The practice is grounded not only in the mythic encounter of Moses with God and Akiva but in Creation itself. Creation is separation and distinction—light from darkness, upper waters from lower waters, land from sea. This is the practice of law—distinguishing categories, creating new categories, creating the world of pure and impure, forbidden and permitted, just and unjust. It is in the practice of the *shakla ve-tarya* (the give and take of legal and intellectual discourse) that the Kingdom of Heaven, the province of the just and The Just, is created. The God

of a talmudist, or at least this talmudist, is the God that generates and is claimed by law, the God that is implicated in and is therefore open to be judged by the categories of law writ large.

The God of the Talmud is also God in Exile—mourning, unable to end the Exile, living in the brokenness. God's absence is very present. It is in this space that justice can happen—that people can act justly and create just societies. These are the four cubits of the law. This is the space within which one not only responds to the Other in front of one, but also in which, with the mediation of the institutions of law, one responds to the call of the Stranger whom one has never actually met.

In the final scene of the talmudic myth of Sinai recounted above, Moses asks God about Akiva's reward for all the Torah that he has studied and taught. God sends Moses forward in time again to the marketplaces where they are weighing out Akiva's flesh after he has been martyred. Again Moses challenges God: "This is the reward for teaching Torah?" Again God refuses to explain.

Torah was destined for and is needed in a broken and unredeemed world in which we are commanded to create just societies. It is in the practice of justice that God exists and that redemption may happen. There are no promises. God could not keep Akiva from martyrdom, nor did this bother Akiva, whose lust for Torah I embrace as the desire to do the quotidian and sublime work of justice for its own sake. ■

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THE LURE OF LOVE DIVINE: Mystery, Spirit, Process, Liberation

by Gary Dorrien

IN 1948 PHILOSOPHER BERTRAND RUSSELL AND JESUIT philosopher Frederick Copleston conducted a famous BBC radio debate on the existence of God. Copleston contended that God's existence was provable, and Russell disagreed. But the two philosophers readily agreed that God, if God existed, would be "a supreme personal being, distinct

from the world and creator of the world."

That was too easy, and typical. Philosophy of religion debates about God's existence often rush past the great question of what God might be, settling for positions about an assumed God. The traditions of theology that speak to me undercut any such assumption that the nature of divine reality is readily definable.

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Augustine put it best, cautioning that anything that one understands is not God. The apophatic mystical tradition of Meister Eckhart, Jan Ruysbroeck, and Nicholas of Cusa powerfully insisted that all ways of positively naming and describing God are inadequate, even as the experience of God's wisdom in the divine Logos and love in the Spirit are central clues to the divine mystery. God is objectively definable only negatively, as that which God is not. The neo-Calvinist tradition of theology fashioned by Karl Barth got to a similar emphasis by a very different route, stressing the incomprehensible otherness of the veiled source of revelation. God is the Wholly Other mystery whose holiness is violated as soon as God acquires a name.

In much of the liberal tradition of theological reflection to which I belong, an overconfident attachment to Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic experientialism caused liberals to downplay negative theology and the sense of God as ineffable mystery. As long as liberals thought that Western modernity was saving the world, most of them had little use for mysticism and mystery, and for decades they treated the Barthian revolt against liberalism as a reactionary throwback.

Much of liberal theology took the post-Kantian transcendentalist or Hegelian options of construing the great "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 as a sign of the identity of thought and being. Self-knowing Spirit arises through the dialectical realization and necessary movement of consciousness in its immediacy. Spirit empties itself into the world of sensuous particularity in its creation of the world as an experience of itself, creating a world by becoming an other to itself. God's self-consciousness knows itself in human knowing; reality is precisely the self-thinking of Spirit.

This tradition of transcendental idealism, epitomized in Hegel and F. W. J. Schelling and reformulated by Paul Tillich, remains a deep wellspring in liberal theology and in me. It (excluding Tillich) belongs to a broader tradition of process thought that includes Heraclitus, Theravada Buddhism, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and modern process theology. Becoming, event, and relatedness are fundamental categories of understanding in process thought. Events are the fundamental things, the immanent movement of creativity itself. God is the lure of love divine for creative transformation and the flourishing of life.

This is the first of three "God is" affirmations that I want to make. My life would be less complicated if I could just leave it there. But every word of this sentence must be qualified by apophatic caution, and unlike much of Whiteheadian theology, I do not believe that God and creativity compete for space, or that being-language necessarily goes with atemporal cosmology, or that the futurity of Jewish and Christian faith is built into the nature of things. God may be in process, but God must not

be subject to process; otherwise God would be subject to passage. God is the creative power of being that makes possible the process of becoming, the dynamic Ultimate power transcending contingency and temporality. As Michael Wyschogrod aptly observes, process thought has a pronounced tendency to diminish the ethical import of Jewish faith by naturalizing it, turning the divine promise of an ethical futurity into something embedded in creation.

Above all, the crucial test of creative transformation is the keynote of all liberation theologies: the focus on overthrowing structures of domination and oppression. Liberation theology changed the subject to the liberation of oppressed peoples from oppression and dependency. Oppression is multifaceted, concrete, and particular. It does not reduce to concerns about the fair distribution of things, nor is it best approached within a universal theory of justice. Racism, sexism, exploitation, cultural imperialism, violence, and exclusion involve social structures and relations that include, but also transcend, problems of distributive justice. Thus, creative transformation is about overthrowing specific forms of domination and oppression, and God is the partisan, liberating power of the oppressed in their struggle for justice. ■



Gary Dorrien writes, "God is the partisan, liberating power of the oppressed in their struggle for justice." But the country that prints "In God We Trust" on its money has trusted instead in teaching torture and state terrorism to Latin American armies at the Army School of the Americas. Here the Rev. Roy Bourgeois, foreground center, leads the annual demonstration against the school in Columbus, Georgia.

GOD, IN WHOM ...

by Diana L. Eck

THE WORDS THAT COME MOST AUTHENTICALLY FROM the heart when I speak of God are these from one of our most common prayers: "Eternal God, *in whom* we live and move and have our being." Granted, when Paul used these words in addressing the people of Athens, he cribbed from a Greek poet to communicate in a new context. Now, fully part of Christian prayer, these words remind me that God is not "out there," nor is God "ours." No, we—and that means all of us—live *within* the complex, vast, intricate, and

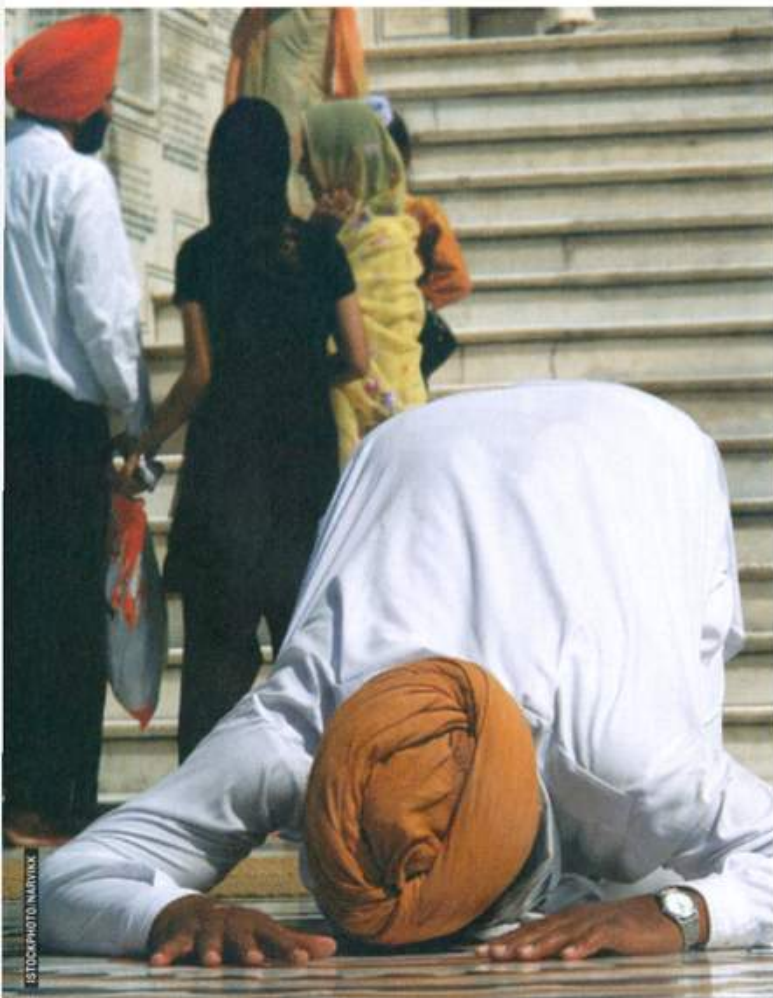
ever-evolving being of the one we call God. Our spiritual life is not about being lifted out of the mundane, but rather about *recognizing* the infinite faces and facets of the one *in whom* we live. It is about growing in knowledge of the One *in whom*. It is about the deep-seeing of prayer and meditation and the deep-seeing of scientific and humanistic research.

Of course, the one we call God transcends our own understanding, even our deepest insight. Our compass and guide is to know that the most important thing for us to know is what we cannot fully know, but try to know. Those of us who are Christians evoke the complexity and mystery of God with the mind-boggling language of the Trinity. Jews write the unpronounceable "I am" who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Muslims do not image God in any form at all, and Hindus speak of 330 million gods, which perhaps amounts to the same thing. As the *Taittiriya Upanishad* puts it, Being itself is that "whence mind and speech, having no hold, fall back."

But we don't leave it there. Faith is personal. My faith as a Christian puts it this way: the One *in whom* we live and move and have our being is not simply a cosmic abstraction. In this Being, we are not aliens, but participants. The *in whom* is also as close and intimate as breath itself: the fire, energy, and intuition we speak of as the Holy Spirit. And the *in whom* is part of the unfolding of the human story, the one we see in Jesus Christ, who is nowhere if not present, who calls us from our workshops and nets into relationships of risk and love, who cherishes the marginalized, who suffers and dies along with us, and who appears to us on countless roads to Emmaus when we do not recognize him at all. Our task is to open our eyes, to see.

Our stories differ, but as human beings we glimpse the vastness *in whom*, but live in the presence, right here. Allah is as "close as our jugular vein," as Muslims put it. Campantar, a seventh-century Tamil poet beautifully translated by Indira Peterson, praises Lord Shiva, who spins the cosmos out of his very being, and also writes of Shiva's presence in his village by the sea:

He loves Venkuru, where, at night,
waves dash against the shore, and scatter
shells and oysters on the sand ... ■



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A CALL FOR SACRED BIOLOGISTS:

Please Announce Yourself

by Peter Gabel

IF "THE EVOLUTION OF SPECIES IS THE GREATEST SACRED drama of all time," as Art Green claims in his beautiful essay, then we need sacred biologists to help us witness and interpret it.

We can certainly appreciate Charles Darwin for his insight into the existence of evolution, but we must also recognize how much his view of the evolutionary process itself was cramped by the so-called "scientific method" and its despiritualized way of apprehending the world. The scientific method seeks its limited truths by standing back from phenomena and grasping the world "objectively" through what it imagines to be neutral observation, but what is in reality a biased way of looking at things with an eye devoid of spirit. Thus it was understandable that Darwin, as a practitioner of this method, would conceive that evolution could be explained by natural selection—by the idea that the species evolve through accidental adaptive changes from a common ancestor, changes across generations that favor the material fact of survival. If there is more going on—for example, a sacred drama in which Being is seeking to make itself manifest through love incarnated through potentially infinite historical forms—Darwin would not have been able to see it. His neutral observation rendered the spiritual dimension invisible because it neutralized the "living things" he observed.

Natural selection is certainly part of the story—namely, the part that pertains to mere material survival in the face of transformations in climatic and other material conditions. But if we

understand the radiance of life as Art Green does, we must newly attend to the Being of plants and animals, to the extraordinary unfolding of their interior presence manifested across the generations, to the meaning of the plant's branches outstretched toward the sun, to the meaning of the panda's long and eventually successful struggle to grip bamboo with an opposable thumb, and to the meaning of the emergence of self-consciousness in humans like ourselves as an upward

movement of historical awareness, of Being itself becoming aware of itself. To say it's all natural selection in the service of survival is analogous to Bill Clinton and now perhaps Barack Obama believing that "it's the economy, stupid" when it comes to the longings of human beings, human beings who in truth want not merely to survive but to become fully present to each other through love and recognition. It's a way of seeing that fails to apprehend what Teilhard de Chardin called "the within of things," the beautiful effort of the soul to manifest itself more and more fully through the unfolding of historical forms.

To understand the sacred drama of the evolutionary process, we need the help of evolutionary biologists who are not neutral observers in the classically liberal sense, but who connect the sacred within themselves to the sacred dimension of what they observe in the natural world. We need biologists who, to use Art Green's words, engage in a "letting go" that allows them to open themselves "with full engagement of the self in love and awe" to the observation and understanding of all animate life, and who understand instinctively that when it



"Submerged In His Erotic Mystification" by Christopher Reiger. Watercolor, gouache, sumi ink, and marker on Arches paper.

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comes to scientific research, it is the quality of the awareness in the subject that determines what is visible in the object. These biologists could help us understand why plants share water during droughts (an empirical fact that puzzles materialist science); or how these same plants "lean toward the light" with branches, stems, and leaves stretching toward the sun in a sensual unity that inspires us to water and attend to them in a way that mere "photosynthesis" could never do; or the role of joy in bird flight and in the evolution of the wing (for the sanderling must be able to "whirl" with his community); or the role of love in the development of the kangaroo's pouch.

The point here is that these physical and morphological phenomena that normal science today describes in a largely anatomical and functional way (i.e., that such-and-such trait developed "in the service of survival") in truth occur in a spiritual and social milieu that must be compassionately and lovingly perceived, patiently studied, and evocatively illuminated. Only in this way will the theory of evolution align itself with the truth that spirit and matter form an indissoluble unity, and that we can only be the outcome of the evolutionary process that Darwin says we are if we are related "from the inside," via the "within of things," to the life that preceded and gave birth to us. ■

THERE CAN BE NO UNIVERSAL TALK OF GOD

by Jeffrey Kuan

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

AS A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN, HOW DO I TALK ABOUT God in the twenty-first century? I have chosen to ground my life in the belief of God to provide me with a moral and ethical compass, but that does not solve the question of how I talk about this God.

Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55 of the biblical book of Isaiah) long ago demonstrated awareness of the limits and inadequacy of the human mind to understand God. This problem is in part confined by human language. Language is the mode of our understanding, and our language controls our understanding. In the midst of such a situation, how can one appropriately talk about God? Are we not able to speak of God only insofar as our language permits us? Moreover, if God's thoughts are not our thoughts, then even if we are able to speak of God through our human language, that does not necessarily mean that we have understood God. Thomas Aquinas notes, "it is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God." He goes on to suggest that we can only speak of God analogically and metaphorically.

God, ultimately, is a mystery. The mystery of God is far too great for us to comprehend in its entirety. All we are left are

but glimpses of who this God is. As a Christian theologian, I believe that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is but a glimpse of God, a limited perspective of who God is. Humanity has been on a journey to uncover this mystery. Generations and cultures share in this journey and quest to have glimpses of the divine.

Any talk about the divine, then, is a construct. Having a glimpse of the divine, we use our inherently limited language to construct a picture of who this God is. Moreover, we bring into this constructive effort of speaking of God languages, ideas, and concepts that are contextually and culturally influenced. We are only able to talk about God out of our lived experience, out of the knowledge we have acquired, and out of how our society and culture have formed us. Such a talk of God, therefore, is always particular and can never be universal.

As a progressive Christian, therefore, I have found that such talk of God shapes my life of faith living in the mystery of God. This living in the mystery of God has helped me to acknowledge and accept the divine as revealed in the lives of people of other faith traditions and to relate to them with respect and appreciation. ■

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THE TESTIMONY OF FAITH TO THE ULTIMATE ORIGIN

by Hans Küng

SCIENCE CAN NEITHER CONFIRM NOR REFUTE WHAT THE two accounts of Genesis proclaim as their clear message: in the beginning of the world is God. So it is not “in the beginning was the Bang,” but “in the beginning was the word, the will, and there was light; there was energy, matter, space, and time.”

Creation of Space and Time from Nothing

HERE WE ARE SPEAKING ONLY IN AN INAUTHENTIC WAY OF A “before” the creation of the world. What was God doing before he created heaven and earth? Augustine, in chapter 11 of his *Confessions*, already gave a precise answer to this question, which he regarded as impertinent. He was brief and terse: the question was meaningless; the question about the “before” was superfluous. Why? Because the world was not created in time, but with time; to this degree Einstein agreed with him. So only the creator is “before” the cosmos, only eternity is “before” time; here Augustine goes further than Einstein and addresses God: “Furthermore, although you are before time, it is not in time that you precede it. If this were so, you would not be before all time. It is in eternity, which is supreme over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time.” Thus from a theological perspective the act of creation is a timeless act; it comes about through time. And time is created time, created time-space, created space-time.

Now what does it mean to talk of creating the world “from nothing”? In the Bible, as I have said, this is only a later notion, the fruit of Hellenistic reflection. It does not mean the nothing becoming independent, as it were an empty black space before or alongside God. Nothingness must not be confused either with the “vacuum” of modern particle physics, whose “fluctuations” perhaps stand at the beginning of our universe, and which is in no way a nothing, but a something. What is meant rather is absolute nothing, which excludes any material cause in the act of creation. Creation “from nothing” is the philosophical and theological expression of the fact that the world and human beings along with space and time owe themselves solely to God



and not to another cause.

But God does not owe himself to any cause. One may not even call God *causa sui* (cause of himself), as Descartes and Spinoza did. He is not caused at all. He is by definition the uncaused reality, because it is eternal and perfect: *Id quo maius cogitari nequit*—“that than which nothing greater can be thought” (Anselm of Canterbury, Descartes). The Bible does not philosophize about this. But it does express the conviction that the world is radically dependent on God as the author and sustainer of all being yet also remains independent of God. Christian theology has maintained that creation continues: *creatio continua*. For our present understanding, only in this way is the coming to being of

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"Connected" by Peter Lewis. Oil, five feet by six feet.

the world as an ongoing process in time possible as a process that does not exclude the origination of new structures but includes them.

Creation from nothing and ongoing creation must thus be as a unity—both are the condition of the possibility of physical process generally. As U. Lüke wrote in *Kosmologie* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004): "*Creatio continua* and *creatio ex nihilo* would simply be two names for one and the same creative activity of the eternal God, itself timeless and at the same time appointing time. And this one and the same creative activity of God would not lie beyond in a singularity billions of years away, but would be strictly present to us, beyond our control, but nearer to us than we are to ourselves."

What Is the Meaning of Belief in Creation Today?

IN IMAGES AND PARABLES OF THEIR TIME, THE BIBLICAL accounts of creation answer simple basic questions that also arise for human beings of today and that science cannot answer with its method and language. What are answered in the Bible are not purely theoretical questions but elementary existential questions:

- What was at the beginning? The good God, who is the origin of each and all.
- Is anything else (star, animal, or human being) God alongside God? No, there is no God but God.
- But aren't a good principle and an evil principle obviously fighting one another in world history? No, God is the good God who is not in any competition with any evil or demonic counterprinciple.
- Isn't part of reality of a lesser quality: matter as compared to spirit, sexuality as compared to spirituality? By no means—the world of the good creator God is fundamentally good, and thus also are matter, the human body, and sexuality. "God saw all that he had made and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).
- What is the goal of the process of creation? The human being—not isolated but in the midst of the cosmos—is the great goal of the process of creation. According to the Bible, it is not first a redemption but already the creation that represents God's gracious concern for the world and human beings. The preservation of the world can be seen as continued creation and evolution.

