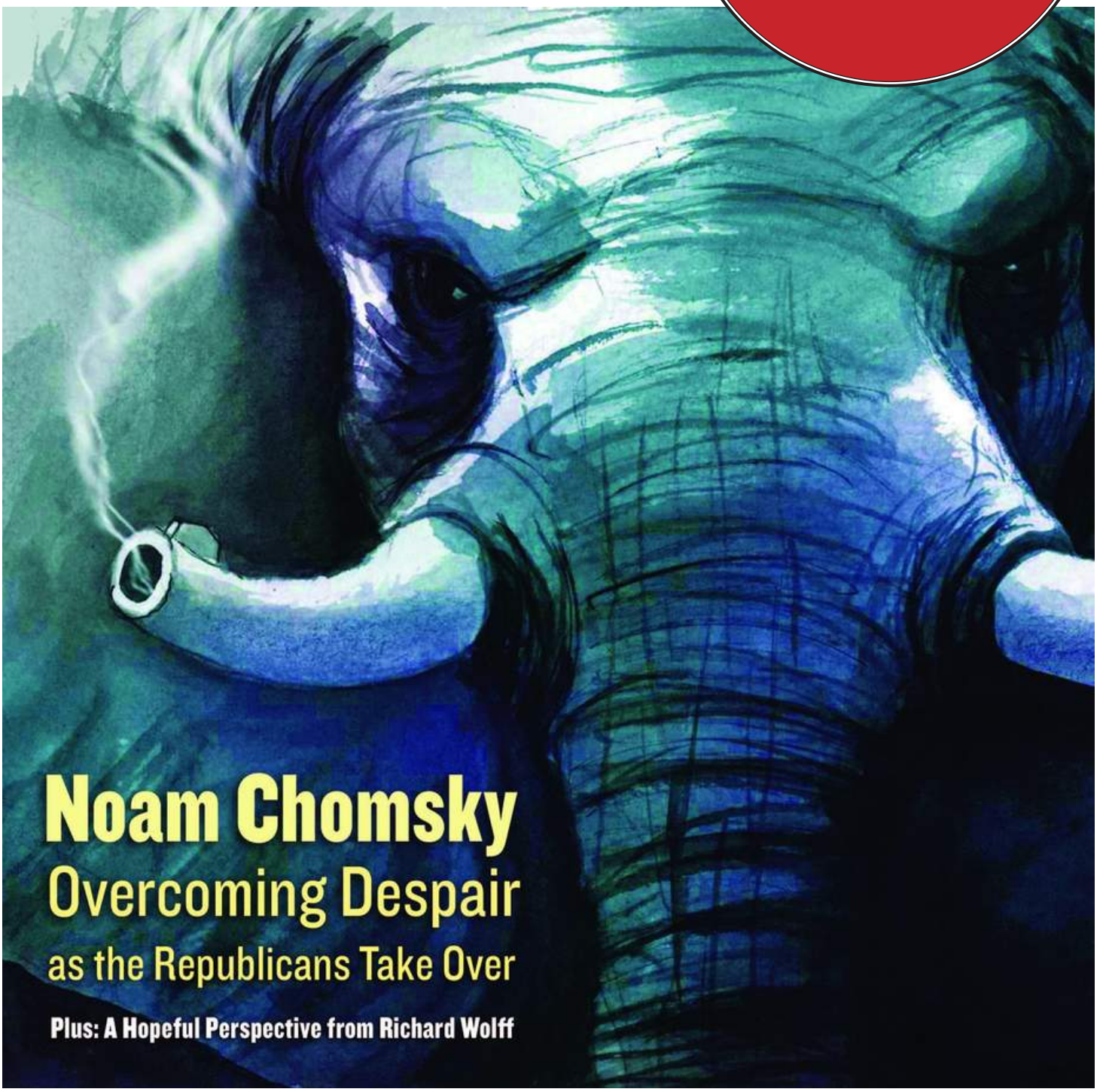
Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

SPRING 2011

THE EGYPTIAN UPRISING



Noam Chomsky

Overcoming Despair as the Republicans Take Over

Plus: A Hopeful Perspective from Richard Wolff

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Jonathan Granoff on Spiritual Illumination & Nuclear Weapons
Joy Ladin on Nourishing Hope | The Imperial War for Drugs
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Tikkun

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Our new website will launch in early March

More articles online:

As *Tikkun* reduces its size and becomes a quarterly, we are hoping to wean you from the tree-based paper version of the magazine to the ecologically sustainable web version. Our vibrant new web magazine site is going live in early March, with some content free to everyone, and some restricted to subscribers and paid-up members of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. It's a beautiful new platform for *Tikkun*—and it will enable *Tikkun* to keep going for many years to come if you continue to donate! Check it out: tikkun.org.

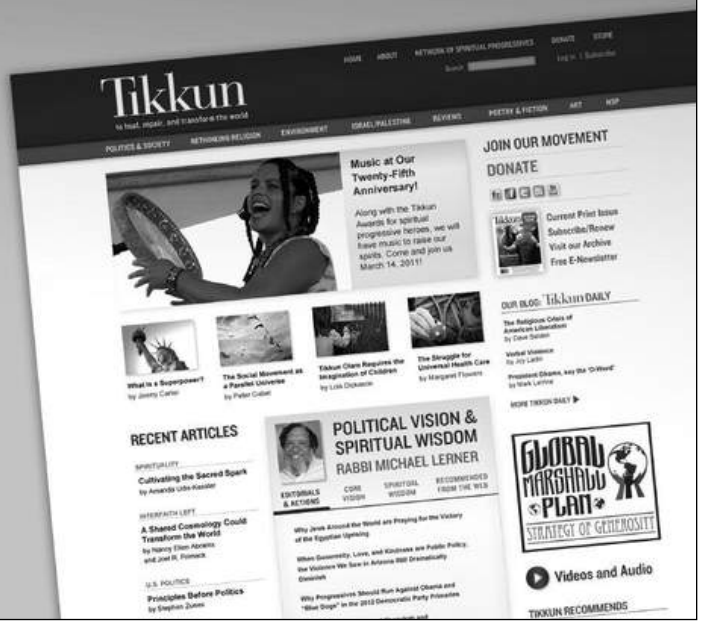

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Illustration by Paul Lachine

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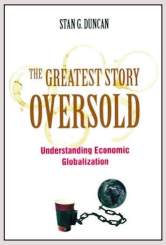
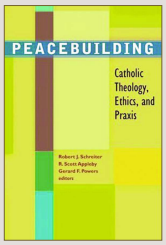
THE GREATEST STORY OVERSOLD: UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

Stan G. Duncan
Orbis Books, 2010

PEACEBUILDING: CATHOLIC THEOLOGY, ETHICS, AND PRAXIS

Edited by Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers
Orbis Books, 2010



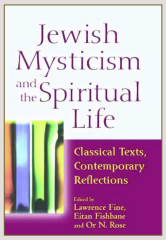


While Stan Duncan provides an elegant summary of all the reasons that economic globalization has been bad for the people it has supposedly helped, he is not against globalization itself. Rather, as he puts it, "the philosophy and practice of our particular model of globalization disregard such values as the development of democracy, civil society, the equality of all human beings, and the protection of the environment." After telling in painful yet evocative stories the details of how very bad our form of globalization continues to be for the people of our planet and for the planet itself, Duncan then goes to the Bible and shows how the religious community can learn from its own wisdom why and how to resist. This is a fine example of spiritual progressive consciousness applied to contemporary economic realities.

Read Duncan's book together with *Peacebuilding* and one can get a renewed sense of hope. The writers assembled in this collection are serious and recognize the enormous challenges faced by those who seek to mobilize Catholicism as a political force on the side of the peacebuilders. Yet in many specific cases Catholics, sometimes detached from or even denounced by the Vatican, have played a central role in supporting and deepening the struggles for peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and human rights—and often by drawing upon the deep wisdom of Catholicism itself. While we regret the absence from this collection of one of the greatest practitioners of the struggle for human rights, Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of the School of the Americas Watch, we can still rejoice in the publication of a book that should be read by anyone hoping to build a world of peace.

JEWISH MYSTICISM AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: CLASSICAL TEXTS, CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

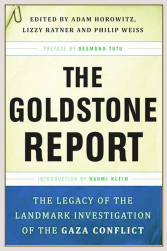
Edited by Lawrence Fine, Eitan Fishbane, and Or N. Rose
Jewish Lights, 2010



The editors have assembled some of the most creative spiritual thinkers in the Jewish world—including *Tikkun* authors such as Shaul Magid, Sheila Peltz Weinberg, Lawrence Kushner, Judith Kates, Daniel Matt, Everett Gendler, and Nehemia Polen—and given them a brilliant task: to share with us some of the most significant classical texts of Jewish mysticism and to provide their own interpretations and reflections. The result is a masterpiece that could itself become a classic text of Jewish spiritual thinking. Put together in honor of Arthur Green, this collection, which closes with thoughts from Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, is a must for anyone serious about Jewish spiritual thought.

THE GOLDSTONE REPORT: THE LEGACY OF THE LANDMARK INVESTIGATION OF THE GAZA CONFLICT

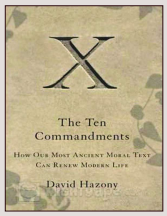
Edited by Adam Horowitz, Lizzy Ratner, and Philip Weiss
Nation Books, 2011



It's not only 325 pages of the most serious, detailed, and moving accounts of Israel's human rights violations while invading Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009; it's also a set of essays that seriously evaluate the work of Justice Richard Goldstone, a Zionist and former member of the board of the Hebrew University, as he sought to evaluate the information and testimony he received, including the recommendations he then passed on to the UN, which had asked him to do the report (he had previously authored similar UN human rights reports on Rwanda and Bosnia). We already sent out Naomi Klein's introductory article online (if you didn't get it, write natalie@tikkun.org to join our email list), but there's much more here, including Moshe Halbertal's fierce critique, "The Goldstone Illusion," Rashid Khalidi's important essay, "Palestinian Dispossession and the U.S. Public Sphere," Letty Cottin Pogrebin's "The Unholy Assault on Richard Goldstone," and more. If you read it, you'll know for sure why you should travel from afar to honor Goldstone when we give him the Tikkun Award at our Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration March 14 at the University of California, Berkeley (info: tikkun.org/celebrate).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: HOW OUR MOST ANCIENT MORAL TEXT CAN RENEW MODERN LIFE

David Hazony
Scribner, 2010



Despite his career as a passionate justifier of Israeli oppression of Palestinians and denouncer of progressive thought, David Hazony has produced a serious reading of biblical themes that is both accessible and insightful. Hazony notes that the kind of love of God called for by the Hebrew Bible is an erotic love based on the human model, emphasizing the Bible's pro-pleasure approach. Though Hazony's book is lacking in intellectually adventurous and spiritual thinking, it does provide a very competent presentation of the traditional rabbinic approach to many important issues. Read it along with our "Ten Commitments" (which you'll find at tikkun.org/article.php/tencom), Leonard Felder's *The Ten Challenges*, and Joan Chittister's *The Ten Commandments: Laws of the Heart*—you'll get a much deeper understanding of why those ten speech acts at Sinai have played such an important role in Western civilization.

We are proud to be launching our redesigned web magazine in March!

We will continually update our web magazine (tikkun.org) with insightful articles on politics, culture, and religion, many of which will only be available to subscribers and members of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. So please subscribe and/or join the NSP at spiritualprogressives.org. You can also sign up to receive our free weekly newsletter, timely political analyses, and updates on organizing efforts at tikkun.org/mail.

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.*

AFGHANISTAN AND THE LOTUS EATERS

What is so striking about the war in Afghanistan is the silence. Barack Obama added 17,000 soldiers in the first month of his administration and then another 30,000 nine months later, all without a serious public debate about the mission and goal of the war, which has led to the American toll of 1,140 dead and 3,420 seriously wounded, as well as 24,000 killed or wounded Afghans. And if the Syracuse *Post-Standard* is any indication of our national interest, weeks can go by without a serious mention of the war, although over 100,000 U.S. soldiers serve in harm's way, and we have spent over $370,000,000 to date, with no end in sight.

We call Korea the forgotten war, but Afghanistan is the opiate war. I say this not because the war is about heroin trade, but because the American public seems to be in a trance and oblivious to the hardships, deaths, and cost of the war. And although candidate Obama said this was a top priority, President Obama hardly mentioned the war in his State of the Union address last year. This is a war without impression or shadow. Shame on us.

What is so troubling about the war is the misunderstanding of its purpose. If questioned as to the war's purpose, most Americans would say it is an effort to eliminate al-Qaida from its original training bases and to prevent this group of terrorists from ever returning to threaten our cities or shores again.

But if one reads newspapers from the Middle East, one would realize that for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and India—the major players in the region—the war has nothing to do with al-Qaida. No one is even thinking, much less talking about al-Qaida because the group no longer has a presence. They are struggling over the balance of power in the post-U.S. withdrawal from the region and over who will gain control of the politics and the minerals. They are playing a waiting game and performing a Machiavellian minuet, while America is playing the punch-drunk sailor in a bar who is being laughed at by the crowd.

In light of our lotus-eater mentality, I thought two quotes from Bob Woodward's book *Obama's Wars* were illuminating. When asked, Richard Holbrooke, former Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said of the surge: "It can't work." And when General David Petraeus was asked about the likelihood of success, despite the withdrawal deadline he said, "This is the kind of fight we're in for the rest of our lives, and probably our kids lives."

Perhaps the best example of our feckless efforts to date was the widely reported progress supposedly being made, according to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and General Petraeus, in negotiating for months with the Taliban for a peace deal involving power sharing with the Afghan government, only to learn on November 22, 2010, in the *New York Times* that we were negotiating and funding an imposter who was in actuality a shopkeeper with no connections to the Taliban. Is it conceivable that the United States could win this war, much less secure peace, if we don't even know with whom we are negotiating?

So here we sit in silence. Most Democrats and liberals say nothing out of fear of undermining their president, and Republicans generally support the war on the baseless grounds that it is a justified war against terror. The Left cowardly stays silent; the Right stays intellectually dishonest. Both are culpable for the futile, floundering military policy that, though heroic, is unprecedented, except for the charge of the Light Brigade of 1854 and Britain's mad attempt to conquer the same tribal rage.

Stephen S. Bowman
Syracuse, N.Y.

MORE LETTERS

Thank you for all of your letters!
We receive many more than we can print.
Visit tikkun.org/letters to read additional letters on Israel and the Vatican, evolution, Obama, giving to the poor, building a broad-based social movement, and more!

TOWARD A JUST ISRAEL

Twenty-five years ago, when many of us thought a Jewish vision for a just and compassionate society was losing its power to persuade and inspire, *Tikkun* magazine voiced a clarion call to do just that! And for these twenty-five years it has persisted in pushing us and pestering us to think and to act. It has pushed us to fight injustice, to demand equality, and to mend the terrible injuries inflicted on women, the poor, and the marginalized. It has urged us to save the environment. In the spirit of our great prophetic tradition, *Tikkun* has been passionate. It has empowered the powerless and has spoken truth to power. *Tikkun* magazine has given voice to voices not heard. It has raised unpopular issues with politicians and leaders that we've supported who have fallen short of the mission they preached. It has been unwavering in its support for an Israel that must recognize the suffering of Palestinians and reach a solution so that Israel can flourish as a democratic and Jewish society.

In a world and at a time when our planet is so vulnerable, when our Jewish world needs a mission to restore its faith and commitment to our legacy of *tikkun olam*, *Tikkun* magazine opens the conversation, spreads the word, and marches on world capitols when necessary.

I hope and pray that *Tikkun* will continue to be that vehicle to move us toward a redeemed world, to ignite our hope, and to fight despair.

As I struggle to keep Jerusalem *shalem* (whole), home to the three monotheistic religions, open to Jews of all streams, and to build a State of Israel that will indeed be a "light to the nations," I know that Rabbi Michael Lerner and *Tikkun* echo these hopes and envision these dreams.