We can ask ourselves: Is it pure chance that modern science could develop in particular against the background of the Jewish and Christian doctrine of creation? Two basic insights that the Qur'an also stresses were beyond doubt helpful presuppositions here:

- The world is not God; it is created and not holy in itself; it has been at the disposal of human beings.
- The world is not chaos but ordered, cosmos; it may be used, built on, investigated by human beings.

So what sense can it still make today in respect to the beginning of the world not only—scientifically—to speak of a Big Bang, of models of the world and theories of the cosmos, but also with full justification—theologically—to speak of a God who has created the cosmos, as countless people from the Hebrew Bible on—Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but also many others—have confessed time and again?

Belief in creation adds nothing to the instrumental knowledge that science has so infinitely enriched; it does not offer any scientific information. But creation faith gives us an orientating knowledge, particularly in a time of rapid scientific, economic, cultural, and political revolutions and therefore of uprooting and loss of orientation. It allows people to discover a meaning in life and in the process of evolution, and may provide them with standards for behavior and an ultimate security in this unimaginably great universe. Even in the age of space travel, when they reflect on the amazing results of astrophysics and as always look out at the starry night sky, people will ask themselves: What does it all mean? Where is it going? Does nothingness explain anything? Is reason satisfied with that?

The only serious alternative—one that pure reason, like so much else, cannot prove because it transcends its horizon of experience, yet for which there are good reasons, an answer that is thus completely rational—is that the whole does not come from a Big Bang but from an origin. It comes from that first creative ground of grounds that we call God, the creator God.

Even if I cannot prove it, I can still assert it with good reason, in that enlightened trust in which I have already affirmed the existence of God, which is so rational and so tested for me. For if the God who exists is truly God, then he is not just God now, for me here and today, but God already in the beginning, God from all eternity. Only in this way, it seems to me, does the universe become plausible to us in its existence as cosmos, in its mathematically ordered, highly complex, and tremendously dynamic nature. And in the face of the magnitude of our universe and the complexity of science, many scientists have shown feelings of amazement, of reverence, of joy, and even of terror and thus have also asked whether this universe does not embrace more than the apparent—a question that cannot be answered by science but only by a

rational trust that has its grounds and that we call faith.

So believing in the creator of the world today does not mean believing in some myths, nor does it mean imagining God as creator in the way in which for example the incomparable Michelangelo as an artist painted him in a completely human way on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Here all notions come to an end. Nor does believing in God as the creator of the world mean deciding for this or that one of the changing models of the world that great scientists have worked out. And this is not because here the issue is one of presupposing all models of the world and the world itself. Even an eternal world of the kind assumed, for example, by Aristotle would be compatible with belief in God. This was the view of Thomas Aquinas, though on the basis of the Bible he was convinced that the world had a temporal beginning. That the eternal God is before all time does not mean a temporal but an ontological priority.

Today, to believe in the creator of the world against the horizon of scientific cosmology means to affirm in enlightened truth that the ultimate origin of the world and human beings does not remain inexplicable; that the world and human beings have not been senselessly thrown from nothing into nothing; but that as a whole they are meaningful and valuable, not chaos but cosmos, because they have their primal ground, their author, a creator, a first and last security in God.

Once again it must be emphasized that nothing compels us to this faith. We can decide for it in complete freedom. Once we have decided for it, however, this faith changes our position in the world, our attitude to the world. Anyone who believes in God as the creator can with good reason also fully affirm the world and human beings as God's creation. The person can, above all, respect *human beings* as our fellow human beings (and not as lesser beings), but also respect and cultivate non-human nature, particularly the *animals*, as our *environment and the world with which we live* (and not as our born enemies, not as material to be used at random).

It is not although I am God's creature, but because I am God's creature, and because my fellow creatures and my environment are God's creatures, that I, my fellow human beings, and also—for all the difference—animals receive a dignity that has to be respected. The "fill the earth and subdue it" of the creation story (Gen. 1:28) cannot be understood as carte blanche for unscrupulous exploitation and destruction of nature and the environment, certainly not in an age when we soberly contemplate the "limits of growth." Believing in the creator God allows me to take my responsibility for fellow human beings and the environment and the tasks imposed on me with greater seriousness, with more realism and hope. ■

This article was adapted from chapter three of *The Beginning of All Things*, by Hans Küng, translated by John Bowden. Eerdmans, 2007.

THE FUTURE OF GOD—AND SECULARISM

by Bruce Ledewitz

THE FUTURE OF GOD DEPENDS ON THE FUTURE OF secularism. Most people will hear in that sentiment a prediction about the growth of secularism: If secularism grows, belief in God will commensurately shrink. If secularism stagnates, the world will continue to believe in God in 2100.

A hundred years ago, such predictions would have seemed straightforward. At the height of the secularization thesis, it was assumed that religion would decline with the growth of science. But, with the resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and other faiths worldwide, the secularization thesis seemed discredited, as argued in books such as the recent *God is Back*.

Yet the secularization thesis has probably been dismissed too quickly. In March 2009, the American Religion Identification Survey reported that 15 percent of Americans have “no religion.” That report, coupled with President Barack Obama’s reference to “nonbelievers” in his Inaugural Address, means that America no longer understands itself as a purely religious society.

By 2100, I believe that the numbers of nonbelievers in the world will have increased dramatically. Surprisingly, however, secular growth is not the most important issue for the future of God. The question is, what kind of secularism will emerge? Currently, the New Atheists—people like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins—dominate secular thought. They identify God as a supernatural being commanding the natural world and demanding submission from humankind. If this remains the message of secularism, this conception of God will also tend to remain dominant. Such a course of events would ultimately weaken belief in God because this is precisely the kind of God that science discredits.

Fortunately, another kind of secularism is emerging, one that would foretell a different future for God. In February 2009, Peter Steinfeld called it the “new new atheism” and, in October, Daniel Burke used the term “Atheism 3.0.” These terms apply to writers such as Ronald Aronson, André Comte-Sponville, Austin Dacey,

and Greg Epstein. These thinkers defend ideas often associated with religion, such as the objectivity of values and the reality of mystical experience. I have called this phenomenon the “new new secularism” because some of these nonbelievers use the term God; for example, biologist Stuart Kauffman writes of God as the creativity at the heart of the universe.

It should come as no shock that God could entail much more than a supernatural being. There are plenty of religious believers who also see beyond the supernatural, including, of course, Rabbi Green in this issue of *Tikkun*. If secularism continues to grow in this direction, then conceptions of God that are not rooted in



“Desire (three pieces)” by Naomi Fuks-Mishol.

supernaturalism will grow as well. In such a world, believers and nonbelievers might begin to come together as their conceptions of reality overlap. And we could even see the end of disputes about references to God in the public square, as secular ideas about God become more sophisticated and inclusive. This is a future for God of harmony rather than division. It is not a future of holy war, but of holy community. ■

ASK THE AUTHOR! March 8: Bruce Ledewitz

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A UNIVERSE STRUGGLING TO BECOME AWARE?

by David R. Loy

GOD IS ONE WAY OF TRYING TO SAY SOMETHING VERY important, something that ultimately cannot be captured in words. So we can't avoid metaphors, but the idea of God as heavenly Father—as an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving Creator who wants us to behave in certain ways, who rewards us if we do, and who punishes us if we don't—no longer makes sense in light of present scientific and historical understanding.

Part of our trouble is the duality of a God whose reality is apart from the created world. Insofar as God is the source of value and meaning, this world is inevitably devalued in comparison. The natural world (including our animal nature) becomes a trap to be escaped. Our ultimate destiny lies elsewhere.

There's another way to understand "God." Is evolution really random and meaningless? Even 13.8 billion years seems a short period to evolve from Big Bang plasma to a Buddha or a Gandhi. Arthur Green discusses genetic evolution, but that is only one of three progressive cosmic developments: the formation of higher elements (fused in the cores of stars and supernovas), the natural selection of self-replicating species, and last but not least the cultural developments necessary to produce highly evolved humans such as Arthur Green. To me, at least, it seems highly implausible that all this is accidental. Is this groping self-organization the universe struggling to become more self-aware? In that case, "God" needs us as much as we need him—but ultimately the duality between us collapses. Is my desire to awaken ("the Buddha" means "the awakened one") the urge of the cosmos to become

aware of itself, in and as me?

Every species is an experiment of the biosphere, and less than 1 percent of all species that have ever appeared on earth survive today. Our super-sized cortex enables us to be co-creators ("created in the image of God"), and with us new types of "species"

have become possible: knives and symphonies, poetry and nuclear bombs.... But it is increasingly obvious that something has gone wrong with our hyper-rationality. Nietzsche's Zarathustra says, "man is a rope across an abyss": are we a transitional species? Must we evolve further in order to survive at all? In Buddhist terms, delusion of a separate self means we are haunted by too much *dukkha* (dis-ease), which motivates us (individually and collectively) to do too many self-destructive things.

Perhaps figures like the Buddha and Gandhi are harbingers of how our species needs to develop—in which case the evolutionary process most necessary today involves spiritual practices that address the fiction of a separate self whose well-being is distinguishable from others' well-being.

Perhaps our basic problem isn't self-love but a profound misunderstanding of what one's Self really is: not a discrete consciousness but rather one of the ways the whole cosmos fits together and actualizes itself. Without the compassion that arises when we realize our nonduality—empathy not only with other humans but with the planet—it becomes increasingly likely that civilization as we know it will not survive the next few centuries. Nor would it deserve to. It remains to be seen whether the *Homo sapiens* experiment will be a successful vehicle for the cosmic evolutionary process. ■



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IS "RADICAL THEOLOGY" RADICAL?

by Shaul Magid

EVER SINCE SPINOZA, MANY MODERN JEWS AND Christians have struggled to offer an alternative to Spinoza's atheism or, more accurately, his a-theism (a dis-belief in the personal transcendent biblical God who commands), while essentially agreeing in principle with his deconstruction of the personal God of the Bible. Spinoza, of course, was not an atheist like Richard Dawkins. He was simultaneously a "God-intoxicated man" and banished from the Jewish community because of his blasphemy. This model of God intoxication and institutional religious rebellion is a central theme of modern religion in the West. And it surely doesn't begin with Spinoza. We can find resonances of this perspective in the medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, the Sufi poet Rumi, the Zohar, the Protestant mystic Jakob Boehme, and modern Hasidism. In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William James, Canadian Richard Maurice Bucke (*Cosmic Consciousness*), Krishnamurti, Allen Ginsburg, and New Age religion have all been traveling more or less in the same Spinozistic trajectory: they have replaced biblical theism with an alternative notion of a God who is ever-present, a sense of ineffable wonder, or a theology that is nondualistic (God and world)—anything but a radically transcendent God who commands and who enacts eternal retribution for eating a crumb of leaven on Passover.

Arthur Green has been at the forefront of constructing an atheistic, or a-cosmic, Jewish theology for a new generation of religious seekers, especially those raised in the continuity-obsessed and uninspired world of post-war American Judaism. Yet I ask myself what is so *radical* about a God-idea that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have struggled with for centuries? Non-duality? Radical immanence? Pantheism (or its problematic cousin, panentheism)? A-cosmism? Are these *radical* in the twenty-first century? I would like to see a sharper definition of "radicalism" in Green's new project. While the periodic re-tuning of these ideas for a new generation is a necessary exercise, and Green is a master at doing so, my fear is that his work also perpetuates what we do not want to face: the fact that we are essentially *already* a-theists. Gershom Scholem struggled with this mightily, defining himself alternatively as a "believing" secularist and a religious anarchist. As a-theists, or religious anarchists, we may believe in something

(or not), we may experience something (or not), out there, in here, but we need not make it appear seamless with a tradition that rests, at its best, on paradox and the very negation of Aristotle's law of the excluded middle (that a proposition must be either true or not true).

Many theologians in all three monotheistic religions lived in that very dark tension, and many offered daring appraisals of a (non-)God on the very precipice of monotheism. Few overtly took the leap. And those that did were truly "radical." But many of us are *already* post-monotheists, religious anarchists, non-believers, or secular believers. This is normative. This is where many of us begin. In an unpublished manuscript version of "God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown," Zalman Schachter-Shalomi wrote, "If pantheism is a given, what is already there as a minimum, then what else can we say about God?" In my mind, this "what else," gnawing at the very margins of classical monotheism, is one next step.

My belief these days is closer to Ezekiel's vision of *razo ve shov* (fleeting), of a God I do and do not believe in, a God who is totally present one day and totally absent the next. And both are true, not because of any notion of divine concealment (*hester panim*), non-dualism, or the limitations of the human perspective, but because the God I do and do not believe in is generated and maintained through my living in the world. And life is messy. And the God that enters, or does not enter, my life has nothing to teach anyone except me. Regarding many of these "new" theologies, with all due respect to Green and the monumental contribution he has made to spiritual life in America, we know most of them already and have known them for centuries, and yet we still dwell in the ruins of human weakness and suffering.

My God is simple, albeit dark. It is perhaps best captured in the penultimate scene in the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man* when Marshak tells his newly minted bar mitzvah boy, "When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies'... *be a good boy.*" Marshak then gives him back his transistor radio with a twenty-dollar bill hidden in its case so that he can finally pay back his bully neighbor for a bag of weed. Just moments later they are all consumed by Job's whirlwind. Life and God are equally precious in their precariousness, *razo ve shov*. While surely not radical, *that* may be worth pondering. *Be a good boy.* ■

Shaul Magid teaches Jewish Studies at Indiana University Bloomington. His latest book, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, was awarded the 2009 American Academy of Religion Best Book in Religion in the textual studies category.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE QUESTION OF GOD

by Sallie McFague

CLIMATE CHANGE DEMANDS THAT WE TURN OUR EYES to the world, to space and place, to the concrete, to asking questions about how to live within the particularities and limitations of planet earth rather than speculating about why we are here. Should religions be more concerned to learn where we are, what the world is like, and where we fit into it, rather than focusing mainly on the “why” questions? For instance, on the matter of creation and providence, is it a question of why, when, and how the world was created that is critical or is it rather discovering the nature, potential, and limitations of our neighborhood, where we live? Is talk about creation and providence concerned with intellectual questions of *why* things are the way they are or is it about *how* we should live in harmony with all the rest of creation? Christianity has traditionally been focused on the “why” questions rather than turning our eyes to the beauty, concrete details, processes, and uniqueness of our home, planet earth. In Christian theology, creation and providence have often been more about God and God’s power—evidence that God is in charge—than about human beings living in and caring for the neighborhood in which we have been set down. The “why” and “where” questions are of course interlinked—we will always wonder about the mystery of why we are where we are—but it may be necessary, given climate change, for Christian theology to pay more attention to the wonderful, fragile, complex—as well as breathtakingly beautiful and violent—world that we actually inhabit.



“Shadow Cracking,” above, and detail from “Shadow Growth,” below, by Lanell Dike.

The traditional creation-providence story in Christian history has underscored God’s power more than divine love, God’s transcendence more than divine immanence, and God’s distance from the world rather than involvement in it. This need not, should not, be the case: an interpretation of the God-world relationship based on the belief that *God is incarnate in the world* implies re-thinking the issues of creation and providence in light of the world as internally related to God—the world as within God or the world as God’s “body”—rather than externally related as an artist is to his or her production. Our doctrines of creation and providence do not stand alone: they are offshoots of our deepest beliefs about the nature of God’s relation to the world. If this belief is that God and the world are wholly other, creation and providence will be seen in that light; if this belief is that God and the world are intrinsically intimate, creation and providence will be understood from within that perspective. An incarnational context for understanding the God-world relationship has implications for our response to climate change. It means that *God and we are in the same place* and that *we share responsibility for the world*. ■

This article was adapted from chapter four of *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*, by Sallie McFague, copyright © 2008 Fortress Press. Reproduced by special permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers.



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AN EVOLVING VIEW OF GOD

by David Nelson

IN 1997, I BEGAN TO SEARCH THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF physics to find new metaphors for God. For years I had listened to folks tell me: "Rabbi, with all due respect, I don't believe in God. You know, the whole old-man-with-a-long-beard-in-heaven thing just doesn't make sense."

Such comments suggest that it is not God *per se* that presents difficulties, but the traditional metaphors used to describe God: shepherd, father, king, and so on. I wanted to develop new, more plausible metaphors. Since physics had always seemed to me to hold the secrets to existence, that's where I focused my search. The result was my book *Judaism, Physics and God: Searching for Sacred Metaphors in a Post-Einstein World*.

My conclusions can be summarized this way: God is the complex set of natural laws and forces that created the cosmos, caused it to evolve with elegant structure and order, and continue to govern its behavior, from the bizarre antics of subatomic (quantum) events to the exquisite dance of stars and galaxies. This description allowed me, a fairly traditional Jew, to recite with comfort such traditional texts as "How great are Your works, O Eternal," (Psalm 92:6) or "who orders the stars in their appointed courses in the heavens, according to His will" (from the evening service).

However, it turned out that all my new God metaphors were nonpersonal. They did not portray God as being a sentient, caring Being. This God could create and control the universe, but could not enter into a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, or command the Israelites, or be angry when they built a calf. I could not interact with this God, unless one considers the experience of being overwhelmed with wonder at a sky full of stars on a clear night as interaction. For me, such a profound experience is moving and inspiring, but it is not interaction. Interaction is having a conversation. I talk, you respond, I listen and reply, and so on. I was troubled by the impossibility of

such interaction with God in the framework of physics metaphors that I had created, and so I started a new search. This time I sought some way of thinking about God as conscious, sentient, and interactive, without compromising my rational worldview.

The search led me to a model used in neuroscience to explain human consciousness. Consciousness is a fundamental human characteristic, yet there is no single part of the brain where consciousness "happens." Rather, consciousness is an "emergent" phenomenon. When a very large number of simple things interact in a highly complex way, a new "thing" comes into existence on a higher level. The new "emergent" thing obeys different rules from those that govern the lower-level things, and sometimes

the emergent thing even affects the lower-level things. A human brain is a collection of a huge number of neurons (conservative estimates start at 30 billion), simple nerve cells that either pass along a simple message to other cells at their connection points (synapses) or don't. Not one of these neurons thinks, dreams, or remembers. But when billions of them are packed into a skull and interconnected in trillions of ways, you get a human being with likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, and more. Using this model, I am developing a sense of God, with each human consciousness being like one neuron. When billions of human consciousnesses interconnect in trillions



of ways, I propose that the inevitable emergent result is what we have always sensed as a personal, sentient God. Like the neurons, no one person is God, but when they all interact, God appears, and we can talk with God, obey or disobey God's laws, and find comfort in God's presence.

Such ideas are experimental models, not dogmatic, theological "truths." They are attempts at thinking in new, rational ways about God, without either disparaging religious tradition or assuming a conflict between traditional religion and modern science. They may be a useful approach to religious belief in the twenty-first century. ■

David Nelson is the campus rabbi and an assistant professor of religion at Bard College.

SACRED PRONOUNS

by Judith Plaskow

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APRIL 19: JUDITH PLASKOW

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THE ISSUE OF THE ROLE OF MALE GOD-LANGUAGE IN producing and maintaining a male-dominated Judaism was first raised by feminists over thirty-five years ago. From the early 1970s, when Rita Gross argued that Jewish inability to say "God-She" was the ultimate symbol of women's degradation, through the 1980s and 1990s, feminists both insisted on the importance of female language and wrote poetry and created new liturgies that expressed their visions of who "God-She" might be. Today, except for a few brave voices speaking of a Jewish Goddess, the issue seems to have fizzled, and no new language has emerged for over a decade. Why?