Rabbi Naamah Kelman
Jerusalem, Israel

Interns and Volunteers for Summer 2011 and September 2011–June 2012

Interns and volunteers help with a wide variety of projects:

1. Editorial work such as reviewing submissions, proofreading, and light editing of articles, as well as helping us find the best new writers and thinkers (particularly younger or undiscovered talent).
2. Finding art for the magazine.
3. Web-based technical work.
4. Promoting *Tikkun* and its ideas on the web.
5. Assisting with the business aspects of the magazine.
6. Working on the Global Marshall Plan or the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
7. Projects around Middle East peace.
8. Assisting Rabbi Lerner at Beyt Tikkun synagogue and with his writing projects.

Info and application procedure for these unpaid positions: tikkun.org/jobs

Tikkun

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Tunisia, Egypt, and Israel

It should come as no surprise that *Tikkun* and other progressive Jewish voices welcomed the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings for democracy as they unfolded in late January and early February: the Jewish people have roots in the Bible's story of the Israelite rebellion against Pharaoh and his oppressive regime—a story repeated each year at Passover celebration and in weekly readings of the Torah—so it is understandable that many of us are naturally inclined to oppose every system of oppression. Our own story inspires us to oppose overt oppression by dictatorial or fundamentalist regimes like those in China, Tibet, Syria, Myanmar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan; oppression by regimes such as the United States, Iraq, Afghanistan, Mexico, and dozens of other countries that use torture and perpetrate the systematic denial of human rights; and more subtle forms of institutional oppression such as the ever-expanding U.S. prison system and the operations of global capitalism (just as we once challenged the oppression of Soviet-style communism).

As this issue of the magazine goes to press (in early February, at a moment when it is still unclear whether the actual outcome of the struggle will be a genuine transformation or a perpetuation of the existing order under some other set of repressive replacements for Mubarak from the same human-rights and democracy-denying group of elites that has ruled Egypt for the past fifty years), we want to acknowledge the legitimacy of worries that, even if the current uprising turns into a successful revolution, the Egyptian regime could be replaced by another system of Islamic fundamentalist oppression. But we also want to point out that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt long ago abandoned its most vicious, violent, anti-Semitic, and anti-democratic terrorist extremists and for the past several decades has been operating as a pro-democracy and anti-torture voice in the Islamic world.

Still, there is certainly no guarantee that the new regime that emerges to replace Mubarak will not tilt in ways that are oppressive, anti-Semitic, or anti-Israel. This option for reactionary politics is always a big risk with democracy.

We support democracy even when its outcomes may be offensive to our values (e.g., the re-election of George W. Bush, the recent victory of right-wing extremists in the 2010 U.S. congressional elections, or the quite possible right-wing victories in 2012), because we believe that so long as free speech, free press and media, freedom of assembly, jury trials, and free elections are in place, even in their money-drenched forms in the United States today, it will always be possible for people to learn from their mistakes and use these democratic processes to rectify those mistakes.

Part of what people fear might happen in Egypt is the plausible consequence of the United States and Israel's approach to the Muslim world, an approach that can best be summed up as a strategy of domination. The United States imposed the Shah on Iran, tried to support him when popular forces challenged him, and then found that all the repression in the world was not sufficient to silence the outrage of the Iranian people after decades of Western-backed torture and violence by U.S.-trained and -equipped "security forces." The wide-ranging anger at Israel in Islamic lands is in good part an outcome of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people for the past sixty-two years. The anger in the streets of Cairo at being shot at and gassed by weapons made in the United States and supplied to the Mubarak regime was predictable. And if some Egyptians would like to see the peace treaty with Israel abrogated, it is not because they actually seek a war with Israel but because that treaty symbolized the corrupt deal with the United States in which the Mubarak regime received tens of billions of dollars in U.S. aid (thanks to the influence of the Christian Zionists and AIPAC) in exchange for doing Israel's dirty work in containing Hamas in Gaza. Ordinary Egyptians watched all that money go to the military and to graft for the Egyptian elites.

Egyptian demonstrators in Cairo's Tahrir Square seek human rights and democracy to replace the Mubarak-led military dictatorship in February 2011. The peaceful demonstrators were brutally attacked by Mubarak-inspired thugs and plainclothes members of the Mubarak security forces.

CREATIVE COMMONS/NASSER NOURI

It's an ethically corrupt and pragmatically stupid strategy to support repressive regimes in the hopes of keeping the lid on popular discontent—it simply never works for any length of time. Israel could be safe if it switched from a strategy of domination to a new spirit of generosity toward the Palestinian people, and the United States could be safe from Islamic extremists if it announced a new approach to foreign policy based on a Global Marshall Plan such as the one advocated by the Network of Spiritual Progressives (spiritualprogressives.org/GMP). Our task as Americans is to help our fellow Americans feel safe to switch

from domination to generosity, and then push for these changes in our governmental policies.

Yet we can see in the current uprising a danger that keeps on repeating itself in country after country around the world. We want the democratic forces to win. But when they do (and, at the moment of this writing, that is far from assured in Egypt, which might continue as a repressive regime even without Mubarak as the figurehead), there will remain a tension between two major forces that have led to the revolution: the secular and human rights–oriented tendencies manifested in many of the middle-class youth who believe that the freedom they seek can be achieved by making their country in the image of the United States and its global capitalist empire, and those poorer and more downtrodden masses who are unlikely to benefit from an Egypt more fully integrated into the global capitalist system. It is members of the latter group who may feel the tug of spiritual yearnings and a desire for meaning in life unconnected to material success, and then be drawn to various forms of fundamentalist religion that provide meaning at the expense of individual freedom (particularly for women) and by labeling those outside the religious community as "enemies." The tension between these two tendencies will play out in Egypt, as they are currently playing out in the United States and other advanced industrial societies in slightly different ways (the "enemy" of choice here in the United States being Muslims, immigrants, GLBTQ people, and African Americans; and the fundamentalism here being Christian, while Israel contends with some variants of Jewish fundamentalism or what I've called "settler Judaism").

Until we can provide a viable spiritual progressive vision such as the Spiritual Covenant for America (please read it at spiritualprogressives.org)—a vision that affirms the need for meaning and spiritual fulfillment but disconnects it from repressive religions, demeaning of others, and the various philosophies of domination and control of others, we in Egypt, Israel, the United States, and other countries around the world will face this alternation between spiritually and emotionally stunted forms of an individualist and materialist-based Left and a repressive and angry religious Right. That's why we say it is time to embrace an ethos of love, kindness, generosity, caring for others and for the planet, *and* awe and wonder at the grandeur and mystery of the universe. It is for that alternative that we hope—for Egypt, for Israel, for the United States, and for the rest of the world.

These ideas, which have been dismissed by many as too utopian, are actually the only practical and "realistic" approach. ■

A Progressive Strategy for 2011-2012

For two years, *Tikkun* critiqued President Obama for not putting forward a consistent narrative or worldview. As of Obama's State of the Union address, our view has changed decisively—inconsistency is no longer the problem; he has made himself clear. But the worldview he has adopted is unequivocally the one that Republicans have championed for the past eighty years: economic nationalism backed by a competitive ethos domestically and a strong military internationally.

Obama's message is the opposite of the message that we urged him to adopt about seeking to build "The Caring Society" by caring for each other and caring for the earth.

By embracing the full message of Blue Dog Democrats and the pro-corporate agenda that follows from it, Obama has taken exactly the path of the Clinton administration of the 1990s. While the media claim that this path was imposed upon Clinton by his loss to Republicans in the 1994 midterm elections, we remember it quite differently. Hillary Clinton's health care plan of 1993 failed not because it was too liberal, but because it sought to ensure the contradictory goals of reducing spending, guaranteeing universal care, and ensuring the high profits of health care profiteers (the insurance companies, hospitals, medical specialists, the drug industry, etc.). The result was an incomprehensible mish-mash of pro-corporate policies that *Tikkun* and most other liberal and progressive forces found difficult to support because of its absence of a moral core. This same failure characterizes the Obamacare legislation that was passed in 2010—it had some very valuable parts, but the decision to mandate the purchase of health care without imposing any serious controls on the rising prices that insurance companies charge us for these government-mandated services was morally incoherent.

Over the course of the past two years, we've made the case that in almost every major arena, the Obama administration failed to develop policies that could significantly challenge the already existing status quo. It was this failure—not Obama's alleged radicalism—that engendered deep cynicism about Obama and his policy direction. Yet the media and the Democratic Party pretend that it was his being too progressive that caused the loss of so many Democratic seats in Congress, and that the solution is to become more like the Republicans.

Obama's Enthusiastic Expression of Conservative Ideology

Becoming more like the Republicans is what Obama has now set out to accomplish. His State of the Union address put forward conservative ideology as though it had been newly discovered by the Democrats. He breathlessly extolled the virtue of competition and our need as a country to win with big ideas! Instead of imagining a world in which we would cooperate with others to achieve shared goals (environmental sustainability, nuclear disarmament, human rights, and an end to global poverty and despair), we were told that the real patriotism consists in getting ahead and beating those other countries when it comes to international economic competition.

From that framework emerged his emphasis on education for

success in the competitive marketplace. Gone is the idea that we might instill in students the desire to seek wisdom and knowledge for their own sake. It is the "information age," and we are to seek information for the sake of global power and domination.

A powerful summary of what was wrong with giving primacy to competition as the central goal for Americans was included within a response by "Historians Against the War" to the State of the Union address:

> Mr. Obama declared that "America has been the story of ordinary people who dare to dream," but his focus on competitiveness means embracing corporate rather than democratic values and reflects Mr. Obama's recent appointments of business executives and business-oriented advisors to crucial advisory and policy formation positions within his administration. The push for competitiveness is an attempt to reassert what historian William Appleman Williams called "open door imperialism," the export of goods and investment of capital abroad with concern only for profits, disregarding the human consequences and paving the way for military intervention when needed to achieve political stability or cooperation. What we need if we are to advance as a nation is a spirit of cooperation at home and abroad. We need to organize our educational system not around competition but around personal rights, ensuring, as John Kennedy explained in his address to the country on civil rights, that all children have the right "to be educated to the limit" of their talents. We need to organize our society around meeting the basic needs of all and cooperating with one another rather than merely asserting everyone should have the chance to try to grab the brass ring. We need to create a world economy based on equality and friendship among peoples, not a competitive race to the top which often forces people from poorer nations and working people in richer nations to the bottom. Symptomatic of the mistaken idea that the competitive market solves all problems is the adoption of NAFTA and other so-called free trade pacts. Although several Latin American states have successfully rejected the International Monetary Fund model of austerity and privatization and put resources toward expanding social benefits and infrastructure development, NAFTA has increased profits for U.S. agricultural firms, flooded Mexico with corn and meat subsidized by U.S. taxpayers, and undermined Mexico's rural economy. Workers in neither country have benefited and large numbers of Mexicans have been forced to leave the land, work in American-owned border town factories as cheap labor under the most deplorable working and living conditions, or to seek employment in our country.

The Harsh Costs of Competitiveness

The picture of a life built on competition is closely associated with another part of the capitalist worldview: that the outcome of this competition is to the benefit of all, because competition brings to the top positions the smartest, best, and most deserving, and that wherever any given individual (like you or me or the person facing mortgage closure or losing her job) ends up in this competition of all-against-all is a reflection of his or her inherent worth.

The Institute for Labor and Mental Health created *Tikkun* magazine in part to challenge that idea. The psychotherapists and union activists who worked with me on the major research grants that I managed in the 1970s and 1980s studied the psychodynamics of American working people and discovered that this idea of a meritocracy was one of the most crippling and pathogenic beliefs in American society.

Rather than understanding that in a class society such as ours most people will never "make it" because there are only a small percentage of jobs that offer adequate pay and an adequate sense of meaning and purpose, most people believe that their failure to have a satisfying and fulfilling work life is a reflection of their own personal inadequacies. Almost all people carry with them a "self-blaming" story of how they screwed up and are or were x, y, or z (e.g., "not smart enough," "not hard-working enough in high school or community college," "not charming or attractive or energized enough," or some other combination of faults or personal weaknesses) and therefore have an unfulfilling life because that is what they "really deserve." The pain of holding those beliefs contributes to a frenetic search for ways to bury these self-blaming feelings in alcohol, drugs, sexual conquests, endless hours on the web, tweeting or other online diversions, religious or political extremism, or in activities that are themselves quite healthy except when engaged in a frenetic way (e.g., sports, politics, religion, or socializing).

Now we have the president, perceived as a liberal (and even labeled as a socialist by some on the Right), sounding the very themes that lead to self-blaming and that will energize people around economic nationalism and the idea of "looking out for number one."

We accomplish little by dwelling for the next few years on how dishonestly Obama manipulated us into believing that he would use his bully pulpit in this way (and please, don't tell me he didn't, because I met face to face and alone with him in 2006 and that is exactly what he did do) or by focusing on how much he has subsequently betrayed the hopes he raised. All that blaming Obama is only relevant for helping people understand that the 2010 victory of the Right was not a choice between right and left worldviews, but of hard right worldviews (Republicans and Tea Party extremists) and soft right worldviews (the Democrats). Understanding that is important for overcoming the depression (and the tendency to blame the American majority for being stupid or reactionary) that is paralyzing many progressives today. But it doesn't get us very far toward a strategy.

So what can progressives do?

In a column I wrote in the *Washington Post* in December, shortly after the Winter 2011 issue of *Tikkun* went to press, I suggested that progressives should run a candidate against Obama in the 2012 Democratic primaries. I stressed that the value of such a

candidacy would be its potential to create a new power alignment in the Democratic Party, answering the right-wingers in the party who counsel elected officials that there is no pragmatic reason why anyone should pay attention to the left wing of their party, given that such liberals and progressives "have no place to go." It's time to counter the idea that no matter how much elected Democrats abandon liberal and progressive voters in the Democratic Party, they can be sure that those on the left will always return to the ranks no matter what, for fear that the alternative to whatever centrist or right-wing Democrat is running for office is certain to be worse for liberals and progressives, whereas those on the right of the Democratic Party might be tempted to vote for the Republican.

How to Use the Primaries for Progressive Politics

Far more important than who the candidate should be is simply this: a progressive candidacy ought to be formed around a progressive program. The most important contribution progressives could make at this time to American political life is to introduce and popularize a new vision of what America could be, as well as present examples of specific programs that manifest this vision at work. Normally mainstream media agencies do their best to keep such visions and ideas out of public view, but in the primary elections we "ordinary Americans" (those of us without much in the way of financial resources) have a last remnant of true democratic process on the national level—a unique opportunity to project a coherent picture that might excite Americans who have never even heard a progressive program and who have come to believe that Obama's pro-corporate agenda is actually "socialism." Progressives should use these opportunities to put forward an agenda that normally never gets heard by most Americans.

But I soon realized that there are two big problems with that strategy. The first problem is that as soon as one fixes on a candidate, the media focus all their attention on whether that person "could win" and of course, since the media are the judge of who is or is not a "realistic candidate," they quickly dismiss and then ignore the content of what such a candidate says. That is exactly what happened to Dennis Kucinich and other progressive candidates in past Democratic Party presidential primaries. As a result, the goal of popularizing a worldview gets obscured as its proponents try to defend a given politician.

Here's a solution. We can make creative use of the fact that when we vote in a presidential primary, we don't actually vote for any given candidate, but rather for a slate of potential electors who will be sent to the national convention of the party we choose with instructions to vote for the candidate to whom these electors are pledged. (For example, if you voted for Clinton or Obama in the last primary, you actually voted for a set of people who were chosen by the candidates' campaigns to go as representatives to the convention.) Our alternative is simple: progressives need to put forward a slate of Uncommitted Progressives who are "uncommitted" to any given candidate but who *are* committed to whatever progressive agenda we work out in a national convention of progressive activists in the summer or fall of 2011. A vote for that slate becomes more than a symbolic protest against Obama, it becomes an endorsement of the worldview to which the slate is committed. Such a slate could be assembled in each state that allows an "uncommitted" slot in its primaries. Simultaneously, while not naming any particular candidate, we could name a cabinet of individuals who would be able to serve the slate of Uncommitted Progressives should they (in the unlikely event of actually winning) be able to select a candidate at the national conventions of any of the political parties to which they were elected. Not every state will allow this, and the Democrats would fight hard to prevent it, but it could be a powerful way to let the media and the Republican and Democratic Parties know that many of their members would actually prefer an alternative to the current status quo—and yet do it in a way that would not hurt Obama in the actual election (remember this is only the primaries, not a repeat of the mistakes made by Nader in 2000). Imagine a convention in which these uncommitted delegates had enough of a presence to force real issues onto the agenda instead of the public relations shows that have characterized conventions of both major parties in the past forty years.