I don't know for sure, but let me offer some suggestions. First of all, most Jews other than the ultra-Orthodox are reluctant and even deeply embarrassed to speak about God. Insofar as new images of God must emerge out of the spiritual experiences of communities, the absence of communal willingness to talk about the nature of God and to share experiences of the sacred makes it difficult to sustain liturgical innovation.

Secondly, early feminist liturgical creativity took for granted the gender binary and was sometimes essentialist—characteristics that have been rendered embarrassing by queer theory's insistence that gender is unstable, malleable, and performative. How can one talk about female images of God without presupposing that there is femaleness and without reinforcing traditional female stereotypes? Doesn't the insistence that God is both male and female

represent the ultimate reification of gender dualism?

Thirdly—and this is not a new insight—changing God's gender does not go nearly far enough in transforming the conception of God enshrined in the prayer book. Female language challenges the idolatry of the dominant male image of God but does not of itself offer an alternative to a God separate from and above the world. Indeed, in some ways it exacerbates the problems with the traditional liturgy by highlighting the extent to which a God in female garb is still the God of traditional theism.

Yet these reasons, while significant, cannot account for the continued hold of *male* language in most prayer books. It is hard not to suspect that the issue of female imagery has disappeared partly for the same reasons it was always fiercely resisted: the possibilities of female power and the power of female sexuality cannot be taken seriously in a male-dominated society. Jews still cannot say "God-She" not because we have struggled with questions of male dominance and come out the other side into a more spacious and fluid understanding of gender but because, for all the changes of the last forty years, such language still seems trivial and degrading.

What's needed, then, is a renewed conversation about the nature and gender of God that takes account of new understandings of gender. If God is found *within* the world, how do we make real in the language of prayer the presence of God in *all* of creation? This is no less a question for the twenty-first century than it was for the twentieth. ■

Judith Plaskow is professor of religious studies at Manhattan College and author of many books and articles in feminist theology, including The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003.

A GOD WE COULD BELIEVE IN

by Rosemary Radford Ruether

OUR CREATION STORIES DEFINE WHAT KIND OF CREATOR gods we believe in. The God of patriarchal monotheism was defined by a dualistic, hierarchical universe. Reality was divided between spirit and matter, mind and body, and the power of the first to rule over the second. God was a disembodied male Ego who dwelt in the transcendent spiritual realm and shaped the bodily realm from beyond.

Whether this God made the universe from some preexistent unformed "matter" or out of God's own substance is the unresolved dilemma of monotheistic creation theology, but the assumption is that the embodied world is radically "other" and under the dominion of its patriarchal "creator."

Today science is giving us a very different creation story, although also one that emerges through historical stages. But these

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historical stages are now vastly longer—fifteen billion years, not six thousand—and the universe that emerges is vastly larger: hundreds of billions of galaxies, not one solar system. This universe story finds its most evocative telling as a moral and aesthetic drama, not just a scientific one, in Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry's *The Universe Story* (1992). Is it possible to speak of God in relation to this universe story? Significantly the term "God" is never used by its authors, who instead refer to "deities."

Swimme and Berry define a number of basic principles for this creation story. There is no "outside" of this emerging universe. From the original "flaring forth" comes all the energy that will ever exist in the entire course of its unfolding. It creates space and time as it unfolds. There is no place for a deity "outside" from which to shape it. It itself is the self-organizing energy that generates its own ongoing process: a process not of a smooth flow, but rather of dramatic self-destructions from which emerge new creative configurations. Yet the unfolding is exactly calibrated: the tiniest instance either slower or faster, and all would have been wholly different or nothing at all.

Three interacting processes define each emerging stage of the universe: differentiation, autopoiesis, and communion. Each stage



of emergence is shaped by a process of rapid diversification balanced by self-generating creativity of each of the entities, which exist in an interconnection that relates them to each other from subatomic to universal levels. This dialectical trinitarian process has prompted one Latin American ecofeminist theologian, Ivone Gebara, to suggest that this should be the way to make sense of the Christian concept of God as trinity.

Yet if this self-organizing, differentiating, and interconnecting process is God, it is not the God of dominion from outside, but a deity who is wholly internal to the process of creativity through death and re-creation itself. This idea seems incompatible with patriarchal monotheism, yet it is one suggested by St. Paul's famous evocation of the "unknown God" as the one "in whom we live, and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It is a God who both sustains what is and yet is endlessly transformative, opening up new possibilities; a God that transcends the split of subject and object to embrace all that was, is and may be; a God who connects us with the whole universe in its fifteen-billion-year unfolding, and yet also calls us to stand shoulder to shoulder to resist the systems of economic, social, and military violence that are threatening the very basis of planetary life. This could be a God we could believe in. ■

GOD'S TIMELESS NAMES

by Zaid Shakir

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD, PEACE UPON HIM, informed us that God revealed the following simple, yet infinitely profound words: "Do not insult time, for verily I am time." In that God encompasses all time, chronology—a phenomenon that is relative to our perception and understanding of the world—is irrelevant to God. That being the case, the great considerations that inform how we humans generally understand knowledge, whether a priori or a posteriori, are irrelevant in relation to God.

Kant is credited with doing to philosophy what Copernicus did to astronomy: he changed the way we look at the world and the place of the world in a grander scheme—metaphysically. Perhaps if we step outside of time we can see that the question of who, what, or how God will be in the twenty-first century is a baseless one in that God's power and ontological reality are unaffected by time. Perhaps a change in perspective will allow us to discover the timelessness of God.

We wrestle with the idea of God, and as our intellect is shaped by realities, which vary from one time to another, that idea from

our temporal perspective is subject to change and variation. However, there is one constant in our intellectual quest for knowledge of the Divine, something captured in the opening phrase of *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its power, it is also not able to answer.

Muslims—at least those who still take revelation seriously (and revelation is the key to resolving the apparent conundrum Kant describes)—are spared the anguish that results from the pursuit of unanswerable questions. Revelation and the connection it gives us to God enable us to find a contentment that frees us from the desire to ask unanswerable questions about God and instills in us the



need to ask answerable ones about ourselves. "God will not be asked about what God does, but you will be asked about what you do," the Qur'an reminds us. Questions of who, what, where, how, or why, as they relate to God, we are instructed, are best left to God. Rather, our task is to observe God's timeless names and attributes as they unfold in the world and cultivate the light, that Divine light, once it has been ignited in our hearts, in order to align ourselves with those perfect names as best we can.

The tasks of observation and spiritual cultivation are timeless ones, and they have yielded consistent results to the faithful for as long as we have been able to record their fruits. However, they are tasks that require humans to gracefully accept the limitations of our knowledge; they require humility and oftentimes a change of perspective. When we find within ourselves the ability to undertake these tasks, we ignite a light that can grow to illuminate every level of our being and reveal to us insights some may deem intellectually inaccessible. ■

GOD IN THE AGE OF TWITTER

by Wendy Zierler

IN THE 1998 FILM *THE TRUMAN SHOW*, TRUMAN BURBANK—whose very name yokes the human aspiration for truth with the fictions or mistruths of Hollywood (Burbank, California)—takes a ship to the edge of his film set, Seahaven. Then he climbs a set of stairs (as if to heaven) and exits this world through a dark door leading to who knows

where. Truman's journey of discovery reveals the sham nature of his media-generated reality and its would-be god, Christof. Notably, Christof demonstrates much of what Judeo-Christian tradition has long taught about God: he is a Creator; with his ubiquitous, providential camera-eyes, he is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. In accordance with the cosmology of Genesis, he cues the sun and brings forth the rain; like God in the book of Jonah, he summons a storm on the sea to force his way upon his recalcitrant messenger. At times he is a punitive ruler; at others, he is paternal, stroking the image of Truman on the screen, as a father would a son. The final bow that Truman takes at the end of the film stands not for obeisance but for rebellion against the norms and assumptions that Christof has conditioned him to uphold.

A modernist, Freudian reading of Truman's exit at the film's end might suggest that Truman has been cured of his religious neurosis and is now ready to live a healthy life, free of the pseudo-God. An existentialist reading suggests that he has learned to reject the media-staged meanings previously made for him and is now ready to make meaning of his own.

But is there really any way to find ultimate meaning outside of words, signs, symbols, and images—that is, outside the realm of human-language media? As a film that is all about the need to distrust the film medium, *The Truman Show* indicates, in frank

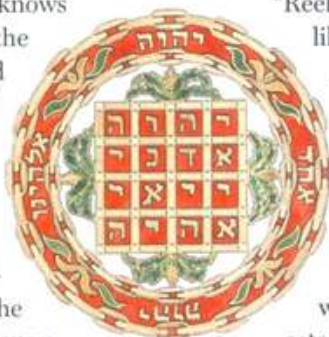
terms, the extent to which we cannot, and perhaps ought not, attempt to flee the superstructure of words, images, narration, and representation that governs our sense of selfhood and freedom.

A post-secular, religious reading of the film—like that which I attempt to do with my rabbinical students in a course entitled

"Reel Theology"—entails both a rejection of Christof-like idols and an affirmation of what God really is.

Arthur Green's ecological rethinking of God and tradition refers to God as Being, as the life force that dwells within the universe. From my text-centered, covenant-centered Jewish vantage point, I maintain a belief that central to the uncovering of God in our lives is a recognition of the sacredness of words, and our godly indwelling within language, for it is our ability to communicate, create, and relate in words and signs, both to each other and to God, that identifies us as created *betzelem elohim* (in the image of God). It is for this reason that the Torah imagines the creation of the world through a speech act. As Truman's incipient relation with an extra named Sylvia suggests, truth and God inhere in real, freely chosen relationships, in love as expressed in language.

In 2010, we are no longer as surprised by the idea of reality TV. What was mere fiction in 1998 is very much our reality. For that reason, more than ever, we need to have a sense of where religion and God intersect with our media-saturated existence. Where is our godly text in our world of texting, tweeting, YouTubeing, and downloading? What structures in our lives allow us to identify the godliness or eternal significance of language, learning, human conversation, and relationship? And how can we fill our time not with noisy verbiage, but with the language of transcendence? ■

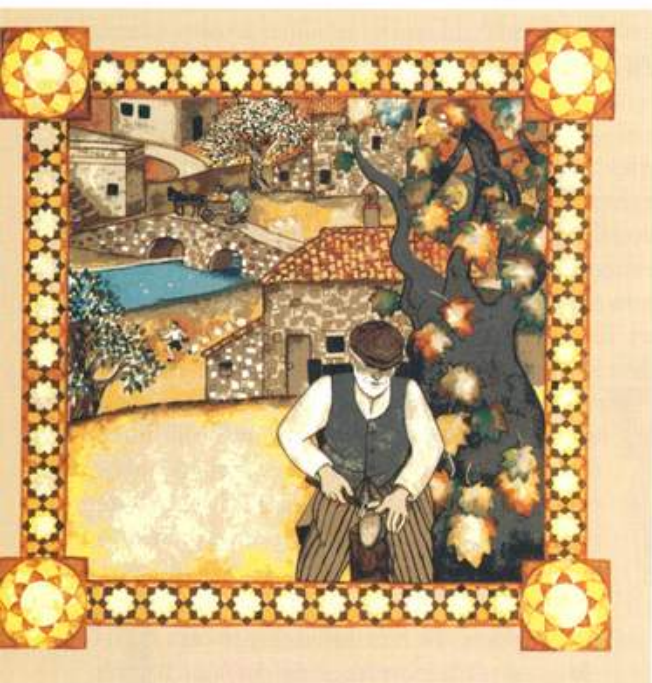


Wendy Zierler, a professor at HUC-JIR, New York, is the author of *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing (2004)* and is currently writing a book on film and Jewish theology, based on a course co-taught with theologian Eugene Borowitz.

Reaching for the Moon

A Children's Book Author Challenges
the Separation of Science and Religion

by Graeme Wend-Walker



Above and on the following two pages are illustrations by Rebecca Hyland for *No One Walks on My Father's Moon* by Chara M. Curtis.

ASK THE AUTHOR!
Graeme Wend-Walker
6 p.m. Pacific Time
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CLOUDS OF DUST SWIRL FROM THE YOUNG BOY'S SHOES AS HE RACES through lanes and over the arching bridge, scampering past the donkey that draws a vegetable cart to market. He cannot wait to tell his father what he has heard in school today—that a most incredible thing has happened before it could even have been imagined. The father is busy mending a shoe as the boy, breathless, arrives to tell him the news: the Americans have sent an airship far into the sky, and its men have walked on the moon.

Come forward in time, and the boy, now a grown man, has left behind his village in Turkey and is visiting the United States as a Fulbright exchange teacher. Talking one day with children's author Chara Curtis, he pauses and looks to the night sky. Then he turns to her and says something that for a moment she cannot comprehend. "My world ended," he says to her, "when your man walked on the moon." Recovering herself, she asks what he means. He explains that when, as a boy, he had told his father of the landing, he had been severely punished. The moon, his father had insisted, is the face of God's shining light, and for him to speak of stepping on it was blasphemy. The gulf that was opened that day between the boy and father had yet to heal.

Curtis felt sadness for both the teacher and his father, but she felt also that each was missing something important. "I set out to find a way to reconcile the two points of view," she says. She found herself writing a story for her Turkish friend; it begins with his childhood experience. The father, who has never gone to school and has read no book but the Qur'an, demands that the boy apologize for lying and blaspheming, and that he seek Allah's forgiveness. The boy swears he is telling the truth. The father, enraged, takes up a stick and "beat[s] him until he [is] too weak to utter a cry." When the father is done, he holds out his hand for his son to kiss.

From here, Curtis's story—and the boy within it—begin seeking out a different ending for themselves.

It is some time before the boy returns to school; clearly distressed, he asks his teacher if it is "possible there is more than one moon." The teacher considers the question, then explains: "There is only one moon that revolves around our Earth, yet it is a different moon for each one who sees it." It will be known as a "silvery disk" if gazed upon only when full, or as an "immense, golden ball" if seen only in the harvest. If studied only through a telescope, it will be known as "mountains, craters and valleys." For the one who never cares to look upon it, it does not exist at all. "The answer to your question is both yes and no, for in truth is the many in one."

The boy takes this lesson home, and night after night sits contemplating the moon,

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attempting to understand the teacher's words. "Yes and no. How could this be? Was it not true that things must be one way or the other?" One night the father finds the boy thus occupied and orders him to bed. "Please, first tell me, Father," the boy asks, "when you look at the moon, what do you see?" The father tells him, "I see beauty not possible for anyone but God to create, and magnificence no person nor thing can ever soil. I see hope for my soul, and hope for even the soul of my son who is foolish and confuses the moon with a rock for climbing."

The boy kisses his father's hand: "Tonight, without lifting a hand or shouting an angry word, you showed me what you wanted me to know. And though I never lied to you, neither was I able to speak the whole truth, for I did not know there could be many in one."

"Like the boy in the story," Curtis explains, "I pondered the question in my heart. Over three months, the book was written. I asked the Turkish teacher to read the manuscript. He did and wept. When he returned to Turkey, he visited his father and achieved reconciliation."

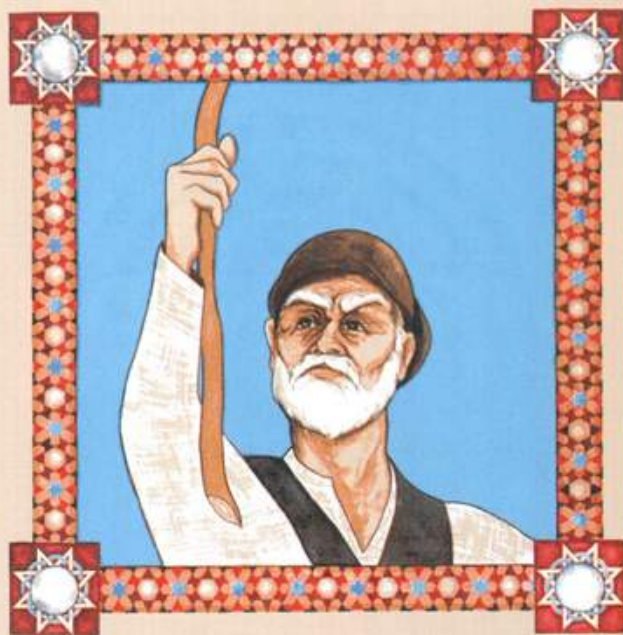
Fortunately for readers, the story's message of healing did not end there. Accompanied by eloquent illustrations from artist Rebecca Hyland, it was published as a children's picture book, *No One Walks on My Father's Moon*. And it joined a small but growing group of works for children that have been quietly questioning the commonplace assumption that religious and secular points of view are mutually exclusive.

Children's books are not alone in this, yet it may be that they have been freer to occupy this postsecular in-between space without that embarrassment that has, in ideologically secularized, "adult" discourse, tended to keep the religious and secular poles opposed. Considering the enormous potential children's books have to shape the minds of a generation (and thus, the future of an entire society), they have a particularly important role to play in cultivating understanding between people of different faiths—including those whose faith is in secularist reason.

And yet, this very capacity to shape minds has also made children's literature something of a battleground for control of the future. Every aspect of the life of a book—from the writing of it, to its publishing and marketing, its selection by bookstores, librarians, teachers, and parents, right through to the actual reading of it—can find itself enmeshed within a multitude of conflicting ideological demands, which on balance may do little more than repeat the familiar antagonisms. If one considers also how lucrative children's publishing has become, it is not surprising that books like *No One Walks on My Father's Moon* are often displaced by those that come down firmly on one side or the other of this sometimes highly polarized cultural divide. Children's publishing, as a consequence, tends to become partitioned between a relatively small segment that markets to specific religious beliefs, and a much larger segment that, while manifesting a kind of benign secularism, effectively renders belief invisible.

Though a great multitude of books now encourage children not merely to tolerate but to positively embrace diversity in all its forms, one does not often hear of books promoting tolerance toward the religious.

Part of the problem can be traced to the way we have come to think about the relationship between reason and spirituality. Institutions founded on the pursuit of reason have tended to define their reasonableness specifically in opposition to religion—supposing, like the boy, "that things must be one way or the other." As a consequence, academics (including many of those who educate our educators) have tended to proceed from a certain bias even as they aspire to objectivity—thus producing what noted children's literature professor Perry Nodelman has called "a vast conspiracy of silence about children's literature with a spiritual





emphasis" and "a common form of intolerance by theoretically tolerant people, an intolerance that amounts to censorship."

Nodelman, however, is not alone; as philosophy professor John D. Caputo has noted, many "otherwise 'secular' intellectuals have become suspicious of the Enlightenment suspicion of religion" and are questioning the idea that the work of reason is necessarily opposed to belief. For such thinkers, the gap between the religious and the secular is no longer an intellectual demilitarized zone but a space within which to expand reason's horizons, and across which to reach toward reason's Other.

It is just this that Curtis seems to be describing in the reconciliation between the son and his father. The boy, we are told, is "eager to learn all this great world could teach him"; but though he tries, night after night, to understand the problem rationally and intellectually, his understanding emerges only when he is able to open himself to the Other, to the father from whom he has become distant. He sees then the moon reflected as two silvery crescents in his father's eyes:

The sight was so beautiful, he could not look away. He stared deeper and deeper until, in the brilliance, he felt himself to be a part of their cool fire.... And here, seeing through his father's eyes, did he know the awe of beholding God's radiant reflection. This was not the moon he had been watching night after night.

The boy's concluding declaration—"Though it is true a man stepped on a far distant stone, this also is true: No one walks on my father's moon"—demonstrates that he now appreciates not only the fact of the lunar landing, but also the fact that his father's moon, properly understood, is not one that can actually be walked on. And it also suggests an attitude of defiant protectiveness: just as the moon is sacred to the father, the father's way of seeing it (and thus, that other moon itself) has now become sacred to the son and is to be defended against displacement by competing forms of knowledge.