There is, however, no point in doing this if the outcome is a progressive program that merely restates the laundry list of left issues. We support those issues, which include ending the war in Afghanistan, creating a new New Deal to end poverty and economic suffering in the United States, imposing a carbon tax to lower atmospheric carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million, passing Medicare for All, defunding the military, and jailing those who ordered or facilitated torture, along with twenty to thirty other demands likely to emerge from any gathering of progressives. But all this will not rejuvenate the hopes of an American people so badly quashed and humiliated by the Obama betrayal—more is needed as well.

What a Progressive Platform Must Include to Win Broad Support

What is needed is a whole new way of speaking—rooted in the ideas that we've developed in *Tikkun*'s politics of meaning and what we now call the spiritual progressive vision. That progressive worldview is summarized in the notion of "The Caring Society—Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Planet" (if you are looking for a seven-second sound bite for the media). This new way of speaking would involve talking about a New Bottom Line of commitment to love, kindness, generosity, caring for everyone on the planet, compassion, forgiveness, ethical and ecological sensitivity, and celebration, awe, and wonder at the grandeur of the universe.

To gain broad support, a progressive platform must include some sort of Global Marshall Plan to eliminate domestic and international poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, and inadequate health care. And it must retain the central message of our Global Marshall Plan: that homeland security can best be achieved by replacing military funding and military actions like those in Iraq and Afghanistan with a strategy of generosity in which we are able to demonstrate real and genuine caring for the peoples of the world. It must include electoral reform and the ecological concerns articulated in our Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution (ESRA), and a plan to hold corporations accountable by forcing them to prove a satisfactory history of environmental and social responsibility to a jury of randomly selected ordinary citizens every five years.

In short, the new progressive platform must transcend the continuing division between those driven to the Right because it is the only place where they hear spiritual concerns addressed and a language of love, caring, and generosity explicitly affirmed (in right-wing religious communities if not in Republican policies), on the one hand, and on the other hand the secular, often mechanistic-sounding, and too often religophobic Left with its nonetheless indispensable focus on economic entitlements, political rights, and personal liberties. Creating the synthesis we need is what *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives have been about these many years!

When have we heard that kind of combination of spirituality and politics before? Well, in the voices of our prophets, from Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, and Micah to Jesus and St. Francis; in the poetry of Rumi and Hafiz; in the spiritual practices of Buddha; in the Hasidim and Christian contemplatives; and in contemporary spiritual directors. But this is a legacy that most progressives have not yet integrated into their consciousness, so calling for a national convention to produce such a politics would likely turn out something so far from these ideas we'd be uninterested. We at *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives can't spearhead an electorally oriented convention because we are a 501c3 nonprofit and have no intention of becoming actively involved in a campaign since such involvement is prohibited to nonprofits in the United States.

But if you understand how the only way the progressive forces are going to recover is if they adopt a whole new framework for their thinking, then you can see why the most important work for us in the second decade of the twenty-first century is to spread this way of thinking. We've developed seemingly utopian projects such as the Global Marshall Plan and the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution precisely because these campaigns lead directly into talking about the strategy of generosity replacing the strategy of domination, and about the need to build an environmental consciousness that goes to the deepest level of challenging the ethos of selfishness and replacing it with an ethos of love, generosity, and awe and wonder at the mystery and majesty of the universe.

So this is what *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives is really about—trying to forge a cadre of spiritual revolutionaries along the lines of, say, the Franciscans or the Chabad Hasidim (though with a different content, of course).

The As-Yet Unfulfilled Promise of Local Organizing

The only alternative to this strategy that one hears from the Left is the following mantra, which we've been hearing since the collapse of the New Left in the early 1970s: "What we really need to do is forget about the elections and build a movement by supporting local organizing projects."

Well, duh. Of course we need a movement, and of course we should support local organizing—precisely what the Obama campaign never did. But these local organizing projects have been going on for forty years or more and have not ever spontaneously turned into a powerful national movement capable of significantly restraining corporate capital, military interventions, or the destruction of the global environment. And the reason is not that they don't try or not only that they are underfunded, but that there is no mechanism for building upon whatever local victories take place in a way that achieves a new national understanding. The amazing work of ACORN was destroyed by the Republicans and the capitulation of the Democrats because most liberals and progressives had no idea what ACORN was doing or how much it was connected to their own local organizing. The good efforts on the local level need to be connected to each other and to a unifying spiritual progressive theme capable of exciting Americans who today think the Left is only a conglomeration of self-interest groups.

Only a new national strategy—one that encompasses but is not restricted to the smart and sophisticated use of elections, the creation of independent and widely listened to or viewed progressive national media, and a national convention every four years to bring together the disparate elements of the liberal and progressive forces to develop strategies and programs that share a common theme of the Caring Society—could transform local or sectoral organizing projects into a powerful enough force to capture the imagination of the American people.

It is not too late to make this happen, so please spread these ideas! At this moment in 2011, the most practical thing you can do is bring this kind of thinking to others.

If these ideas excite you, please do consider joining the Network of Spiritual Progressives as a dues-paying member so we can continue to print the magazine (to which NSP members get a free subscription). Please also explore our newly redesigned web magazine site, which contains new articles each week that you won't find in the print version. Those who do subscribe or join the NSP will also get access to exclusive articles online that are not available to casual readers. So join now at spiritualprogressives.org/join. ■

TIKKUN—NOW ONLINE IN A VIBRANT NEW WAY

Our beautifully redesigned web magazine site is set to go live in early March. There will be some articles for free, and some only for subscribers. Please subscribe now at tikkun.org! Your subscription or NSP membership will give you both online access and, so long as we can afford to produce it, our print magazine.

Passover Haggadah Supplement 2011

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 April 18, the first night of Passover, or on any of the other nights of Passover until it ends on April 26. The bulk of this supplement can be found online at tikkun.org/passoversupplement. We are only printing the first part here.

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

In fact, we know it is the ongoing spiritual inspiration and Jewish cultural and psychological resonance of that ancient struggle that led many Jews today to cheer on the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings against their oppressive dictatorial regimes. Yet we also know that many Jews responded with more fear than hope, a residue of the ongoing post-traumatic stress disorder generated by 1,700 years of Christian oppression culminating in the Holocaust. The result: too often the high ethical values of the Jewish tradition can get subordinated to the fearful psychology that leads some of the most wealthy and politically powerful Jews in the world to still feel insecure and to see the world through the framework of the need to control, rather than through the religious frame of hope, love, and generosity that were the cornerstone of Jewish consciousness for many centuries. Without putting down those who are still traumatized and fearful, our task is to rebuild and reaffirm a Judaism committed to building a global transformation toward a world of love, generosity, peace, social justice, environmental sustainability, and genuine caring for each other and for the planet. It is toward this goal that we assemble at our Passover table as we rejoice in our freedom and affirm our commitment to spreading that freedom to all humanity.

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 we can believe in." Some will say 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 he chose advisers such as Geithner and Summers as soon as he was elected, and why he 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 GLBT, environmental, human rights, immigrant rights, peace, and women's movements, and the 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 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

ISTOCKPHOTO/RONANDJOE

The oppressive ancient Egyptian regime in which Jews lived as slaves was overthrown. The Passover story reminds us that in every age we must continue the struggle for liberation, which Jews first experienced on the first Passover some 3,200 years ago.

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.

READ THE REST ONLINE!

The rest of this Haggadah (and there's much more in it) will appear on tikkun.org by the end of March (the first Passover Seder in 2011 is on Monday, April 18) and will be available to anyone who is a *Tikkun* subscriber and/or NSP member.

If we have your email address, we will send you instructions in late March for how to access this special subscribers-and-members-only content on our newly redesigned web magazine site. If you haven't received the instructions by the end of March, please call our office at 510-644-1200. If you haven't subscribed or joined, please go to spiritualprogressives.org and do so now! If you are a subscriber or member but don't have access to the web, send us your address and we'll mail you a copy of the full Haggadah supplement.

CREATIVE COMMONS/MHARRSCH

Truth, Illumination, and Nuclear Weapons

by Jonathan Granoff

CREATIVE COMMONS/ERIN MARIE PAGE

Rabbi Lerner asked me to share my highest spiritual truths, but I had intended to talk about the moral imperative to abolish nuclear weapons. I will try and put these two themes together.

The highest spiritual truth that I know is contained in *Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad*—there is only One, the Lord is One and only That One is worthy of worship. *La ilaha illa Allah*—there is no God but the One God; there is no reality but God. God is a mystery and His wondrous creation is filled with the mystery of life—unified and harmonious. Each of us is one within the One.

Hindus describe Indra's web as an infinite net that stretches out in all directions. Each node of the web has a jewel, and each jewel reflects the entirety of the web. If any part of the web is touched, the entire web responds.

Each heart is that jewel, and each heart reflects the entirety of all life. One who knows himself or herself will know that jewel and see that all lives are interconnected and are a manifestation of that one mysterious being and power, beyond name, beyond gender, beyond form, beyond description, that permits us to know It and to know our soul—our real selves—as infinite light and infinite love.

The great majesty of the human experience is that this capacity of knowing oneself is directly related to the capacity of knowing one another. Each of us only gets one heart, and that heart has to open in all directions. If you try to only open the heart to the divine—to HaShem, to God, to YHVH, to Allah—and neglect love of other lives, that insight into the mystery of life, the secret of the One, will not be realized.

Jesus summed it up very nicely (quoting the Torah), when he said the method of obtaining fulfillment is to love that power of infinite light and love with all your soul, all your heart, and all your might, and like unto that, love your neighbor as yourself.

It is an open door that goes two ways, inside and outside. Peace is an inside job, your soul is an inside job, your consciousness is an inside job—and these gifts cannot be measured. That which is most important cannot be measured. Through that which is limited and measurable, these treasures can only be pointed at. But there are universal principles of the way in which this pointing is done, and there are universal principles of how we are to behave if we are to honor these treasures.

The illuminating radiance of the soul becomes manifest in creation when a human being lives in accordance with the nature of God's presence. That presence is without differences

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of race, religion, gender, "I" and "you," high or low, or dogma of any kind. It is the full embodiment of love and compassion, and it includes complete freedom from fear and, the deeply realized even say, death itself. It is the nurturing ground for individual and social health. Society needs individuals living this radiance.

One of the greatest problems the world faces today is the franchising of the way in which this realization is pursued. Franchising, like McDonalds or Burger King, can be found in the realm of religions. Significant movements in Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism are attempting to franchise love and meaning, each claiming a unique exclusive ownership. Imagine believing that my Jewish love is better than your Hindu love, or my Christian liberation is better than your Jewish liberation. If these metaphors for that which is beyond description, beyond any form of idolatry are to have any meaning in this age, they are a call for us to express authentic love and living virtue in a manner that is free and open.

A relevant analogy is that of wells being dug to get to the water table. The water table is one, and the wells are each unique and separate. The value of each tradition is to dig to get to that one water table. We are people who honor life, desire to seek and serve peace, and work as a network. Also, we are people digging to get to that water table. We are people who recognize that network of life itself, and who are willing to say shame on you for saying that you own God's love, and shame on you for creating violent divisions in humanity in the name of God.

A Sufi saying I learned from Bawa Muhaiyaddeen is to "separate from yourself that which separates you from your fellow human beings." The same qualities that separate us from one another separate us from that which is most important inside. Anger, falsehood, jealousy, pride, arrogance, and fanaticism separate us, while love, compassion, patience, tolerance, and peace bring us together. If religion and spirituality have any meaning it is to reconnect us with that oneness.

PAUL LACHINE

Buddhism: hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. Christianity: all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you so even to them (Matthew). Confucianism: do not onto others what you would not have them do unto you (the Analytics). Hinduism: this is the sum of duty—do not unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you (the Mahabharata). Islam: not one of you is a believer until he desires for the other that which he desires for himself (Hadith). Jainism: in happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self. Judaism: what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man—that is the law, all the rest is commentary.

The Eleventh Commandment: Don't Kill Everybody

Grace is part of the fabric of creation, part of what holds things together, and these ethical principles express the way things actually are. It is not poetry; it is a description of how things really are. When these principles are violated, instability ensues—instability in our personal lives and instability among states. States must also treat other states as they want to be treated.

It is useful to look at policy in terms of coherence with universal ethical principles. There is a universal convention barring biological weapons. Imagine if nine states said, "No state can use polio or smallpox as a weapon, but nine states can use the plague as a weapon to maintain international peace and security." Such a proposition would be offensive to our basic morality and logic. It violates that ethical principle of do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

In order for stability to be achieved in world affairs, states must treat other states as they wish to be treated. In order for citizens—the people of states—to achieve social and personal stability, we treat others as we wish to be treated. We do not want to be dominated, and we do not want to dominate others in our names. *(continued on page 41)*

TAKE ACTION!

Norway has placed some of the profits from its oil resources into a pension fund for future generations. The fund cannot invest in companies with environmentally destructive practices or those that directly engage in the production of weapons of indiscriminate effect such as land mines, cluster munitions, and nuclear weapons. Is it not time for us to issue a challenge to all religious institutions and other institutions based on values, such as colleges and universities, to adopt the same guidelines for their investments? For further information: www.gsinstitute.org/pnnd/updates/update22docs/NuclearDivestment.pdf

Another Word on "God and the Twenty-First Century"

by Michael Benedikt

It is no longer necessary to invoke the name of God to explain or promote compassionate action. Today we understand we have evolved that capacity and can choose to exercise it.

CREATIVE COMMONS/MELISSAGALLO

There's the story of a young atheist arguing with his Orthodox Jewish father about the existence of God. It's late Friday afternoon. After an hour or so, the father looks at his watch and concedes, "Well, my son, God might or might not exist, but it's time for evening prayers."

Mitzvot are what matter. And what are mitzvot—what are commandments? Ways of bringing goodness to life through actions, through deeds. Said Rabbi Shimeon: "Not learning but *doing* is the chief thing." Said Jesus: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord! Lord!' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who *does* the will of God" (Matthew 7:21). Said Muhammad: "If you derive pleasure from the good you do, and are grieved by the evil you *commit*, you are a true believer."

These are the words of three champions of monotheism. Their pragmatism is bracing. But what should followers of these theist traditions think of the good practiced by *non*believers—people who would say it's quite unnecessary, and even counterproductive, to bring "God" into ordinary morality, who would offer that morality can and should be understood from an entirely scientific, evolutionary, and historical point of view thus: the capacity for empathy, fairness, and altruism is wired into human beings and even other higher mammals from birth, thanks to millions of generations of reproduction-with-variation under the constraints of natural selection. Similarly, the laws of civility—from the Eightfold Way and the Ten Commandments to the Magna Carta, the Geneva Convention, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights—are the culturally transmitted legacy of thousands of years of human *social* evolution overlaid upon older, natural reproductive-selective processes. Whereas laws of civility may once have needed the rhetorical force of God-talk to establish themselves, today they can be embraced rationally in the service of peace and prosperity.

In short, the nonbeliever holds that arriving at the enlightened understanding that good actions are good-for-*us*, that better ones are good-for-us-all, and the best are good-for-*all-living-things* requires neither God nor religion. God (in their view) is actually "God," a useful fiction at best, a mental catalyst, rather like the square root of minus one: put into the equation only to be taken out later.

This dismissal of God and "his" goodness—in favor of evolution and *its* goodness—leaves modern, science-educated theists (and deists) unsatisfied. They believe that centuries of religious architecture, literature, and music ought not be treated only aesthetically and/or anthropologically, bracketed from real life, and considered to be about what was once picturesquely believed—but rather as capable, still, of transporting the self and transforming the world for the good. They believe, likewise, that ceremonies calmly

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asking for God's blessing in progressive churches and synagogues the world over may not be *worship* in the traditions of self-abjection or irrational ecstasy, but they do more than "improve group fitness." There's a reason that the seal impressed upon births, marriages, and deaths by the invocation of the deity is so poorly replaced by secular language.