Curtis's story suggests one need never fear that, in becoming open to the Other—whether to one's estranged father, people of another faith, or God—one will somehow compromise one's identity or one's capacity for reason. Perhaps this, then, is the new ethical landscape that children must now learn to navigate: in a world where the power of reason has been misused—used to divide people from each other and from creation, or at best to argue for mere "tolerance"—we may need to ask whether reason's own dividing of itself from the religious is an offense not only against the faiths of others but even against reason itself. For it no longer seems reasonable to allow a narrow faith in reason to

preclude the reason of faith, or scientific knowledge to displace those poetic ways of knowing that ultimately make even our scientific pursuits meaningful to us. It is to be hoped that tomorrow's children will feel free to choose, without prejudice, their own metaphors and values from within that greater spiritual truth that is the many in one.

No One Walks on My Father's Moon is currently out of print. Curtis and Hyland are seeking a new publisher. ■



The Healing Power of Sacred Dance

by Miriam Maron



ONE DAY A YOUNG DOCTOR NOTICED AN ELDER FROM THE LOCAL INDIAN pueblo sitting in the waiting room of his clinic, watching him examine patient after patient. At the end of the day, the doctor, Carl Hammer-schlag, then a recent graduate from Yale University Medical School, approached the elder and asked if he was next. The elder eyed him for a while and then said: "I am curious. They said a healer has come to the pueblo." Carl chuckled proudly: "That's me! I am a doctor." There was quiet. Then the elder asked him: "Do you dance?" Carl laughed again: "No." The elder rose and turned to leave, and said: "Then you can't heal."

This experience, which took place on the pueblo in New Mexico where Carl did his post-graduate internship, changed Carl's life and his entire way of practicing medicine.

Years later, at a Walking Stick retreat that he and I co-led, Carl (now a nice Jewish doctor in Arizona) realized that the pueblo elder could just as easily have been Reb Mendl of Kotzk, or Reb Nachman of Breslav—that the Jewish tradition shared the same mindset around the power and sanctity of dance and its role in healing and in spiritual practice.

Rabbi Miriam Maron, B.S.N., R.N., M.A., is a spiritual healer and mentor who teaches kabbalistic and Jewish shamanic healing modalities and sacred dance. A singer and songwriter, she has seven albums to her credit (www.MiriamsCyberWell.com).

Rabbi Miriam Maron seeks healing and transcendence through sacred dance.

The word for dance and the word for illness, taught Rebbe Nachman of Breslav, are related: *ma'cho'l* for dance, *machah'lah* for illness or affliction. Not by accident do they both share the same root. After all, dancing brings one to a state of joy, and when the body is in a state of joy, the negative energies contributing to illness begin to dissipate (*Likutei MoHaRaN Tanina*, chapter 24). After all, the Shechinah—the godly life force that moves us along our life walk—is drawn more into manifestation in our lives when we are in a state of joy (Talmud Bav'li, Shabbat 30b).

Rebbe Nachman also pointed out that when the Torah says of our ancestor Yaakov, “he lifted up his feet” (Genesis 29:1), it implies dance, as the second-century Rabbi Acha commented: “His heart lifted his feet” (*Midrash B'reisheet Rabbah* 70:8), meaning that when his heart was stirred to joyfulness after his reassuring vision of the ladder that connected earth to heaven, and after God's promise to him, it moved his feet to dance (*Likutei MoHaRaN*, chapter 32).

Commenting on the words of the prophet Isaiah—“Joy and celebration shall they seek, and trials and tribulations shall then be driven away” (Isa. 35:10 and 51:11)—Rebbe Nachman wrote the following in *Likutei MoHaRaN Tanina*, chapter 23:

When one is pulled into a circle of dancers, one should not leave one's troubles outside, but invite them into the dance to thereby transform them and heal them. It is usually the case that in such situations, one would be inclined to leave their troubles outside the dance. But one ought to in that moment pursue their troubles, seize them, and bring them into the dance, to heal them and transform them into joyfulness.

As David wrote in Psalms, “You turned my grieving into dance” (30:12).

When Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov heard that his friend the Rebbe of Berditchev had become ill, he repeatedly muttered his friend's name over and over again and prayed for his recovery. Then he suddenly put on his new shoes, laced them up tight, and danced himself into a frenzy. A disciple who was present at the time reported how “power flowed forth from his dancing. Every step was in itself a powerful mystery. A strange kind of light then spread across the house and everyone watching it saw angelic spirits joining in his dance” (my own rephrasing of Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*).

The power and sanctity of dance was always an integral part of our people's theology and spiritual practice, from biblical times to the present. The Jerusalem Talmud recounts, for example, how women would dance in the vineyards and orchards during Yom Kippur and on the full moon of the month of Ahv, when the sun's heat began to diminish. The ancient rabbis themselves are reported to have done their share of dancing during the harvest season (*sukkot*) as part of the ritual of the water-drawing (*simchat beyt ha'sho'ey'vah*), even entertaining the folk by juggling flaming torches while they danced (Talmud Bav'li, *Sukah* 51a and *Tosefta Sukah* 4:2). The ancient teachers also considered dance to be one of the reasons the Torah came down to us in the Moon of Twins, in *Sivan*. Why then? “Because the twins resemble humans, to whom God gave a mouth with which to speak, hands with which to create, and feet with which to dance” (*Midrash Pesikta Rabati* 20:2).

The prophets, the Tanakh recounts, used music in their spiritual practice and often drummed themselves into ecstasy (2 Sam. 6:16, and 1 Chron. 15:29), and I assume they also danced. How could they not? After all, dancing and drumming seemed to be a very common spiritual practice back then: “Praise Yah with drum and dance” (Ps. 150:4). Or, “Declare praise to God's name with dance” (Ps. 149:2). “And Miriam the Prophetess took drum in hand and led the Israelite women in dance and song” (Exod. 15:20). Nor was Miriam the only dancer in the family; her brother Aharon danced too, the ancient rabbis tell us. The two used to do special dances for their mother, Yocheved (Talmud Bav'li, *Sotah* 12a). “The mountains, they dance like antelopes!” (Ps. 114:4). “There is a time to dance” (Eccles. 3:4). There absolutely is.

Maimonides reiterates how the ancient prophets of Israel and their followers would



Sufi dancers perform at the Sirkeci Railway Station in Istanbul.

dance themselves into an ecstatic state of mind before channeling prophetic visions, and that they would do so with the aid of drums and chant. "All of the prophets do not prophesy just any time that they wish," he wrote. "Rather, they focus their concentration and sit in a state of joyfulness and good-heartedness and meditate. For prophecy does not happen amid solemnness, only amid joyfulness. Therefore, the prophets would have before them leather wind instruments, drums, flutes, and hollow leathery string instruments, during those times when they would seek their visions" (*Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:4*).

Movement is also an integral part of prayer: swaying, bowing, dancing about. Moving your body in prayer is based on the verse in Psalms 35:10, "All of my bones declare: 'O Infinite One! Who is like you?'" and is mentioned as a sacred practice not only during prayer but also during Torah study (sixteenth-century Rabbi Moshe Isserles [*RAMA*] in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim*, chapter 28 and 48:2). The Talmud recounts how the second-century Rabbi Akiva would employ so much movement and dance in his worship that he would begin his prayers in one corner of the house and end up in the complete opposite corner "on account of all the swaying and bowing" (*Talmud Bav'li, Berachot 31a*).

There are various ways of bowing. For example, the Talmud tells us that the second-century Rav Shey'sheht would bow like a bamboo shaft bending in the wind when he recited *baruch*, and then slither upward like a snake when he straightened to *atah* (*Talmud Bav'li, Berachot 12a*).

The sixteenth-century Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague explained that there were two predominant types of dance, both sacred, yet one intended more toward transcendence than the other. *Ree'kud*, the standard Hebrew word for dance, is a dance of any kind, such as a celebrative dance at a wedding or other sacred celebratory event. *Ma'cho'l* is a transcendent form of dance, one that brings one to a state of ecstasy, so that the soul frees itself from its subjection to the body and connects in that moment to the realm of



Spirit. This is why the word for dance used in the account of Miriam the Prophetess leading the women in dance is *ma'cho'l* (Exod. 15:20). And that is the very form of dance we do in prayer when we recite *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*—"Holy, holy, holy is Infinite One, Mover of all the Forces" (Isa. 6:3); we dance in an upward, leaping motion representing ascension, transcending our earthly manifestation.

Rabbi Loew also describes *ma'chol* as a form of dance that is usually done in a circle around a central point of focus, and relates it to the futuristic vision of the ancient rabbis: "In the world to come, God will lead the righteous in dancing and they, too, will dance before God" (*Midrash Eichah Rabati* 1:3). Rabbi Loew goes on to describe the dance as a circular one with God in the middle of the circle, pointing, so to speak, at each and every individual dancer, acknowledging each person (MAHARAL in *B'er Ha'Golah*, *B'er Re'vee'ee*, folio 76).

A third and lesser-known form of sacred dance in Judaism is *Meh'char'ker*, translated as "whirling dance," where the dancer completely loses himself or herself in the frenzy of a

whirling movement, totally entranced to the point of dropping all inhibition. The term *chahr'ker* is therefore appropriately used in the story of the Hebrew chieftain David (of the tenth century B.C.E.) when he was overcome with ecstasy after having recovered the Ark of the Covenant from the hands of the Philistines. During a victorious parade with the holy Ark, David gyrated in a wild whirling dance in public through the streets of Jerusalem, wearing nothing but a loin cloth (2 Sam. 6:14-16 and 1 Chron. 15:29). Interestingly, this strange term for wild, whirling, ecstatic, transcendent dancing happens to be one of the seventy names of the highest of the angelic spirits, Matat'ron, who is also believed to be the angelic incarnation of the ancestor Enoch. Matat'ron's thirty-eighth name is *Meh'char'ker*, or literally "Whirling Dancer" (*Midrash Ba'tei Midrashot*, volume 2, chapter 46, number 30).

The power of movement and dance, Rebbe Nachman taught, is so potent it can even resurrect the dead! "Through a person's movement from here to there, one can resurrect the dead, as is written about Elisha when he resurrected the dead son of the Shunamite woman, that he 'went to and fro, to and fro' (2 Kings 4:32-37). Movement causes the five wings of the lungs to flap; and through moving this way and that way, one moves into motion the five wings of the lungs which, when they flap, stir the heart so that the heart gives off sparks of lifehood and rekindles the life force throughout the body, and thereby even rousing the dead to life" (*Likutei MoHaRaN*, chapter 92).

Dance and movement is therefore held quite sacred and highly spiritual in the Jewish tradition, certainly not to be taken lightly—although one needs lightness to dance in the first place. It is told that on one *Simchat Torah*, Reb Mendl of Kotzk (of the early nineteenth century) chose to sit quietly in a corner of the synagogue, watching his Hasidim dance around and around the *beemah*, singing and clapping hands as they danced. Finally, they approached him and asked him why he wasn't joining them in dance. He responded, "I would if you knew how to dance." Hearing this, they attempted a more frenzied dance, with more fervor and elevated voices and louder hand-clapping, but still the Rebbe of Kotzk chose to sit out the round, watching his Hasidim with a critical eye. Again they stopped and invited him into the dance circle, and again he declined, repeating his dissatisfaction with the way they were dancing. After several attempts to dance even better and even better than better, they finally gave up and begged the rebbe to just teach them the proper way to dance. "Close your eyes," he said. "Now imagine you are standing perfectly balanced at the very edge of the Abyss. Now dance!" ■

Culture

BOOKS | FILM | MUSIC

[FILM]

Hagiopics from Hollywood

AVATAR, Twentieth Century-Fox

LEGION, Screen Gems, 2010

THE LOVELY BONES, DreamWorks SKG, 2009

THE BOOK OF ELI, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010

Review by David Sterritt

RELIGION HAS A CHECKERED history on the silver screen. Most films with spiritually tinged agendas are merely wish fulfillment in drag, and the challenge for progressive moviegoers is to sift the occasional worthy items—such as Scorsese's *Kundun*, Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*, and yes, Monty Python's *Life of Brian*—from run-of-the-mill “hagiopics,” to borrow film scholar Pamela Grace's excellent term. The latest crop includes a couple I can recommend. But others also deserve mention, partly because their failings shed light on current Hollywood mindsets, and partly because ignoring them would give them a free pass they don't deserve.

Avatar was temporarily kicked off more than 1,500 screens in China to make way for a state-sponsored biopic starring Chow-Yun Fat as Confucius, the ancient sage who's making a major comeback there. But overall James Cameron's epic is going strong, racking up huge grosses and a fair share of religious commentary. Telecommunications critic Jaron Lanier sees it as a



parable of the “hive mind,” viewing the spiritually attuned Na’vi people as plugging into a planetary super-consciousness the way some real-life internet users believe

they do when they network with computers around the globe. Lanier may be onto something, which is more than I can say for conservative *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat, who says *Avatar* is propaganda for pantheism, a false religion that worships heartless Nature and offers “no God to take on flesh and come among us.” No wonder it opened at Christmastime, Douthat observes—it's the Gospel According to James, designed to change worshippers of God into huggers of trees.

My own take is less portentous. *Avatar* is awesome as a 3-D technical feat and its subtexts are right on target, calling out the perils of environmental pillage, the sins of

colonialist exploitation, and the evils of militaristic adventurism. What curbs my enthusiasm is a contradiction I sense between the film's eagerness to entertain, on one hand, and its desire to uplift and enlighten, on the other. While its ideas are admirable, they're swathed in so much cinematic razzle-dazzle that the spectacle outweighs the significance for most viewers, judging by what I've read and heard from people who aren't critics or pundits but simply wanted a lively night at the movies. I hope the film's messages will get across more pointedly as the excitement over its effects inevitably moderates over time. Unless and until that happens, count me as an agnostic on this movie.

Very different messages slither out of *Legion*, an eschatological horror film wherein God decides to touch off the Apocalypse, sparking a battle between well-meaning mortals and “angelically possessed” zombies. The two camps are led by the archangels Michael and Gabriel, respectively, each armed to the teeth with heavy-duty lethal weaponry. Michael wins the fight and prevents Armageddon, becoming the hero of the movie by nullifying God's will—a surprising twist, since even



Hollywood usually avoids making God a bad guy who needs to be bailed out by an angel when He goes postal. Perhaps the picture is aimed at people like Rev. Pat Robertson, whose noxious brand of Christianity revels in self-righteous rage, blaming a "pact with the devil" for Haiti's recent earthquake and saying ungodly tolerance for abortion, feminists, and homosexuals provoked Hurricane Katrina and the September 11 attacks. By those lights, God is the scariest villain since Ming the Merciless, and we should all hope Michael shows up the next time God's temper gets out of hand. *Legion* is a blasphemously bad movie—think *Wings of Desire* meets *Night of the Living Dead*—but it illustrates the scary truth that violence and paranoia have colonized contemporary consciousness so completely that entertainers now imagine even the angels with guns in their hands and hatred in their eyes.

The Lovely Bones, based on Alice Sebold's bestselling novel and directed by Peter Jackson, presents a more benign view of divine intervention. Susie, a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, is murdered by a madman in her neighborhood and later watches from above as her parents try to track the killer down. They don't succeed, but the madman gets his just deserts anyway, thanks to Susie's uncanny (and unexplained) ability to project her desires earthward at critical moments. While the picture is nonsensical, attention must be paid to it, because it's exactly the kind of faith-based fantasy that crowds *fact*-based accounts of social and political horror—like the British-made *Red Riding* trilogy, which conveys deeply disturbing truths about child murder and police ineptitude—out of multiplexes and into the steadily shrinking art-theater circuit where approximately twenty-five people will have a chance to see them.

The Book of Eli is no masterpiece, but its religious inklings make it a picture I can recommend with reservations. Like last year's *The Road*, it takes place after nuclear catastrophe has wiped out civilization. The hero, superbly played by Denzel Washington, is a voyager on a mysterious mission, carrying a leather-bound book that he reads from daily but won't let others touch. His journey brings him to a ramshackle

town ruled over by an evildoer named Carnegie, who's been hunting obsessively for a book that will, he claims, enable him to rule the world.

Although much of the story is standard-issue action fare, it gains interest from the identity of Eli's book. (If you plan to see the picture, you should put off the rest of this review until then.) It turns out to be the Bible, which has become a rarity because some people held it responsible for the nuclear cataclysm and destroyed every copy except the one that Eli found. As its guardian, Eli is the hero of the film, and a finale resembling *Fahrenheit 451* confirms the wisdom of his struggle to preserve it. But it's revealing that Carnegie covets the book because he knows how readily its meanings can be misappropriated to deceive and manipulate the masses. Could the nuclear disaster have indeed been caused by a demagogue—like Carnegie, or like the Rev. Robertson, for that matter—who thumped the Bible so hard that the world literally exploded? Food for thought. ■

David Sterritt, Tikkun's film critic, is chairman of the National Society of Film Critics and professor emeritus at Long Island University. He was film critic of *The Christian Science Monitor* for decades. His latest books are *The B List* and *The Honeymooners*.

TUNISIA, 1942: HUMANITY AMID INHUMANITY

THE WEDDING SONG, Gloria Film
France 3 Cinema

Review by Ralph Seliger

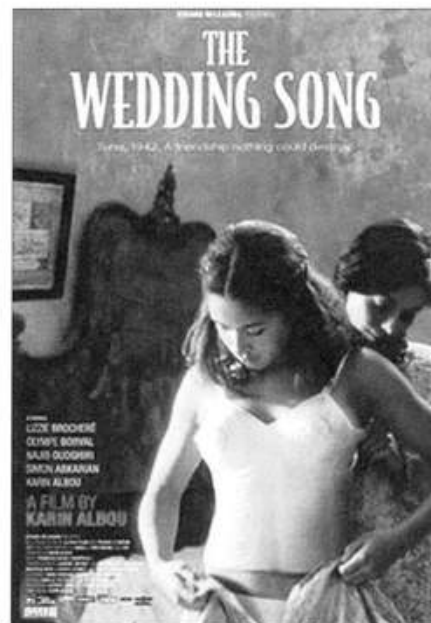
THE WEDDING SONG BEGINS with a young girl sweetly singing an Arabic wedding ditty. This is followed abruptly by a photo tableaux of the infamous Grand Mufti of Jerusalem meeting with Hitler and his SS henchman, Himmler, and reviewing Nazi troops. The Mufti—through his Arabic radio broadcasts from Berlin, his recruitment of Balkan Muslims to the SS, and his work against the British

in Iraq—spearheaded Nazi Germany's outreach efforts to Arabs and Muslims.

The Wedding Song is an emotionally charged drama with documentary appeal—both ethnographic and historical. It is also highly sensual, with the need for actors willing to appear naked in some scenes having caused the French director/writer Karin Albou to cast herself in a major role. "I couldn't find an actress who matched what I had written," she says. "The French ones did not speak Arabic; the Arab ones did not want to get naked in the *hammam* [Turkish bath]. My husband and a friend of mine told me 'why don't you do it?' So I had myself go through the casting process!" She also cast a non-Arab French woman, Olympe Borval, as the main Arab-Muslim character.

Borval had to learn sufficient Arabic for her role. Both Arab and Jewish characters routinely mix French and Arabic, often switching languages from sentence to sentence. The film depicts the intimate living conditions and the wedding customs largely practiced and celebrated in common by North African Jews and Arabs.

The story begins in November 1942 and is set entirely in Tunisia. That month, the tide of World War II dramatically turned against the Axis in North Africa, with the British victory at El Alamein and the landing of U.S. and British forces in Algeria and Morocco. But Field Marshall Erwin Rommel successfully withdrew his Afrika Korps to Tunisia, where the



Germans landed heavy reinforcements. Bloody fighting sea-sawed for another half year in Tunisia until the Germans and Italians surrendered there in May 1943.

The Nazi overseer of anti-Jewish measures in Tunisia, SS Colonel Walter Rauff (mentioned in the film), received this assignment as a consolation prize for his previously intended mission as commander of "Einsatzgruppe Egypt," created to murder the Jews of Palestine after the anticipated British defeat there.

The Nazis began their rein of terror over Tunisia's 100,000 Jews much as they had proceeded in European countries they occupied, with the establishment of a Jewish council, a local "Judenrat," forced by Colonel Rauff to select and equip thousands of slave laborers at short notice and to collect heavy "fines" imposed upon the Jews to pay for their alleged "crimes."

Vichy France had already stripped North African Jews of their rights as citizens, just as it had stripped all the Jews of France of such rights. The Vichy regime also prohibited or restricted North African Jews from the practice of most professions and the conduct of most businesses. Only the accident of geography saved them from being transported en masse to the death camps. The blessedly short duration of the Nazi occupation prevented the death toll from malnutrition, disease, and sheer brutality from climbing into the tens of thousands.

Jews in North Africa were caught in a vise between their traditional second-class status as "dhimmi" in Muslim lands—a "protected" but subordinate minority—and the French Republican promise of equality. In 1870, the Jews were offered French citizenship and most accepted, in exchange for giving up the jurisdiction of rabbinical courts. This benefited them but also estranged them from members of the Muslim majority, most of whom were not offered the same deal. It was the classic colonialist gambit of "divide and rule."

The Nazis exploited this contentious fact to propagandize against the Jews. This anti-Semitic effort had some limited success, and it fueled tensions that eventually erupt between the two sixteen-year-old protagonists of *The Wedding Song*, the Arab Nour and Myriam, her Jewish neighbor

and closest friend.

Myriam and her mother, a widowed seamstress, are so impoverished that Tita (the mother, portrayed by director Karin Albou) promises her daughter to a wealthy but much older suitor. Myriam envies Nour's engagement to a handsome young man, but they can only marry if he finds a job, and the only ones hiring are the Nazis and their Vichy-French collaborators. Influenced by the ideology of his new employers, Nour's fiance, Khaled, opposes her friendship with Myriam.

Albou embarked on a personal quest in making this film, delving into her North African-Jewish roots (she is of Algerian descent). Her work parallels that of Robert Satloff, whose *Among The Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (Public Affairs, 2006) recounts the little-known story of 500,000 North African Jews living under German, Vichy-French, and Italian occupation and how a number of Arabs heroically sheltered or otherwise aided Jews being persecuted. He did so not simply as a historian, but also with the explicit purpose of reaching out to the Arab world to find common purpose in the interest of peace.

Albou seems similarly motivated by a conciliatory spirit. This is especially evident in a scene of Nour reading the Qur'an with her father and in the film's perhaps overly sweet conclusion.

Sadly, there are few Jews left today in North Africa. Only Morocco has a community that still numbers a few thousand from the 300,000 who lived there until the 1950s. Tunisia now has an even smaller community, which briefly made the headlines in 2002 when an al-Qaida suicide bomber killed nineteen people (mostly tourists) visiting a synagogue on the island of Djerba.

Like Ms. Albou's family, most Tunisian and Algerian Jews immigrated to France. Most Moroccan Jews settled in Israel.

The post-war national liberation struggles in North Africa gave rise to a pan-Arab consciousness that identified with the Palestinian refugees who had lost their homes during Israel's victory in 1948. Arab anger and frustration deepened with their ensuing defeats in 1956 and 1967, leading to mob violence and hostile governmental

measures against the Jewish minorities in their midst. The kind of personal reconciliation that Albou depicts is emblematic of her hope but does not yet reflect reality, at least not on a societal level. Still, Arab-Jewish relations as a whole will surely benefit once Palestinians and Israelis learn to live together in a peace that provides security and dignity for both peoples. ■

Ralph Seliger is editor of Israel Horizons, Meretz USA's quarterly publication, and a blogger at www.MeretzUSA.blogspot.com.

[MUSIC]

THIS IS ANDALUS!

SIWAN

Audio CD by Jon Balke, Amina Alaoui, Jon Hassell, Kheir Eddine M'Kachiche, and Bjarte Eike

ECM Records, 2009

Review by David Shasha

ANDALUSIAN HISTORY RE-presents not only one of the great high points of medieval civilization—the ground on which Jews, Muslims, and Christians once coexisted and interacted culturally in productive ways—but also the place where Europe and Arabia met and lived with one another.

It is this rich history that comes to life through song in *Siwan*, a project undertaken by the Norwegian jazz pianist Jon Balke after he was commissioned to present a special project in an Oslo music club. Balke chose to contact the Moroccan singer Amina Alaoui and produce an aural history of Spain through the eyes of Convivencia, the fabled cultural interchange that brought together the Jews, Muslims, and Christians of Spain.

The music is magically filled with the indelible light of Andalus—a light that was extinguished by the smoldering fires of the Spanish Inquisition. The attempt to destroy the polyglot culture of Andalus is not a recent development, but an old and distressing story of religious intolerance that lamentably continues to be played out on the world stage.

The songs presented to us in the

delightful *Siwan* package are timeless evocations of a world primed for cultural resurrection. Rejecting the detritus of contemporary politics, Siwan presents its listeners with hope and passion. It provides us with the robust culture of one of the world's least known and yet most brilliant civilizations. Its songs are both simple and deeply complex in an emotional and historical sense, telling the story of Andalus/Sepharad in an evocative way that resonates deeply with those of us who still cherish our traditions.

The medieval *Convivencia* of Jews, Muslims, and Christians has not always been cherished by modern Spanish historians and intellectuals. For example, historian Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz waged a bitter polemic against Américo Castro regarding the place of Arab-Islamic culture in the context of Spanish history. Albornoz asserted that Arab culture was an aberration that should not be taken into account when assessing the larger field of Spanish civilization—a civilization that he claimed should be solely based on its European-Christian component.

In our day this debate has been made even more complicated by the presence of a largely Islamophobic pro-Zionist cadre of scholars led by ubiquitous figures such as Bernard Lewis, Norman Stillman, and Jane Gerber, who have argued that the presentation of Andalus/Sepharad as an interfaith paradise is belied by the historical evidence. In their reading of the historical record, we see something much less than an interfaith utopia and more akin to the Anti-Jewish persecutions of Europe.

The truth of the matter is that Andalus resists facile comparisons to our present values and cannot really be judged by current standards of human rights and socio-cultural mores.

That said, the attempt to fit Sephardic history into an Ashkenazi mold—framed by a Zionist paranoia regarding Islam—has led scholars to overlook the Andalusian civilization's role in shaping our Western tradition. In particular, the musical history

of medieval Spain has been very poorly documented in the West and, in fact, its legacy is largely unknown to the general public.

The negative, skeptical view of Andalus/Sepharad has been countered in popular books by María Rosa Menocal and Chris Lowney, as well as in more specialized studies from Ross Brann, Peter Cole, and Ammiel Alcalay, but these works have drawn fire from members of the Bernard Lewis camp. There is a sense that centuries of Jewish

pride in Sepharad was misplaced and that we must accept the jaundiced voices of misanthropic scholars who seek to paint Islamic history in less than flattering terms. After many decades of scholarly respect in the Jewish world, Sephardic heritage is slowly becoming invisible to rank and file Jews, not to mention the larger world.

The German label ECM has made an important addition to our knowledge and cultural appreciation of the Andalusian world with its release of *Siwan*. Best known for its avant-garde classical and jazz recordings, ECM has nevertheless also released the brilliant work of the Greek singer Savina Yannatou, which touches on this old Mediterranean world. In her last few releases (beginning in 2001 with the classic *Terra Nostra*, which was recorded with her expert musical ensemble Primavera en Salónico), Ms. Yannatou has sketched out a Mediterranean civilization that is notably inclusive of the Ottoman legacy—a legacy that continued to extend the Andalusian tradition after the tragic events of 1492.

In Yannatou's seminal recordings, we are presented with a unified Mediterranean society that is linked by the songs and traditions of an older world, which can best be seen in the historical civilization in which Jews, Muslims, and Christians coexisted in a world of rich cultural productions. From Spain to North Africa to the Balkans and Greece, Mediterranean civilization fused different traditions that came together to create a rich amalgam. It is this resilient amalgam that has lasted

through generations of political and military conflicts in the region.

Alongside Yannatou, Italian-Sephardic singer and scholar Miriam Meghnagi is another wonderful musician who has worked to revive the songs of this area: in 2004 Meghnagi and her brother produced the compelling CD *Dialoghi Mediterranei*.

And now we are blessed to have *Siwan*, as well. Jon Balke's new album takes its *Convivencia* very seriously. Rather than ferreting out the Arabic from the Spanish or vice versa, the poetic texts that have been adapted for the recording run the gamut from the classical Arabic Golden Age to the later productions of Christian figures in the Spanish Golden Age.

The booklet that accompanies the CD displays the lyrics of the songs in Spanish, English, and Arabic. The lyrics are drawn from the cream of medieval Spanish civilization, including words by giants of the Iberian world such as Ibn Khafaja, Ibn Abbad, Ibn Ghalib al-Rusafi, and the ever-notorious mystic Al-Hallaj, along with Lope de Vega and John of the Cross.

Hallaj, the martyred Sufi who notoriously proclaimed himself the "Truth," was not, technically speaking, an Iberian, but a Baghdadi originally born in Persia. The way his ideas and spiritual insights traveled from East to West was typical of the period and its relentless mobility. Hallaj and John of the Cross were both important figures in the mystical traditions of Islam and Christianity, and their spiritual teachings were deeply influential in the religious lives of Spaniards. The spread of their wisdom exemplified the way in which ideas could cross national borders and culturally unify the Mediterranean region from West to East and back again.

Alaoui is not only a graceful vocal interpreter of this musical tradition, but a scholar of Andalusian civilization as well. In the liner notes, she expertly sketches out the historical figures behind the songs and provides listeners with a panoramic view of this magnificent civilization.

Siwan thus presents the listener with a rich composite of a world in perpetual ferment and cross-cultural pollenization. The swirl of sounds marks what María Rosa Menocal's new book has called "the arts of intimacy": a blending of ideas and



traditions exalting the sacred in the context of the brilliant aesthetic developed in a polyglot Andalusia. The album skillfully shows us the historical connections between contemporary Arabic music—much of which remains an integral presence in our Syrian-Sephardic liturgy, as Mark Kligman has shown in his excellent study *Maqam and Liturgy*—and the music of the Middle Ages. The songs are not mechanical attempts to reproduce ancient melodies as historically constituted, but free interpretations of the poetic texts using the skills of the musicians and composers who bring to the project an expertise in both the Western and the Arabic musical heritage.

What's more, *Siwan* is a pleasure to listen to from a purely musical standpoint. Perhaps it can act as a bridge to a world that has been closed off to many because of the culture of our current politics—a politics that has often demonized Arabic civilization and with it the Sephardic heritage that is so closely allied to it. We are not sensitive enough to the ways in which Arabic and Spanish are intertwined with one another. By recasting old literary texts in a contemporary setting that draws from the rich heritage of both East and West, the musicians and singers involved in *Siwan* have provided an aural monument to a civilization that offered an invaluable model of how cultures can work with one another and become enriched in the process.

Without seeking to recreate a mythical Andalusian fantasy world, *Siwan* succeeds in both delightfully entertaining and teaching us. We can luxuriate in its rich tapestry of sound and poetry and simultaneously experience the exalted grandeur of a history that is central to our current concerns: a history that needs to be remembered and explored not simply as an academic matter, but also as an existential one. In this sense, *Siwan* enriches its listeners with an accessible yet learned voyage through the world of Andalus—a wondrous world that once spoke in the twin languages of Europe and the Middle East. ■

David Shasha is the director of the Center for Sephardic Heritage in Brooklyn, New York. The center publishes a weekly e-mail newsletter, Sephardic Heritage Update (<http://groups.google.com/group/David-shasha>), and promotes cultural events.

[BOOKS]

KABBALAH FOR FEMINISTS

ON THE WINGS OF SHEKHINAH:
REDISCOVERING JUDAISM'S DIVINE
FEMININE

by Rabbi Leah Novick

Quest Books, 2008

Review by Alicia Ostriker

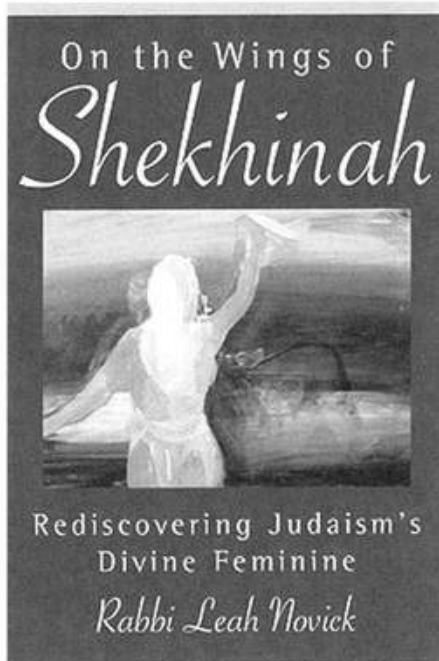
JEWES IN PURSUIT OF THE Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of God found in kabbalistic tradition, have needed for many years to rely on scholarly works such as Gershom Scholem's massive *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, Raphael Patai's readable but quirky *The Hebrew Goddess*, and Daniel Matt's translations from *The Zohar*, which are beautiful and provocative but, of course, do not take us past the thirteenth century. More recently, we have Howard Schwartz's excellent *Tree of Souls: the Mythology of Judaism*, with extensive sections on the Shekhinah supplemented by reading lists. But what of those who want to bring the

Shekhinah beyond theory into practice? May we actually, as Debbie Friedman's song promises, "be blessed beneath the wings of Shekhinah"?

On the Wings of Shekhinah is a book for seekers. Ordained by Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, a founder of Jewish Renewal, Rabbi Leah Novick writes from the perspective of one who has herself experienced "the Divine Presence" and strives to "bring Shekhinah back to this earth, in our time." Her book is explicitly aimed at individuals and communities seeking a personal connection with the Shekhinah in their spiritual lives, and more largely in the hope of restoring the balance of a world dangerously racked by chaos and violence. It traces the metamorphoses of the Shekhinah in Jewish lore and life, from possible sources in the pagan past through the Torah and Talmud, then through the phases of Early and Lurianic Kabbalah, and on into our own time. The final chapters survey the ways in which feminists have been recovering the image of the sacred feminine as a source of guidance in our sexual lives, in the creation of new life-cycle rituals, and in our needs for bodily healing and the healing of the planet.

Throughout, Novick speculates about how men's views of women, as well as women's own daily lives, may have been inflected over the centuries by changing visions of the Shekhinah. Did medieval women call on the Shekhinah in childbirth? Was the Shabbos Queen of the Hasids for men only? Did women connect Rosh Chodesh celebrations with their bodies? Novick speculates that "women baking challah took the place of the temple showbread." Did these women see themselves as priestesses of the home? The author quotes a candle-lighting prayer: "Ribono Shel Olam [Master of the World], may my mitzvah of lighting candles be accepted in the way the mitzvah of the high Priest was accepted when he lit the Menorah in the beloved Holy Temple." She notes the lives of numerous foremothers and present-day teachers who are expanding our spiritual possibilities.

Novick's prose is both personal and



learned. Unfortunately it lacks footnotes (except for the epigraphs, which are profuse and wonderful, ranging from tal-mudic and zoharic sayings to quotes from famous Hasids and their rebbetzin wives), and although there is an extended bibliography, I'm not sure how a reader wanting to track her sources for more precise information would do so. But that is really beside the point. The point is that "Shekhinah energy" is available to us today, by a multiplicity of paths, if we seek it. ■

Alicia Ostriker is a poet and critic, and author of For the Love of God: the Bible as an Open Book. Her poetry collection The Book of Seventy received the 2009 National Jewish Book Award for Poetry.

RADICAL MEDIA RENEWAL

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF AMERICAN
JOURNALISM: THE MEDIA REVOLUTION
THAT WILL BEGIN THE WORLD AGAIN

by Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols
Nation Books, 2010

Review by Paul Buhle

NOT LONG AGO, BEFORE THE Obama administration plunged into the crisis of bad luck and bad decisions that is threatening to wipe out the accumulated hopes of several generations, the "media revolution" sometimes seemed the only topic of public conversation. That is fairly natural, because the commentators are anything but bystanders. Or rather, there are many thousands of journalistic bystanders who lost their jobs and are standing by, blogging and hoping.

Meanwhile, new communications devices seem to appear every week. Adept corporations are set to earn billions of dollars from their sale, but no one really knows what these new gadgets will mean for journalism.

Of all the writers who have tackled

these and related issues, Robert McChesney and John Nichols can rightly claim to have the track record that counts. The two of them, respectively a distinguished media scholar (and radio show host) and one of the sharpest political journalists in the United States, have been at the beating heart of Free Press (www.freepress.net) from its inception. This social movement, epitomized by the radio show Democracy Now, was created to fight corporate media domination and the Bushies' effort to quash human rights discussions, and it seems to have peaked in the midst of that administration's blundering bloodthirstiness. The nomination and election of Obama threw a spanner into the works for some months because the worst of the problems, it was hoped, might now be passed. Sad reality: we need this kind of movement as much as ever.

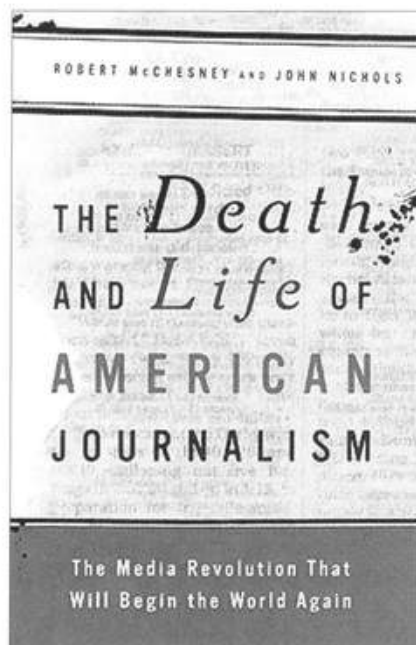
The Death and Life of American Journalism is, at its most innovative, a historical analysis with a programmatic conclusion. So many books on U.S. history have appeared in recent decades that the actual story of journalism has remained a remarkable mystery. McChesney and Nichols reveal the surprising fact that without government subsidies, there would have been no penny press (an innovation way back in the 1820s); no blood and thunder fiction weekly papers (the television or Web of the day) in the 1840s; no vigorous arguing over slavery; and for that matter, no utopian, free love, and women's rights papers.

Forget for the moment that the huge mass of newspapers and, later, magazines, have historically been profit-driven, morally corrupt, racist, and tied to a corrupt two-party system. All the way back to Thomas Jefferson, elements of the elite found a dissenting press useful to themselves and expressive of the democratic promise of the new nation. The Post Office Act of 1792, opening up "Post Roads" across the country (and soon making the Post Office the nation's largest employer), was accompanied by a heavy subsidy of rates for sending printed matter. Printing subsidies of various kinds followed as well.