For modern, science-educated theists, the theory of evolution and the way it accounts for the origins of ethics and aesthetics is not wrong, then, just inadequate. Arthur Green's excellent essay in "God and the Twenty-First Century," the March/April 2010 *Tikkun*, represents one response, one solution. It is to *divinize evolution*, to understand evolution as God's only mode of operation. Evolution has a direction, which is the attainment of ever higher levels of complexity and organization—of ever greater "intensifications of beauty," as Alfred North Whitehead put it—in the arrangement of matter and energy in the universe, culminating in human consciousness. This passage from dust to mindfulness, this many-billion-year saga, is sacred in its entirety. It is the new "Greatest Story Ever Told."

If evolution itself is seen as wise and benevolent, even divine, how come it involves so much suffering? Or is there a better way to conceive of "evolutionary spirituality"?

In Divinizing Evolution, What Becomes of the Problem of Evil?

Reading Green brings to mind earlier attempts to divinize evolution: Whitehead's *process*, Henri Bergson's *creative evolution*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *cosmogenesis*, Samuel Alexander's *emergentism*, as well as the "evolutionary spiritualities" (Andrew Cohen's term) of Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel, and J. Huxley, for whom humankind was "nothing else but evolution become conscious of itself." The danger with reconciling theism with science by sacralizing evolution, however, is the tendency to assign to evolution a wisdom equivalent to the God of Genesis. The resulting problem is an old one: the "problem of evil." For just as it is difficult and even impossible to reconcile the existence of a single, absolutely powerful, knowledgeable, and beneficent Creator God with the innocent suffering that surrounds us, so one cannot hold to a good, evolution-devising, evolution-endorsing, or even evolution-constituted God for whom the agonies and early deaths of uncountable living creatures through history are justified by the result, since *the vast majority of those agonies and deaths contributed nothing to evolution.*

Evolution, overall, may be "good" in as much as it eventuated in our being here to read and write articles like this. But looked at with any precision, evolution is a slow and messy affair, tragic in most directions. Is God really that careless, that wasteful? The evolution of species may be "the greatest … drama of all time," as Arthur Green says, but on the evidence, it would seem that only a small and recent chapter of it *begins* to be "sacred." It's the chapter that opens with Eve's eating of the apple, the allegorical mark of the emergence of human conscience, and it's a chapter that's still being written.

What If God Emerges From and Evolves With Us?

I suggest that the only version of "evolutionary spirituality" that keeps God good and that makes spiritual as well as evolutionary sense, sees God him/her/itself as emerging *from* and evolving *with* us, and *not existing before*.

This is not so strange an idea, or so new. As talmudist Aryeh Cohen, coming from quite another direction, writes in his careful essay in the same issue of *Tikkun*: "It is in the practice of justice that God exists and that redemption may happen." The next logical step multiplies implications: perhaps it is not only *in* the doing of good (in "the practice of justice") that God exists, but as the doing of good (as the practice of justice) that God exists. "God" is not a noun but a verb, as David Cooper declares in his book about the Kabbalah; but more pointedly *God is not a being, but a doing*. If God is as God does, and God does only good by definition, then it follows, in so far as *doing* (over mere mechanical action or reaction) involves even a trace of foresight, creativity, and review, that God's existence and continuance is in human hands, no less than our continuance, increasingly, is in God's. The human

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species is new in cosmic history. Doing good is newer still. God is not everywhere always, therefore, and never was; God *is*—only where good is being done, and when. Humanity is "theogenic," and God "ethicogenic."

I understand that these declarations are under-supported in this short article. But consider this: seeing God as goodness performed, like music or dance, allows an educated believer to say "God" and to mean by "God" something viable, actual, and energizing that needs no apology or bracketing or empty hyperbole to promote. It encourages them—it encourages us—to understand that religious texts, and especially ancient religious texts, are not poor science or arcane readings suited only for ritual use, but recordings of the emergence of—and generators, still, of an openness to—that new, tenuous, and "vertical" dimension of human experience we call the ethical. This is the dimension into which we step, as out of a basement into fresh air, each time we volunteer ourselves into selflessness, or choose what is best for all, or welcome necessary complexity. One might call it elevation through submission—submission not to God Almighty (this is the old hyperbole), but to the gentle and persistent current of joy and care that runs through life: a charge coming to us from everywhere and nowhere to "choose life," consciously, for all living things, in the freedom to do otherwise.

The step into the ethical dimension and its upward loft is not arduous. It is often a small one. Said Moses to the Israelites:

> Surely this instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond your reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your hearts, to observe it ... Choose life, that ye may live (Deut. 30:11-14, 20:19).

Look out of your window, then. Every animal not shot, every walker not carrying a gun, every car waiting patiently for a traffic light to change, every repairman writing up a job fairly, every person dying in a fresh hospital bed rather than on a battlefield or in a gutter, every street that is swept, every bush that is trimmed, every toddler studying a worm, is God evidenced and instanced. We should look upon these things and be glad, even reverent. We should rejoice at peace and simple decency, and not take them for granted. They are not the product of raw, biological evolution, but of the divine process of civilization, a process to which we contribute. Our "cup runneth over," and by our ethical actions, that cup runs over for others. This is the wonder of good doing. "The wonder of [good] doing," wrote Abraham Joshua Heschel,

> is no less amazing than the marvel of being ... and [it] may prompt us to discover "the divinity of deeds." In doing sacred deeds, we may begin to realize that there is more in our doing than ourselves, that in our doing there is something—nay, someone—divine. [It is] "through the ecstasy of deeds" that we learn "to be certain of the hereness of God."

How Should We De-Anthropomorphize God?

One perpetual challenge for thoughtful theists—a challenge almost as great as how to interpret evolution—is how to deal with theological anthropomorphism, which is the second entry point for atheists after the problem of evil.

As Stewart Guthrie points out in *Faces in the Clouds*, anthropomorphism takes two forms. The first is easy to detect and easy to suppress: seeing the man in the moon or thinking that snakes are reincarnated bad *(continued on page 43)*

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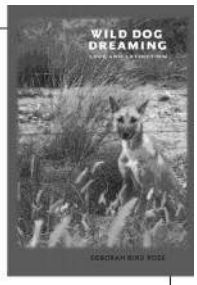

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Overcoming Despair as the REPUBLICANS TAKE OVER

A Conversation with Noam Chomsky

MICHAEL LERNER (ML): YOU HAVE MADE MANY EXCELLENT ANALYSES of the power of global capital and its capacity to undermine ordinary citizens' efforts to transform the global reality toward a more humane and generous world. If there were a serious movement in the U.S. ready to challenge global capital, what should such a movement do? Or is it, as many believe, hopeless, given the power of capital to control the media, undermine democratic movements, and use the police/military power and the co-optive power of mass entertainment, endless spectacle, and financial compensations for many of the smartest people coming up through working-class and middle-income routes? What path is rational for a movement seeking to build a world of environmental sanity, social justice, and peace, yet facing such a sophisticated, powerful, and well-organized social order?

Noam Chomsky (NC): There is no doubt that concentrated private capital closely linked to the state has substantial resources, but on the other hand we shouldn't overlook the fact that quite a bit has been achieved through public struggles in the U.S. over the years. In many respects this remains an unusually free country. The state has limited power to coerce, compared with many other countries, which is a very good thing. Many rights have been won, even in the past generation, and that provides a legacy from which we can move on. Struggling for freedom and justice has never been easy, but it has achieved progress; I don't think we should assume that there are any particular limits.