Go forward to the twentieth century,

and newspapers are peaking in circulation with a staggering variety in many languages, local, regional, and national—not to mention the comic pages (always favorites, along with sports sections). The press of the 1910s featured muck-raking revelations of corruption and called for political reform. Again, never mind that by the end of the decade, papers and magazines favoring the U.S. entry to war had been favored, those opposing the war suppressed (mostly by the loss of postal rates, though sometimes by mobs of American Legionnaires wrecking offices and Red Squads dragging staff members off to jail). Subsequent bursts of lively journalism, the scandal sheets of the 1920s, the left-leaning minority of papers (including much of the secular foreign-language press and of the African-American press), foreshadowed the Pentagon Papers' revelations and belated criticism of the CIA by the liberal press.

By the 1980s and '90s, of course, the heavily centralized newspaper industry was raking in profits by cutting staffs and news pages while loading up on ads, much to the delight of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton regimes. The opposition press, such as had existed, virtually ceased to exist outside of some weeklies and a handful of left-leaning magazines. The PBS commentaries by Bill Moyers were to the point but after the fact, and



as the great newsmen (there were few newswomen) of the World War II generation passed from the scene, they were largely succeeded by centrists like Dan Rather, ever eager for another Democratic-led war, or others with no particular views at all, just an eagerness to get in on the profits. The Right heavily subsidized its own, from the Moonie-funded *Washington Times* to the neocon *Weekly Standard*, while liberalism largely disappeared from the pages of reliably hawkish publications such as *The New Republic*. Meanwhile the margin on the left, including *Tikkun*, courageously but barely hung on.

Then came the new century and with it the consolidation of the latest media revolution: the Web and all of its ramifications. Actually, that consolidation occupies the first several chapters of *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, which is admirable for its thoroughgoing rundown of newspaper collapse, monopoly-fed profit gouging among the moguls, and the subsequent sinking sense that the daily press will soon go dead. This is a good treatment but will be more familiar to most readers. What's new is the proposal to do something about it all, a concrete plan that offers a ray of light and lots of room for serious discussion.

The authors advise the careful subsidization of the printed press, support for local competition and diversity among surviving dailies, and the subsidization of opinion magazines by way of postal reductions and special care paid to protect the high school newspapers and assorted media of young people. To make these kinds of developments possible, they propose some government oversight, e.g., in offering a transition from corporate to post-corporate, a term sufficiently vague for all kinds of alternatives, positive and negative. The low-profit, limited-liability corporation (L3C) seems the most promising, because a newspaper, literally paper or not, can take investments as well as grants from foundations. Could this offer a model for the newsroom of the future? Well, maybe. A plausible argument for related alternatives would be National Public

Radio, which has doubled its audience during the last decade.

The other proposal centers, inevitably, upon the Web and the democratic use of cyberspace. Vouchers would be made available to operations without any advertising, building upon donations repaid via tax benefits; web-based journalism of the most grassroots kind would be off and running, funded by further vouchers as media sites took hold of a local, regional, or national audience. This "evolutionary force" would, the authors admit, create a great deal of trivia-based "news" and probably Sarah Palin fan clubs as well. McChesney and Nichols offer the hope and expectation that out of this burst of new journalism, good would outweigh bad. Further tax-created funds could be created, they argue, through taxing commercial broadcasting, taxing consumer electronics (as little as 5 percent on new media purchases), taxing advertising, and several other means.

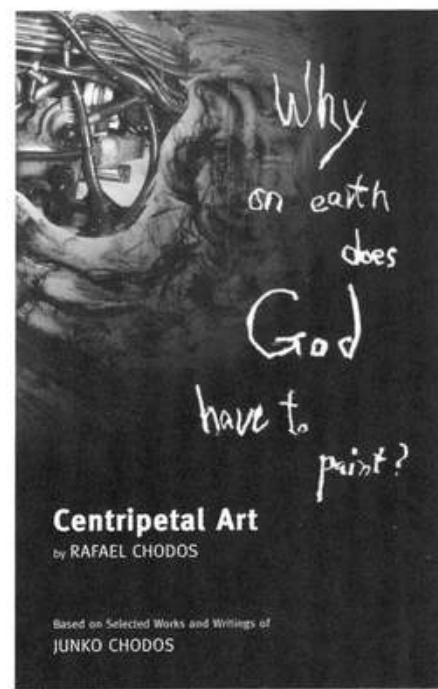
Critics of *The Death and Life of American Journalism* are certain to point out that ostensibly public broadcast resources such as NPR, to take a crucial case in point, were no less eager to rush into war with Iraq than the *New York Times* or the conservative papers, and likewise just as eager to embrace the official narratives on a wide range of other issues (these days, notably the misguided offensives in "Afpak"). Progressives were moved to the margins long ago, with a partial exception in the realm of cultural coverage, and show few signs of being permitted back in the door. How do we get beyond the viewpoint of the hegemonic center and near-Right as the "alternatives" that prove "democracy is working"?

Others would opine, no doubt, that the sorry tale of the corporate press, taken with the track record of who guides government programs, is also an unhappy object lesson in social control. Those in power, to judge from the first year of the Obama administration, work just about as effectively in Democratic as Republican outfits, and especially when it comes to openness and accessibility from the Left. Perhaps only an economic-

social crisis as large as the Great Depression could prompt changes on the scale necessary; barring that catastrophe, the real elites—corporate suits and their military-industrial-political partners—have no reason to agree to the blueprint that the authors lay out. Unsentimental about the printed press except as it serves their interests, and still firmly in control of the political system, these elites make democratic communications proposals daunting to implement.

Still, McChesney and Nichols make a case for media democracy—a case based on real political experience and plenty of knowledge—that no one else is likely to make as well. *The Death and Life of American Journalism* should set off alarm bells and also inspire a new generation of activism. Let's hope so. ■

Paul Buhle's latest books of nonfiction comic art include *The Beats*, Studs Terkel's *Working: a Graphic Adaptation*, and a biographical picture-book, *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman*. His next comic is entitled *Yiddishland*.



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on earth
does
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have to
paint?

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challenged by our *golem* of “artificial intelligence,” we can hardly imagine the new heights and depths that understandings of reality will attain, even in a relatively short expanse of time. As we unravel the genome and the mysteries of DNA, the truth that each of us bears within us the memory of all earlier generations, indeed of the whole evolutionary process, becomes ever clearer. What will it take to convert that understanding into *real* memory, and how greatly will that add to our appreciation of who we are and the long journey on which we have come? As to where the journey is leading, I envision a mind so vastly expanded beyond ours that it will be able to embrace the whole of bio- and geo-history, everything back to the beginning, all as One. On *that* day, indeed, shall “Y-H-W-H be one and its name one!” But we are still a long way from there. Meanwhile, keeping our planet alive is the first order of business.

My Own Roots and Beginnings

THE IDEAS I HAVE SHARED HERE COME FROM MY YEARS OF thought as a Jewish seeker. I have been reading, studying, writing, and teaching theology to Jews—including many present and future rabbis—for nearly half a century. Yet I still think of myself primarily as a seeker. That means living in pursuit of an ever-present yet ever-elusive God, the One of Whom Scripture says: “Seek His face, always” (Ps. 105:4). There is no end to such seeking. But it also means questing after truth, or at least *my* truth, one that wells up from my own life-experience and feels authentic to who I am, as a person and as a Jew. Personal and intellectual honesty are essential to my life as a seeker; I do not permit them to be overwhelmed by traditional claims or by emotional need. In this I am a longtime disciple of Rabbi Bunem of Przysucha who taught: “Do not deceive anybody” (Lev. 25:17)—not even yourself!”

These two realities, being a God-seeker and a truth-seeker, might seem to go hand in hand. Supposedly God *is* Truth, after all. But in my case they present a terrible yet wonderful conflict. It is

this conflict, and my ongoing attempt to resolve it, that my current work—including my forthcoming book, *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God And Tradition*, from which this article was adapted—is all about.

I have understood since childhood that I am a deeply religious person, one easily moved by the power of sacred language, rites, and symbols. Through them I am sometimes able to enter into states of inner openness to some nameless and transcendent presence, that which I choose to call “God.” Raised in a Jewish atheist household, I was powerfully attracted to the synagogue by the time I was seven or eight years old. The grandeur and mystery of its liturgy, the drama of its sacred calendar, and the infinite beauty and intricacies of the Hebrew language all drew me in and have never ceased to fascinate me.

At the same time, I have long known that I am not a “believer” in the conventional Jewish or Western sense. I simply do not encounter God as “He” is usually described in the Western religious context, a Supreme Being or Creator who exists outside or beyond the universe, who created this world as an act of personal will, and who guides and protects it. Indeed I do not know that such an “outside” or a “beyond” exists. Challenges to conventional theological views, as well as to all the apologetic reformulations that seek to save them, came at me rather hard at the end of adolescence. I had chosen the religious life on my own, becoming quite fully (and somewhat compulsively) observant as an adolescent. But the regimen of Orthodox practice I had adopted, at the cost of terrible family battles, came crashing down during my college years, when I accepted that its theological underpinnings had been rooted in fantasy and denial of reality.

The challenges came from two directions: theodicy and critical history. The former included both personal loss (my mother died when I was eleven, and I had spent much of adolescence mourning her and struggling with that loss) and the fact of being a Jew in the immediate post-Holocaust generation. I remember the day my beloved East European grandfather found out just what had happened to the Jews of his town, as I recall my mother and grandmother going through newspaper lists of “relatives sought” in the early post-war years. These experiences, both personal and collective, made it clear to me that I could affirm neither particular providence nor a God who governed history. The God of childhood dreams, the One who could show that life was indeed fair after all, was gone. My initiation into adulthood meant full acceptance of the arbitrariness of fate, including the finality of death.

At about the same time, I was exposed to Jewish scholarship, including the critical reading of the Hebrew Bible and its history. This exciting intellectual enterprise, which gripped my imagination, also undermined the residue of faith I had in Scripture as revealed. The text was edited, composed of (*continued on page 72*)



ILLUSTRATION: GATE

new life of a child, or of an approaching death. We may see it in wonders of nature, sunrises and sunsets, mountains and oceans. It may happen to us in the course of loving and deeply entering into union with another, or in profound aloneness. Sometimes, however, such a moment of holy and awesome presence comes upon us without any apparent provocation at all. It may come as a deep inner stillness, quieting all the background noise that usually fills our inner chambers, or it may be quite the opposite, a loud rush and excitement that fills us to overflowing. It may seem to come from within or without, or perhaps both at once. The realization of such moments fills us with a sense of magnificence, of smallness, and of belonging, all at once. Our hearts well up with love for the world around us and awe before its grandeur. The experience is usually one that renders us speechless. But then we feel lucky and blessed if we have enough tie to a tradition that gives us language, that enables us to say “the whole earth is filled with God’s glory!”

God is not an intellectual proposition for me, but rather the ground of life itself. It is the name I give to the reality I encounter in such a moment, one that feels more authentic and deeply perceptive of truth than any other. I believe with complete faith that every human being is capable of such experience, and that these moments place us in contact with the elusive inner essence of being that I call “God.” It is out of such moments that religion is born, our human response to the dizzying depths of an encounter we cannot—and yet so need to—name. I returned to tradition, the one of my ancestors and my early attempts at faith, because it gave me a language with which to name that inner “place.” I find myself less convinced by the dogmatic truth-claims of tradition than I am powerfully attracted to the richness of its language, both in word and symbolic gesture. Through the profound echo-chamber of countless generations, it offers a way to respond, to channel the love and awe that rise up within us at such times, and to give a name to the holy mystery by which our lives are bounded.

I was about twenty years old when I

began studying the Zohar (the thirteenth-century classic of medieval Kabbalah) and the teachings of the Hasidic masters (Eastern Europe, eighteenth century). This encounter with the mystical tradition saved Judaism for me. Without it I would have wandered away. The essential insights of Hasidism—that God is to be sought and found everywhere and in each moment, that the quest for a deeper truth about reality is a lifelong adventure, and that our ongoing discovery of God can uplift and transform both soul and world—soon became *my* truths. The best semi-systematic work where I found them presented in those early years was a little treatise called *Fundamentals of Hasidism* by Hillel Zeitlin, one of the two key (along with Martin Buber) neo-Hasidic thinkers of interwar Europe, and famous martyr of the Warsaw ghetto. When I read those pages—his discussions of “Being and Nothingness,” “The Self-Contraction of God,” and “Uplifting Sparks,”—I remember somehow knowing that I had found my own religious language, one that spoke deeply to my soul, while challenging rather than offending my mind. It has served me well across the decades, and I hope that I have come to serve it faithfully as well.

I am a neo-Hasidic Jew, one deeply influenced by the lives and teachings of the early Hasidic masters, but choosing not to live within the strict parameters of religious praxis that characterize Hasidism, and not sharing the later Hasidic disdain for secular education or for the modern world as a whole. It has long been clear to me that the insights into reality to be found in the texts, lives, and stories of that tradition need to be shared more broadly, something I have tried to do over a lifetime of writing and teaching. I also have a sense that the spiritual legacy of Hasidism should not belong to Jews alone. Its insights into the great universal questions, though expressed in deeply Jewish language, have importance for Jews and non-Jews (particularly, but not only, Christians) alike, for all who take religious questions seriously and who understand the critical hour in which we live.

I also think of myself as a *religious*

humanist. Humanism means an understanding that our fate, along with that of the entire planet, depends on human action. There is no one to hold back our hand, to keep us from destroying this garden in which we have been placed. We are totally responsible. *Religious* humanism means that we will fulfill that awesome role only by realizing that we are part of a reality infinitely more ancient, more profound, and more unified than any of us can express or know.

My forthcoming book is an unpacking of the ways in which I see mysticism and humanism, two seemingly very distinct approaches to life, complementing one another. Its title, *Radical Judaism*, shows my roots in the “Radical Theology” movement of the late 1960s. I have recalled elsewhere a conversation I had with Heschel in which I asked him what he thought about Radical Theology, a movement that spoke of the “Death of God,” which Heschel had termed “blasphemy.” But this very “Death of God” was also clearing the road for precisely the sort of “depth theology” that Heschel himself had advocated. “Radical Theology is very important,” he answered, “but it has to begin with the teachings of the Hasidic masters. “Forty years later, I have written a book that I hope is that theology.

The “radicalism” of my work may not be what some readers would expect. I am primarily a thinker and teacher, not an activist. Although I share a strong progressivist view on political and social issues, my work is about a different sort of radicalism, one that takes us back to our deepest roots and challenges us to rethink our lives from that perspective. It has implications in the social sphere, to be sure, but its core lies in the realm of a contemporary mystic’s understanding of who we are, how we got here, and where we are going. Call that “theology,” if you like. In Jewish terms, it is a call to return to our Source, the one that underlies and precedes all our so-venerated “sources.”

I may be speaking in Jewish terms, but my work is aimed at an audience that transcends all the conventional religious lines. In former times, theology was written only for those who lived within a particular religious community and shared

the symbols and liturgical language of that faith-community. Its function was largely to explicate those symbols and to give an intelligible account of how they bore that community's message. But given the wider concerns and the urgency of the hour, I set myself a different goal. I hope to reach both Jews and non-Jews. I write as a radically heterodox Jew, but I hope to reach some of my Orthodox brothers and sisters as well. My work will hopefully embrace readers who have been exposed to the religious languages of East as well as West, including some of the many who are making a "journey home-ward" after encountering meditation and spirituality first in an Eastern setting. I think they will find my language to represent a Judaism closer to those teachings than they might have expected. ■

FAMILY COURTS

(continued from page 27)

their positions and soak up the adversarial atmosphere. What would the percentage be at the point a party first enters a lawyer's office or talks to a friend or counselor about divorce?

As a result of this research, Dr. Doherty has designed a university project to offer reconciliation services in divorce cases, the Minnesota Reconciliation Project (www.mnreconciliation.org). The essential component, of course, is to offer effective services. Since marriage counseling has often been tried without success, the project also features more intense interventions like weekend retreats and mentoring by couples who have restored their marriages to health after teetering on the brink of divorce. Mailings to parties who have recently filed for divorce have just gone out, and work with the first interested couples has begun. We will know more in the coming months about who seeks help and what works.

The Minnesota Reconciliation Project has also begun to develop specialized services for the "leavee" spouse, whose pain and anger can be expressed, sometimes for years, in conflict and efforts to sabotage a peaceful divorce process. The reconciliation project serves people with

active divorce cases, and I have high hopes that a private sector, non-adversarial divorce process would be much more sophisticated about recognizing the opportunity in family strife for healing and reconciliation long before the courts get involved. Dr. Doherty has already begun working with a creative group of collaborative lawyers to develop protocols and language for lawyers to use to open up the sensitive topic of reconciliation as an option for clients who come seeking a divorce. Eventually the entire divorce system might start asking who is healing rather than who is winning.

Help Unmarried Parents Build Families

I AM CONTENDING THAT THE COURT system's adversary processes are counter-productive for resolving divorces. But the surge in unmarried parenting has thrust the courts into a relatively new field where formal legal arrangements do have an important role. Unmarried parents lack the legal ties and history of a marriage, and sometimes have only a tenuous relationship on which to build a cooperative parenting partnership. The court system is about the only venue presently available to build a family out of these components.

There is another factor that makes the role of the courts in unmarried parent cases so important—most of the parties are poor. Part of that is due to the demographics of single parenting—poor people are the most likely to have children outside of marriage. But the bigger reason for the profile of the unmarried cases the courts see is the extensive, federally funded child support enforcement system. All over the country, every day, government lawyers are tracking down the partners—usually fathers—of parents receiving public assistance and hauling them into court to confirm their parentage and establish child support obligations to recoup the government's public assistance outlays. The irony is that many of these fathers are poor themselves and have little money to contribute to child support.

The sophisticated research on unmarried parents coming from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study at Princeton (fragilefamilies.princeton.edu)

confirms that a large percentage of unmarried parents are closely connected with each other and their child around the time of the birth. But without the legal structure, social support, and cultural expectations of a marriage, these relationships often drift apart. She gets a new boyfriend, he gets a new girlfriend, and life moves on. By the time the children of unmarried parents reach age five, over 60 percent of their parents are living apart, and nearly 40 percent of the nonresident parents have not seen the child in the last two years. This is a big loss—the research is increasingly clear that high-quality involvement by the noncustodial parent can go a long way to improving the prospects of these children. And yet when the parents of these at-risk children stand together in a courtroom in the official procedure addressing their parenting connection, the discussion will likely be just about money, the noncustodial parent will feel his or her primary value is as a cash machine, and a prime opportunity to support these people as parents will be lost.

If our society is going to weather an unmarried parent rate of 40 percent, concentrated in the lowest socioeconomic groups, we need to develop institutions and cultural expectations to support unmarried co-parenting. In our court we are about to begin a grant-funded pilot project we call "Co-Parent Court," a problem-solving court for unmarried parents. In partnership with community and government agencies, including both our state and local child support agencies, Co-Parent Court will soon add co-parent education, domestic abuse screening and programming, family group conferencing, and parenting support services (like employment and housing assistance) to the current focus on collecting child support. The goal is for parents to graduate from the program committed to a lasting parenting plan tailored to their circumstances. We believe we can show that investing in the parents will bring a far larger return in child well-being.

Projects like Co-Parent Court could start to provide the legal framework unmarried parents need. A deeper understanding of the significance of being an



A Spiritual Perspective on Family Conflict

ACCORDING TO THE EGOCENTRIC CONSCIOUSNESS NOW PREVAILING ON THE PLANET, conflict between people is inevitable. The purpose of life is fulfillment in the material world by amassing money, power, acclaim, or psychological gratification. People often choose romantic and sexual partners to accomplish these goals, and the relationships usually work only so long as each party sees the other as the best way to get his or her needs met. As soon as someone strays from the program of serving the other's goals, problems arise. The typical egocentric spouse responds—and we all do it—by trying to push the other person back into line through persuasion or manipulation (I've seen a lot of jewelry bought in the years before a divorce), nagging, anger, intimidation, or other forms of coercion. If that fails, the dissatisfied spouse disengages and looks for a better alternative.

A spiritual approach to relationships is quite different. As spiritual beings struggling to make our way through—and ultimately out of—a bruising material world, we all develop wounds, repressed emotions, and trigger points that render us incapable of perfect love and patience in all situations. Our goal in life is to experience the divine within and around us, which requires working through these limitations. Intimate partners present us with an ideal opportunity to find our sore spots, and plenty of chances to work on healing them. We recognize that a strong negative reaction to something about another person is a sure sign that the same quality lurks inside us. In my Unity Church congregation we are fond of the phrase, "If you spot it, you got it." Seeing partners as mirrors and relationships as spiritual training camps means conflict is still inevitable, but instead of leading to anger and blame, it is an opportunity for growth and healing. And if either party's wounds are simply too deep to allow a relationship to continue, the parting of ways, while sad, need not be bitter, and it can be accompanied by a healthy dose of self-examination and acceptance of responsibility.

Based on the many families I have seen in court and some of the things we have been trying in Minnesota, I believe legal institutions can help people act from their highest selves, rather than bring out the worst in our egocentric natures. What's needed is to do away with the adversary nature of family proceedings and instead offer opportunities for deeper communication.

Get Divorces Out of Court

DIVORCE IS TEARING APART FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, WITH A disproportionate effect on poor and working-class people and children. Couples with incomes over \$50,000 are 30 percent less likely to get divorced than couples with less money, and children living with unmarried or divorced parents are statistically much more likely than children of continuously married parents to become pregnant as teens or to drop out of school. Even if the correlation is not entirely causal, it is clear that divorce introduces yet another strain into the lives of children who are already struggling, making them vulnerable to a host of cognitive, emotional, and social problems.

Perched right at the epicenter of this crisis are the nation's family courts, where judges, guardians *ad litem* (people appointed to represent the child's interests in a court case), custody evaluators, parenting consultants, and an array of related professionals struggle to manage anger and conflict while guiding families through orderly transitions. The system "works"—people get divorced, and custody disputes between unmarried parents are decided. But virtually none of these hardworking professionals I know are very happy with it. Neither are the parties going through it—in one survey, 71 percent of family court litigants said the legal process pushed their feelings of anger and hostility to a further extreme. Add to that heightened conflict the legal fees that can consume all of a family's assets and the emotional stress caused by uncertainty and loss of control, and the picture is one of a misdesigned system that may have sufficed for the scattered cases in the 1960s but is now inadequate for addressing the intense family problems of a large

percentage of the population.

The most pressing step is to get divorces out of the courts. In our culture, courts mean a fight, a chance to attack another person's position and exaggerate your own righteousness. They also mean coercion—the idea is to get the authority figure, the judge, whose orders will be enforced by men with guns, to see things your way. It's the perfect culmination of an ego-centered family dispute, which starts with trying to force someone else to comply with your wishes. Getting the judge on your side now gives you the ultimate coercive power.

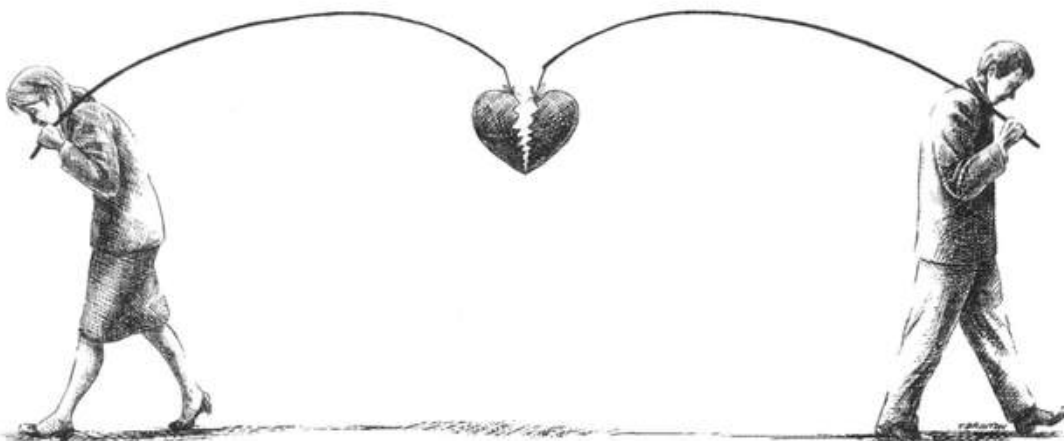
The problem, of course, is that if the litigants are parents, for the next fifty years they will still be interacting and making decisions about their children. Courtroom combat may be fine for people who never have to see each other again, but for families, destroying whatever remains of a parenting relationship is the worst possible outcome. After seeing what some people do to each other in court, I am amazed they can bear to lay eyes on each other again, much less cooperate in parenting.

The intensified fighting perpetuated by family courts may be unpleasant for the parents, but it is the children who suffer the most: research demonstrates that conflict makes divorce especially damaging to children, and cooperative parenting after the divorce is one way to minimize the harm.

Family courts are also often inefficient and not necessarily the best way to make good decisions. The adversary system works fine for deciding a historical fact like who pulled the trigger or ran the red light: put the two best re-creations of the event in front of a fact finder and get a decision. But family court decisions involve not historical facts but future predictions—what arrangements will be best for the children? And the target is a moving one—the answer today may be very different from the answer next month or next year. Unfortunately, most of us legally trained judges are only superficially knowledgeable about the complicated issues of family dynamics and child development raised by parenting cases, and rarely are the resources and time available to get us the comprehensive, sophisticated evidence needed to reach the best result. Add the complicated procedural rules the adversary system needs to make sure the fight is fair, and staff the system with lawyers who are trained in legal combat and paid by the hour, and you have a system that makes the health care establishment look positively streamlined.

Back when getting a divorce required proving the other party was at fault in some way, a court proceeding was necessary to establish fault. But with the advent of no-fault divorce, the rationale for forcing people through a conflict-enhancing, emotionally and financially exhausting court proceeding where they can fight over all the details of their marriage, down to the pots and pans, has disappeared. (I remember a fight over who got the pizza stone, and we once spent a fair amount of time deciding visitation rights regarding a parrot.)

So what is the alternative? The best and simplest solution is for courts to get out of the divorce business in favor of a system of administrative divorce. Just like getting a marriage license in the first place, let people sign a form in some county office. If there is a practical problem that the parties need help to work out, let them file a simplified civil lawsuit over that particular issue—who gets the house, or what the parenting schedule should be, for example.





Limit the court fights to specific issues and avoid the emotion of suing or being sued “for divorce.”

Getting divorces out of court would be the first step toward a new view of divorce as a painful but growth-enhancing life passage that a large share of the population goes through. If we can reframe divorce, we can then expect that our celebrated private enterprise system will start offering more sophisticated “family transition” services or “family resource and recovery” centers rather than high-priced legal services. I know the legal fees in divorce cases with any contested issues regularly exceed \$10,000 per party. There is a lot of money out there that could fund a better system. It could not make matters much worse.

Replace Adversary Proceedings with Healing Processes

SO WHAT ABOUT DISPUTES? EVEN WITH AN OUT-OF-COURT DIVORCE PROCESS emphasizing personal growth, many couples will have issues they can’t agree upon. There are private dispute resolution services, of course, and with an administrative divorce system there would be many more, but courts will still need to be available as the backstop.

The basic judicial dispute resolution system, we all realize, is just a sophisticated version of the tactic every kid knows—get the powerful person on your side (“Mo-om, tell Jeffery to give me my video game ...”). Acquire the power to coerce the offender into line. Now, in recent decades, an extensive machinery called “ADR,” alternative dispute resolution, has developed. Involving primarily mediation, but also including arbitration and other techniques like neutral evaluation, ADR provides services to litigating parties to help them settle a dispute before a judge has to. We love it, of course, and it is a big improvement. But most ADR processes essentially add another layer to the calculus of “how can I get the powerful person on my side?” Now the question is “how likely is it that I can get the powerful person on my side?” If I feel confident, I can hold out for a settlement closer to what I want. This ADR calculus is a more structured version of the analysis most litigants go through. The vast majority of court cases are not decided by a judge, of course: the parties work them out (sometimes on the proverbial courthouse steps). These settlements typically are highly influenced by the impending judicial decision and the party’s view of how likely he or she is to get a good deal from the judge.

The premise of both judicial decision making and ADR is that the problem is a dispute, so the focus of the analysis is on the outside person who will coerce a resolution to the dispute. The other party in the dispute is seen not as a soulful human being, but as an obstacle. To ease the way for parents who must continue to work together, we must first redefine the problem as one involving hurt people in a wounded relationship. The process needs to recognize both parties’ wounds and prioritize the entire family’s well-being. The specific issues laid before judges are usually just symptoms of the deeper pain the parties are suffering.

Is it possible for a court system to promote healing as a way of resolving surface disputes? Some forms of mediation get close (see www.transformativemediation.org), and a growing movement called “collaborative practice” tries to factor out the coercive outsider by having both lawyers and the parties commit to never going to court (www.collaborativepractice.com). But some especially direct techniques warrant further exploration. For example, Marshall Rosenberg, the originator of what he calls “nonviolent communication” (sometimes called “compassionate communication”) has developed a powerful system that relies on identifying the underlying needs and feelings of both parties and then recognizing that conflict arises over strategies to get those needs met (www.cnvc.org). Dominic Barter, a talented English social worker who has been working in Brazil for many years, has married the concept of nonviolent communication with the age-old community circle processes used in traditional cultures throughout the world to develop a very structured process to heal conflicts. He is using “restorative

circles” in the slums, where people have to work out their problems together because there is literally no government authority to appeal to. The beauty of Barter’s work is that he has honed the process down to the point where he has been able to facilitate the resolution of most conflicts with a minutes-long “pre-circle” discussion with each participant followed by an actual circle process of a couple of hours. Usually there is also a follow-up circle to see if all parties have kept their commitments.

In Minneapolis we have experimented with Barter’s restorative circles in a few intractable cases where the adversary system has repeatedly failed to produce lasting peace. There have been notable successes, and any failures have generally resulted from parties’ failure to show up after having initially volunteered to do so. Clearly the mechanics of how restorative circles can be incorporated into a court system need to be carefully considered. It is too early to draw general conclusions, but at this point I can say this with confidence: in every family court there is a subset of cases for which the adversary system is a total failure. The parties come back again and again, locked in endless conflict. There is absolutely no downside in trying to replace coercion with healing in these cases.

Even in cases with significant, practical conflicts about children or finances, I am always optimistic about a decent process and outcome if I hear a party express some concern that the other person also have as rich a relationship with the children and as much freedom from anxiety about money as possible. Such concern sets a tone that invites reciprocity, and the process becomes about people rather than bargaining positions. By replacing adversary proceedings with processes that encourage mutual concern, healing can become an increasingly important function of the courts. And, although it may seem counterintuitive, I know many family lawyers who would welcome such a change.

Offer Reconciliation Services

RIGHT NOW STARTING A DIVORCE IS LIKE ENTERING A FREEWAY WITH NO EXITS. PEOPLE have a marriage problem, they know divorce is a solution, and the route to their goal is open and well-traveled. Lawyers will usually be more than willing to get the journey started, and courts, which have a hard time assessing the quality of their work, are very good at establishing time standards and pushing cases along. There is also a social pressure for divorce in our egocentric culture. When somebody has problems with a spouse, it can be most gratifying and ego-enhancing for friends and family to trash the offender and support the friend in “sticking up for herself/himself.” The same tendency holds true in the therapeutic community, which can be individualistic and undermine commitment.

Forty years ago, family courts were often called “conciliation courts” and they had statutory authority to try to save marriages. The name of the premier national association for divorce professionals is still the “Association of Family and Conciliation Courts.” Maybe the time has come to make the courts fit the name.

Now, let me be clear that many divorces are absolutely necessary. Indeed, one of a cluster of “hard” reasons for divorce—addiction, domestic abuse, chronic infidelity, or mental illness—has been present in a large percentage of the divorces I have seen. And many divorces are necessary for “softer” reasons, like incompatibility, especially because there is a point at which the level of hostility is so bad that the children would be better off if the parties split up.

The picture can be more complex, however. Over the years I have sometimes seen people deliberately choose to sit near each other in my office, laugh easily together, or respectfully work out complex problems. I began to wonder if some of them might not need a divorce to solve their problems, so a few years ago I asked Dr. William Doherty, director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Minnesota, for help. Dr. Doherty conducted survey research and learned that, not surprisingly, in nearly half of our cases at least one party is interested in working on reconciliation—divorces often involve a “leaver” and a “leavee.” More surprising is that in about 10 percent of our divorce cases with minor children, both spouses express interest in pursuing reconciliation services. And these results are from active divorce cases, where the parties have had time to harden *(continued on page 74)*



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unmarried parent in our society is also needed. Some advocates for families and I have started talking about a "Commitment to Parenting" ceremony. What if unmarried parents had the chance to stand up in their place of worship (or in a park or a living room) in front of their loved ones and affirm their commitment to their new child and their commitment to treat each other with respect and cooperation? Spiritual folks know that heartfelt intention is worth more than any public program.

The Route to Reform

THE IDEAS I HAVE OUTLINED ARE ALL practical steps, grounded in spiritual truths, all imminently doable. We've already made progress in this direction: the use of nonlegal professionals to assist parties and advise judges, an emphasis on alternative dispute resolution techniques, better recognition of the important roles played by both parents, and the use of more sophisticated education programs have already made family courts more humane. But the deeper changes that I have proposed will not be easy to implement. The professional skills and instincts of lawyers and judges perfectly mirror the initial impulse of many people in our ego-centric, competitive culture to win disputes, not heal them. Legal training and years of courtroom practice hone the ability to deliver the zinging retort intended to demolish an adversary's position. What Marshall Rosenberg calls "giraffe ears"—ears that can hear behind the critical words of another to identify the needs and feelings expressed so tragically—are not standard courthouse attire. A skilled hired

gun is exactly what some people seeking divorce want, out of either a desire to punish a hurtful spouse or out of fear of an intimidating partner. Moreover, the legal profession venerates precedent and looks to past practice for stability and wisdom, so our combat skills can be readily deployed against new ideas. Our chief judge once sent around a thoughtful article about why lawyers and judges tend to behave more like mules kicking down barn doors than like carpenters building them. And on top of these aspects of legal culture, add the fact that ever since the Constitution was written, the focus of American law has been on preserving individual rights—protecting us from each other. The law has few tools to affirmatively foster human connections. Respect and compassion cannot be court ordered.

The route to reform is clear, however. I once taught a course on law and social policy issues at a local Catholic law school. Looking for a robust discussion, we scheduled a class on the topic of gay marriage. No fireworks—to most of the students it was a no-brainer, only a matter of time. Wise people have said that we rarely convince intellectual critics of anything. The better course is to seed the public discourse with creative ideas and innovative experiments. Let the future leaders absorb these into their professional DNA. I have seen that with the way younger lawyers in our court so naturally embrace the cooperative practices and alternative dispute procedures we have already instituted. I foresee a time in the not-so-distant future when a young lawyer will ask, "What was this thing called a divorce trial?" ■

LONG LIVE ZINN

(continued from page 28)

they took, they came to represent something far higher.

Zinn and Chomsky represented a tradition and state of being that meant we were not entirely on our own. Their names became beacons of:

- *The deepest possible compassion.* At any given moment the world is divided into those who hear the screams of innocent victims and those who do not. Most of us, certainly myself, go in and out of hearing the screams. We fight one injustice but ignore another. Zinn and Chomsky represented a state of being in which one consistently hears the screams, from Vietnam to the inner city, from East Timor to Haiti. It is a state of total openness to the pain of the world.
- *Intellectual clarity.* Both men have told their truths to millions, never compromising for the sake of political expediency as so many of their contemporaries have. Many of us were terminally confused by the conflict between America's image and reality. Zinn and Chomsky provided explanations and understandings that helped keep us sane.
- *Moral courage.* Going far beyond mere speechmaking and writing, Zinn risked arrest or bodily injury many times while opposing segregation and the war. Chomsky took similar risks as a leader of the draft resistance movement. Both men's names have come to stand for committed intellectuals who do not compromise—intellectuals who align their bodies and actions with their minds and thoughts.
- *Passion for social justice.* Unlike younger liberal historians such as Michael Lind, who argues that our murder of millions of innocents in Indochina is irrelevant to judging the war since we also killed civilians in World War II, Zinn and Chomsky stand for passionate opposition to the injustice and criminality of murdering civilians—a passion that was kindled for Howard in World War II when, as a bombardier, he realized that he was often bombing the innocent in violation of the laws of

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Howard Zinn, center, is arrested for occupying the JFK Federal Building in Boston on May 7, 1985. This was one of many actions throughout the country organized by the Pledge of Resistance against U.S. involvement in war in Central America.

war, not out of military necessity but out of inertia and indifference.

- *Integrity, authenticity, and wholeness.* Zinn and Chomsky have come to represent the idea of practicing what one preaches. I have never seen either act out of character. Back in 1968, as Howard and Dan Berrigan were on their way to Hanoi to escort U.S. POWs home, I asked him, "What political system do you believe in?" He smiled in his wry way, grinned his wide grin, and answered in that soft, Brooklyn-tinged voice of his: "I guess the closest is the kind of anarcho-syndicalism they had in the Spanish Civil War." As we talked, I understood that he knew too much to put faith in any government, Right or Left, and that "anarcho-syndicalism" was a way of saying he remained idealistic that humans could at least theoretically live sanely. But he never fell into the trap that many of us have of projecting our ideals onto the fallible humans who hold power in any system, Left or Right, and are inevitably corrupted by it.

The integrity conveyed by the words "Zinn" and "Chomsky" is, in the end, impossible to pin down. These leaders were cut from a different, older, deeper cloth. Their roots lie in an earlier time when those fighting for peace and social justice

did so because of who they were, not because they sought personal power or to realize fantasies of "revolution." I asked Howard last January why he continued to fight, write, and speak for peace and social justice when it all seemed so hopeless. His answer was simple: "I couldn't live with myself if I didn't."

Zinn and Chomsky have come to represent a kind of moral center in my life—a compass, a guiding star. This or that politician in whom I had believed might turn out to have feet of clay. I might betray my own ideals. I might drop out for a while, become despairing. But knowing that Zinn and Chomsky have fought consistently for their ideas without getting corrupted by the temptations of power has reassured me that integrity is possible.

The symbolic weight that I have assigned to my idealized concepts of "Zinn" and "Chomsky" has sometimes made me feel conflicted about the actual men. When I went into electoral politics in the 1980s, I worried that they would see my choice as morally or intellectually compromised, so I tended to avoid them. I also sometimes saw them as naive. When I talked to Howard shortly after John Kerry was nominated for president, he forcefully argued that Kerry had better run against the Iraq war if he wanted to win. My internal reaction was something along the lines of, "Oh, there he

is, good old Howard, a naive romantic to the end. No one can hope to win the presidency without supporting the Iraq war." I did not foresee that Barack Obama would win the presidency largely for opposing the Iraq war at a time when conventional wisdom held that supporting the war was necessary to win.

As the horrors of the Bush years wore on, and now as the disappointment of Obama's first year has kicked in, I have found myself increasingly embracing what Zinn and Chomsky have taught and embodied: the ideas they represent are serving even more as a lodestone to me in these years than they did in my youth.

Howard's death is thus a shock that transcends the shock of losing a friend or even a loved one. The personal memories come tumbling out. I remember watching a theatrical presentation with him in a cave north of Hanoi as Nixon got elected in November 1972, marveling at the morale of the Vietnamese compared to the despair we felt at the prospect of four more years of killing. I remember spending the night in adjoining jail cells during the Redress demonstration, being so buoyed in the morning by his cheerfulness, smiles, and wry but never cynical humor. I remember marching together in a small march in Lexington, Massachusetts, and then hearing him speak with deep knowledge and feeling about how the ideals of the American Revolution, as contrasted with its reality, required us to oppose the Vietnam war. I remember forty years of emails, phone conversations, and visits in which Howard was always gracious, always committed, always kind, always interested, and always interesting.

My only consolation in this moment is knowing that though Howard Zinn the man has died, the idea of "Zinn"—all that he represents—has not. I know that many of us will continue to be sustained in the difficult years to come by the answers we will receive when we ask ourselves: *What would Howard think and how would he see it? What would Howard say? How would Howard feel?* And, most importantly: *What would Howard do?*

Zinn has died. Long live "Zinn." ■

LETTERS

(continued from page 5)

STILL TABOO: THE LINK BETWEEN INTIMATE ABUSE AND PUBLIC VIOLENCE

THANK YOU, *TIKKUN*, FOR BETTINA Aptheker's excellent review of Robert Cohen's biography of Mario Savio (*Tikkun*, January/February 2010). Who better to review Cohen's book than Aptheker, who co-led the Berkeley Free Speech Movement with Savio? But for me, the most important issue Aptheker brings up is the way Savio was wounded by sexual abuse in his childhood. Today we would refer to this as PTSD, an acronym that has entered our popular discourse mainly in the context of the tens of thousands of U.S. service people returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. As much as we talk about the phenomenon, though, it remains largely misunderstood due to shame, a military code of conduct that continues to urge its members to "tough it out," and our society's inability or unwillingness to make the connection between the intimate soul-wounding experience and the repetition of violence it so often engenders.

Aptheker's own life experience, beautifully documented in her autobiography *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel*, is one of very few books to successfully deal with the often uncomfortable connection between childhood sexual abuse and the more public political arena. In it she is able to look at her father, the important Communist historian, in a truly nuanced way. She documents his abuse and its effect on her while recognizing his brilliant contributions. When her book came out, I remember more than one Left voice questioning her need to reveal her father's abuse. I have long felt that until those of us committed to social change are able to explore the silenced aspects of our movement and their heroes, we will be unable to create new forms of struggle capable of taking us where we need to go.

MARGARET RANDALL
Albuquerque, NM

THE AMERICAN WAY

I'M A MEMBER OF BEYT TIKKUN AND NSP. I'm also a professor at UC Berkeley. I continue to be amazed at the quality and amazing *Tikkun* articles. Every issue I imagine, "wow, they'll never be this good again." And then the next issue you do seems even better.

There are two articles in the January/February 2010 issue that I really would love to get an electronic copy of before waiting two months.

One is the incredible overview of American society by Harriet Fraad. In the past two months, I've gotten very involved in UC Berkeley campus politics of how to get the faculty, students, and unions on the same page to get a massive properly framed message to the California voters to make major changes in Sacramento. I think Fraad's analysis is a must read for some of the factions. The issues must be framed in such a way that the majority of voters (people who barely pay any taxes) will vote for their interests. The left has done a horrid job of framing things properly, and I'm hoping that UC faculty might be helpful in that framing process and in getting a decent fraction of the two million college students to become politically involved. I think Fraad's article presents an important point of view.

Second, Bauer and Blanchard's article on neurobiology and God is a must read for some members of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science discussion group with which I'm heavily involved. Our 2011 annual conference will be on the topic of "Why Good People Do Bad Things" (actually the latest version of the title has the word "Good" removed, but I'm hoping it will be put back in). The Bauer and Blanchard article is exactly the sort of thing we would like to have presented. Incidentally, I'm very familiar with the use of God language for humanity's goodness since I go to Rabbi Lerner's Torah study gatherings when I can (I live a few blocks from him, so walking is a treat).

I want to give you huge congratulations for how you are able to make each issue of *Tikkun* a precious gem. Most impressive.

STAN KLEIN
Berkeley, CA

ISRAEL'S CAMPUS CRITICS

I WANT TO RESPOND TO PHILIP MENDES'S letter to the editor in *Tikkun*'s November/December 2009 issue. Mr. Mendes, there is no well-organized pro-Palestinian lobby in Australian universities. Yes, there is a growing number of voices that are becoming less fearful to speak from their conscience, research, and experience. Yes, there is a greater openness within some sectors to considering the possibility of a liberal, multi-ethnic, democratic state (not unlike that of Judah Magnes's binational state vision) that is equally respectful of the deep cultural and spiritual connections that Jewish and Palestinian Arab people have to the region.

However, these are simply people who have had enough of seeing the violence that comes with militarily and economically occupying a people for forty-two years; the unabated settlement expansion; and the failure to deal with a sixty-one-year refugee problem. Yes, the left needs to do more to condemn rocket attacks on fellow humans living in Sderot or Ashkelon; for anti-Semitic statements in Arab media; or for the part that other Arab countries plays in making the life of Gazans a misery (e.g., Egypt's blockade of Gaza). But Mr. Mendes's letter ironically tries to create a bogeyman out of a weak and marginal community (in the same way that the Jewish community for decades argued was done to them). Mr. Mendes, these people you fear are not that unlike you: they too look for a future where Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis can live together in peace. The difference is in politically how such a situation would look. I respect your many years of engagement on this issue, but please don't play on Americans' ignorance of Australian university politics to try and create something that is untrue.

STEWART MILLS
Sydney, Australia

NOT FOR LONG

To Czeslaw Milosz

"In Book 22 of the Odyssey, there is a description of the way in which Odysseus' son punishes the faithless women who had reverted to prostitution. Emotionless, and with an inhuman composure rivaled only by the impassibilité of the major nineteenth-century novelists, Homer...compares the women's appearance as they hang to that of birds caught in a net, ... with the information that the feet of the row of suspended women "kicked out for a short while, but not for long" Hope attaches to the fact that it happened a long time ago. Homer offers consolation for the entanglement of prehistory, savagery, and culture by recourse to the once-upon-a-time device."

— Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 79-80;
citing *Odyssey 22:473*; Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, 150).

"The inner self... is like a very shy wild animal that ... comes out only when all is perfectly peaceful.

— Merton, *The Inner Experience*, 5

What then should I make of these traces
of sweet sleeplessness so late in life,
wistful and troubling as they ever were,
though not for long?

And from whom can I now seek guidance?
Denise, the author of *What we desire*
travels with us, was dead in her mid-seventies,
like Yeats, still muttering *Lust and rage*,
What else have I?

Levertov Selected Poems 161

Yeats Collected Poems 312

Those crawdads heisted from the Big Sur creek
into the hot skillet — how they writhed, writhed,
but *not for long*,
like my innards remembering my first
idiot clumsinesses
excruciating once now ghostly.

Odyssey 22:473

Dear Czeslaw, I can only think of you
pushing ninety, with a glass of whiskey
in some airport, with your *eyes*
weakened, insatiable, peeping
at miniskirts, lulled by imaginings
half from contemplation, half
from appetite.

Milosz New Poems 679

Those glistening beaches when I first came west,
those adolescents who were laughing,
shining, in the lascivious swirling tide
and were not ashamed How sad, how sad
that innocence quickly lost, fouled by promises
of a permissive Eden already come!

Genesis 2:24

Still *under orders* from erotic phantasy
 You gazed narrowly on *buttocks, thighs*.
 You once told Merton that you loathed your nature
 having learned *the attraction of the Manichaeon*
 from those cracks of bullets, holes in the wall above you.
 (The one stripping leaves just over my head
 was fired by a drunken hunter without ill will.)

Milosz *New Poems* 679
 Merton Milosz *Striving* 44
 Merton Milosz *Striving* 45

an age not of Pan but of Midas,
 and the mutterings of dry broken
 marriages like quivering reeds

To all of you who saw death at close hand
 clamoring to me that old men should rage:
 Should I feel deficient that I am not like Lear
 lost on a heath and circumscribed by demons?
 I was raised like Merton outside history
 as Milosz knew it — *fires of burning cities*
 and thus am *in deep complicity with nature*
 even to the point of being ridiculous
 as now when craving absurdly deliciously
 what I cannot have

Milosz *New Poems* 469
 Merton Milosz *Striving* 69

I gain in strength
 from my drive's decline, now like an old cat
 that does not come when called, but warms my lap
 when I least wish for it, though not for long.

No longer a circus bear
 with its paws up on my shoulders, frightening me
 with its slobber and hot breath,
 its aging empowers me.

I see an unremarkable
 Japanese photographer on the beach
 who like me is in Vancouver for three days,
 and, as is now my custom, take her picture
 with her own camera, though at her request

(*Not me! Vancouver!*)
 I make her small in the frame.

Our eyes contemplate each other for a moment
 like those of two strangers in a dance
 Then click! and my exit line
 is what I have never said to a stranger before:
You
are completely beautiful!

— love not as acquisition but as gift —

When we do not expect anything
we can be ourselves —

Shunryu Suzuki *Not Always So* 5

though not for long

March 8, 2009
 — Peter Dale Scott

State of the Universe Address 2010

Wake Up Laughing, and Wise Up Loving: the Upwising Has Begun!

BY SWAMI BEYONDANANDA

"We're not here to earn God's love, we're here to spend it!"

You really had to strain to hear the laugh track in 2009. Certainly, there was plenty to not laugh about. Take our political system—please!

A year ago, Americans believed they had chosen not just a new president, but also a new precedent. Well, now that the "hopium" fix is wearing off, we must face the inconvenient truth that if we want a truly new deal, we the people must become the new dealer. Unfortunately, the old dealer seems to have dealt a great hand to the uncommonly wealthy at the expense of the commonwealth.

Riding high on the shoulders of public opinion, President Barack Obama came down to earth, showing he—like anyone else in the employ of the American Empire—must answer to the board of directors, not to the shareholders. To give credit where credit is not due, the administration bailed out the big banks, which immediately reinvested the money in three big houses: the White House and the two houses of Congress. Yes, it's a buyological fact. When the banks are picking up the tab, the government becomes more usurer-friendly.

As even more shift hits the fan in 2010, the body politic will need all the fortification and nourishment it can get to metabolize the political toxins and neutralize the sociopathogens. And so I am offering my simple and effective two-step program, because frankly we don't have time for all twelve: wake up laughing, wise up loving.

Wake up, because it's time to wake up. Laugh, because there is definitely something funny going on—even if you can't find the joke hidden in the picture. Yes, waking up is hard to do, so we will need plenty of "hahas" to go with the "ahas." As we wise up to the inconvenient truths hidden behind convenient lies, we will need something to keep us from taking these

political toxins poisonally.

That is where love comes in, because love is the one solution that will dissolve negativity. Of this, I am positive: love will positively dissolve negativity.

Step One: Wake Up Laughing

Do you realize that billions of people worldwide go to bed serious every night? And wake up the same way?

Seriously.

So naturally—or in this case, unnaturally—the world is in serious condition. Between the stresses of work, the economy, and a steady diet of bad news, is it any wonder so many people have gained weightiness?

Do you ever wake up in the morning with a funny feeling? Great. Go with it! Feel the levitational pull uplifting the corners of your mouth into a smile. You want to uplift humankind? Uplift your face first, and everyone else will get the idea.

Step Two: Wise Up Loving

In the midst of our evolutionary upwising, we must amp up the loving—particularly loving that which we find most unlovable. Why? The lovable has no problem getting love, because it's so ... lovable. Meanwhile the unlovable is left unloved, and so acts unlovingly, and becomes even more unlovable. This is a vicious cycle that can indeed become a never-ending cycle of viciousness, unless we end it. So, as the old saying goes, when you find yourself caught up in a vicious cycle, stop peddling and get off.

Now you're going to love this: when we find some lovable part in the unlovable to love, that lovable part expands, and the unlovable shrinks. So ... if you find something unlovable, by loving what is lovable about it, you can love the unlovable to death!

At the same time, we can love the lovable to life! We do that by focusing

on the positive. That is why I have launched my "Just say no to negativity" campaign. It is especially important that we give our children an esteem bath every day. Next time you see your youngster sprawled out on the couch playing video games, speak only positive words of praise: "What's *right* with you, you useful good-for-something? And wipe that smile onto your face!"

I guarantee that before long, he or she will be hanging out with a savory crowd.

We Can Achieve "Fulfilment"!

As we wise up to the awful truth, we must then rise up to the awesome opportunity: humanifest destiny! We are here to manifest our destiny as imaginal souls in the body of a newly emerging organism called humanity, where each of us is totally unique—just like everyone else! We are here for one singular purpose—to let our light fully shine. The enlightened ones call this fulfilment.

I never make predictions because I don't want to jeopardize my non-prophet status. However, I do set intentions. And so, may 2010 be the year that we collectively tune out reality TV and tune into ... reality! We are in the hero's role in the greatest adventure story in human history: conscious evolution! A world-win campaign where the whole world can win.

May we use our intelligence intelligently and our hearts lovingly. May we wake up laughing, and may we wise up loving. And may we—each and all—achieve fulfilment. ■

Swami Beyondananda is the alter ego of Steve Bhaerman. Check out his e-book, Wake Up Laughing: An Insider's Guide to the Cosmic Comedy and his book with Bruce Lipton, Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get There From Here, both available at www.wakeuplaughing.com.

THE HISTORY OF WHITE PEOPLE

Nell Irvin Painter
W.W. Norton, 2010

NELL PAINTER HAS WRITTEN ONE OF THE MOST important books ever on the social construction of the notion that there is a "white" race. Interrogating the historical, anthropological, biological, and genetic data, she endorses a growing conclusion among biologists and geneticists who no longer believe in the physical existence of races—though they recognize the continuing power of racism (the belief that races exist and that some are better than others). But while the argument for the interrelatedness of all human beings is strong, the flexibility of the concept of "whiteness" (or at least of "nonblackness") has allowed the white American middle class to adopt a multicultural ethos and embrace diversity in suburbs and on college campuses while continuing to see blackness as fundamentally synonymous with poverty. According to the author, "Poverty in a dark skin endures as the opposite of whiteness, driven by an age-old social yearning to characterize the poor as permanently other and inherently inferior."

THE DICE GAME OF SHIVA

Richard Smoley
New World Library, 2009

RICHARD SMOLEY SUBTITLES THIS BOOK "How Consciousness Creates the Universe," and presents a powerful if sometimes playful challenge to scientism. He draws upon spiritual wisdom and ancient mythologies, yet states his central points in ways that are independent of their origin: "The world arises when a self perceives an other, just as an infant begins to become conscious by distinguishing what is self versus what is not." He goes on to argue that there is no place where consciousness is not present. Smoley believes that civilization as a whole is moving toward the goal of exploring consciousness, whether this manifests through psychological introspection, neurological research, or work with artificial intelligence. This important book should be read by anyone who thinks the universe can be explained solely by a materialist astrophysics or by randomness and contemporary versions of evolutionary theory that have not yet integrated a spiritual-consciousness-related vision of how evolution works.

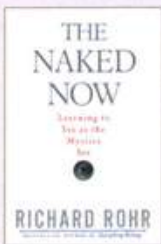
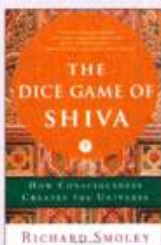
THE NAKED NOW

Richard Rohr
The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009

DANIEL BERRIGAN: ESSENTIAL WRITINGS

Selected and introduced by John Dear
Orbis Books, 2009

THESE TWO CATHOLIC PRIESTS—FATHER RICHARD ROHR AND FATHER Daniel Berrigan—have been among the most significant thinkers in the Catholic world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and they have much to teach people of all faiths. Father Rohr, a frequent contributor to *Tikkun* and *Sojourners*, subtitles his new book "Learning to See as the Mystics See." It is an exciting and extremely accessible introduction to the Christian contemplative tradition and its stunning insights. He warns those who would seek to be religious leaders that it is only transformed people who have the power to transform others. Moreover, to overcome ego, there are two main paths: love and suffering. Love "is the only way to initially and safely open the door of awareness and aliveness, and then suffering for that love keeps that door open and available for ever greater growth."



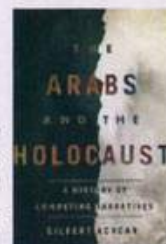
Father Berrigan—the great Catholic hero of the peace movements of the 1960s who never gave up while others faded back into the struggle to "make it" economically, and who has endured as a great light for all humanity—has certainly lived the path of love and suffering described by Rohr. Father John Dear, a Network of Spiritual Progressives leader who has inspired many spiritual activists with his willingness to go to prison to challenge the forces of evil, has done a beautiful job of assembling Berrigan's deepest reflections. We follow Berrigan as his understanding of the Bible leads him to challenge the war in Vietnam, co-found and chair Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, and eventually go to jail for his nonviolent resistance to the warmakers. The book also chronicles Berrigan's collaborations in Paris with Thich Nhat Hanh, his move back to the United States and new civil disobedience against the warmakers, and his prolific career as a writer whose Catholic liberation theology continues to resonate with the most ethically alive young Catholics in the twenty-first century.



THE ARABS AND THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF NARRATIVES

Gilbert Achcar
Metropolitan Books, 2010

HISTORIAN GILBERT ACHCAR RECOGNIZES THAT "IT IS NOT possible to look toward a peaceful future until accounts have been settled with the past and its lessons assimilated." This book makes an important contribution to that understanding by helping Westerners understand how the denial of the Holocaust in Arab discourse developed as Palestinian suffering increased. Achcar understands the denial of Jewish suffering as anti-Semitism and doesn't excuse it, but by contextualizing this denial in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, he shows that this is an anti-Semitism that developed in response to Arab suffering and was not the cause of that suffering.



AFTER LIVES: A GUIDE TO HEAVEN, HELL, AND PURGATORY

John Casey
Oxford University Press, 2009

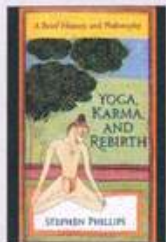
EVER SINCE THE EMERGENCE OF CLASS SOCIETIES, HUMAN beings have wondered what social order comes next after the current realities of pain and oppression. Beliefs in some form of afterlife, immortality, the human soul, and either retribution or a just reordering of social realities have given people a compensatory vision to counter the harshness of daily life. John Casey's definitive study of the wide variety of beliefs in the afterlife draws primarily on Western visions, which are often very different from each other while surprisingly similar to some of the views that emerged from Eastern societies. Casey invites us to consider ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel, the Greeks and Romans, Christians and Mormons, the rise and fall of heaven and hell, and much more.



YOGA, KARMA AND REBIRTH

Stephen Phillips
Columbia University Press, 2009

STEPHEN PHILLIPS TAKES US DEEP INTO THE WORLD OF yoga, and through that into Eastern approaches to life and death. Yet the goal here is not to find a way to preserve one's individual identity in future incarnations, but to transcend the illusions of individual existence—to disidentify with the "I" so that one may more fully identify with the good of the whole of all being and hence practice the dharma (the right way to live). Reincarnation allows for psychic development through a series of lives, and becomes the path to being part of the universal creativity while manifesting individual beauty.



Let's face it—if our agenda is fully identified with the capitulations to corporate interests and fruitless attempts to appeal to the Right that have shaped Obama's first year in office, then it's no wonder that "Tea Party" conservatives start to look good to many Americans who feel humiliated that they allowed themselves to believe that "change we can believe in" was at hand. We neither want to bash Obama nor have our ideas be judged by his failure to build on the deep yearning for a society based on social justice, human rights, environmental sanity, peace, kindness, generosity of spirit, and genuine caring for others that was revealed in the 2008 elections. So can we bring together those who have not yet given up, so that we can map a strategy together?



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- The Global Marshall Plan.
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