At the moment we can't realistically talk about challenging global capital, because the movements that might undertake such a task are far too scattered and atomized and focused on particular issues. But we can try to confront directly what global capital is doing right now and, on the basis of that, move on to further achievements. For example, it's no big secret that in the past thirty years there has been enormous concentration of wealth in a very tiny part of the population, 1 percent or even one-tenth of 1 percent, and that has conferred extraordinary political power on a very tiny minority, primarily [those who control] financial capital, but also more broadly on the executive and managerial classes. At the same time, for the majority of the population, incomes have pretty much stagnated, working hours have increased,

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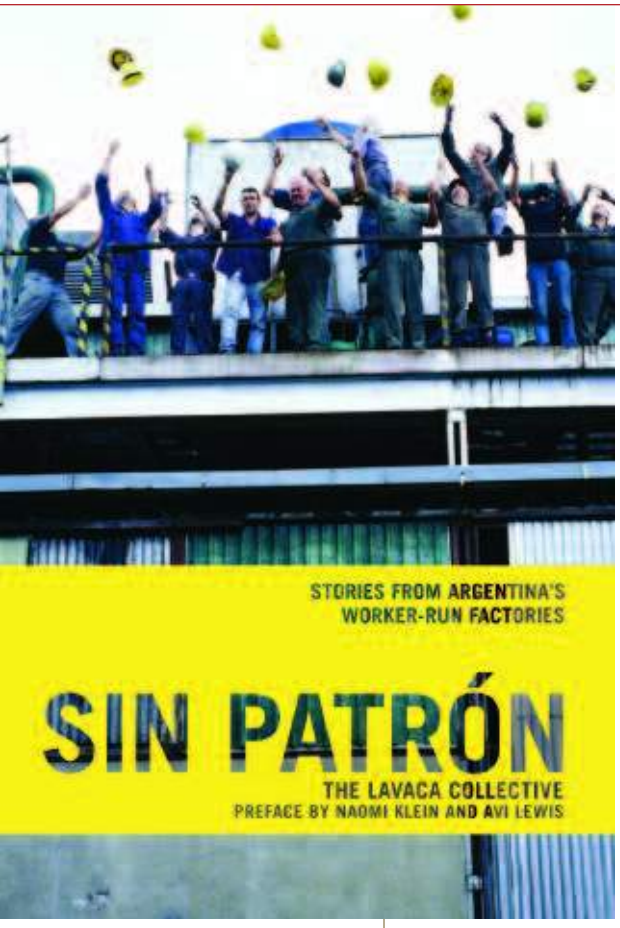
TIM BRINTON



The most inspiring examples of workers taking over factories have been coming from Argentina. Sin Patrón, *published in English by Haymarket Books, tells in the workers' own words the stories of ten occupied and recovered workplaces.*

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benefits have declined—they were never very good—and people are angry, hostile, and very upset. Many people distrust institutions, all of them; it's a volatile period, and it's a period which could move in a very dangerous direction—there are analogues, after all—but it could also provide opportunities to educate and organize and carry things forward. One may have a long-term goal of confronting global capital, but there have to be small steps along the way before you could even think of undertaking a challenge of that magnitude in a realistic way.

Worker-Managed Businesses

ML: Do you see any strategy for overcoming the fragmentation that exists among social movements to help people recognize an overriding shared agenda?

NC: One failing of the social movements that I've noticed over many years is that while they are focusing on extremely crucial and important social issues like women's rights, environmental protections, and so on, they have tended to ignore or downplay the economic and social crises faced by working people. It's not that they are completely ignored, but they are downplayed. And that has to be overcome, and there are ways to do it. So, to take a concrete example right near where I live, right now there is a town near Boston where a multinational corporation is closing down a local plant because it's not profitable enough from the point of view of the multinational. Members of the workforce have offered to purchase the plant and the equipment, and the multinational doesn't want to do that; it would rather lose money than offer the opportunity for a worker self-managed plant that might well become successful. And the multinational has the power to do what it wants, of course. But sufficient popular support—community support, activist support, and so on—could swing the balance. Things like that are happening all over the country.

Take Obama's virtual takeover of the auto industry. There were several options at that point. One option, which the Obama administration chose, was to restore the old order, assist in the closing of plants, the shifting of production abroad and so on, and maybe get a functioning auto industry again. Another option would have been to take over those plants—plants that are being dismantled—and convert them to things that are very badly needed in the country, like high-speed rail—it's a scandal that the United States doesn't have this kind of infrastructure, which many other countries have developed. In fact at the very time that Obama was closing down plants in the Midwest, his transportation secretary was in Europe trying to get contracts from Spain for high-speed rail construction, which could have been done in those very plants that were being dismantled.

To move in the direction that I suggest would take substantial organization, community support, national support, and recognition that worker self-managed production aimed at real social needs is an option that can be pursued; if it is pursued, you move to a pretty radical stage of consciousness, and it could go on and on from there. Unfortunately, that was not even discussed.

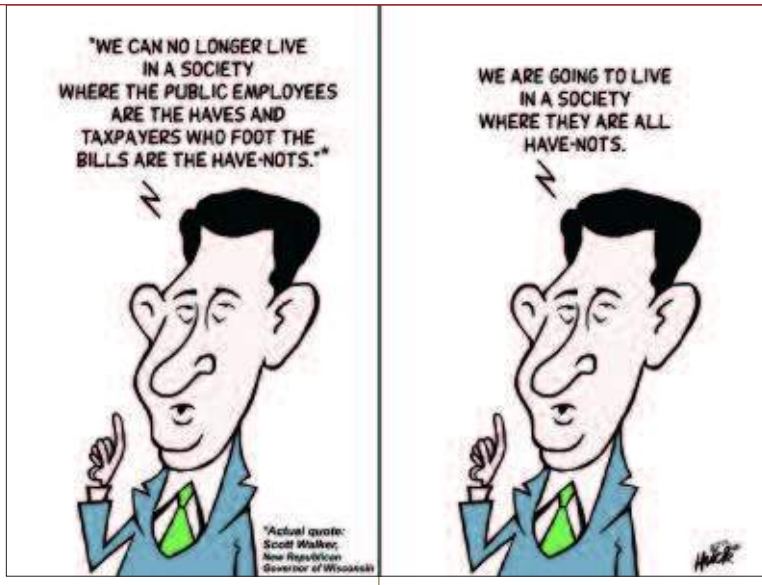
Amend the Constitution?

ML: *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives have proposed the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the Constitution or ESRA [read it at spiritualprogressives.org/ESRA], which we think could potentially unite many segments of the liberal and progressive forces in this country. It starts with a first clause that essentially takes money out of national elections by forbidding private money in elections and requiring that they be funded by public sources. It overturns *Citizens United*, it requires the mass media to give equal and free time to all major candidates, and it bans any private advertising in the months before an election. It then goes on to the issues of corporate environmental and social responsibility and requires that any corporation with income above $100 million per year would have to get a new corporate charter once every five years; to get the charter, a corporation would have to prove a satisfactory history of environmental and social

responsibility to a jury of ordinary citizens so as to avoid the control of regulatory agencies by the people they are supposed to be regulating.

I wonder if this kind of idea makes sense to you, not as something that is likely to pass but as something that is likely to frame an agenda that is potentially unifying and that does give people a concrete vision of what it might look like to get significant advances toward democratic control of the society and some semblance of responsibility from corporations.

NC: I think those are ideas that I would endorse. I'm sure that they can be used for organizing and education, but until those organizing and educational efforts reach a much higher plateau than anyone can envision today, the proposals are impossible to implement. So yes, as a platform for organizing and bringing people together, ideas of that kind make good sense, as do the kind I mentioned, and many others, but work has to be done.



*If you can't read the small print: left panel says "*Actual quote: Scott Walker, New Republican Governor of Wisconsin."*

GARY HUCK

ML: Dennis Kucinich has promised to introduce this into Congress. It's not something that we're expecting to have passed in this current Congress, but something that—if we can get them endorsed by local city councils and state legislatures—might raise the kinds of issues that right now are not even in the public sphere at all.

NC: It's a reasonable tactic, especially trying to implement it at the local level. There are things you can do with local councils, communities, and maybe someday state legislatures that aren't really feasible at the congressional level, and that is a way of building popular organizations.

Run a Progressive Candidate against Obama in 2012?

ML: Now in trying to find a way to bring together some of the forces that responded to what they believed to be a progressive candidacy in the Obama campaign of 2008, I wonder what you think of the notion of trying to create a progressive candidacy to oppose Obama in the 2012 Democratic primaries, and to use that effort to build a public face for a progressive opposition that could then split the Democrats and create a third party with a greater mass base than the Greens.

NC: You know, that's sort of a difficult tactical question. My own guess is that efforts that are undertaken at the national level make sense if they're connected to a program of local organizing. I think we're very far from being able to carry out large-scale changes at the national level.

You could see the limitations of a national campaign in the 2008 election. A tremendous amount of energy and excitement was generated, but it was clear from the beginning that it was going to head toward severe disillusionment because there was nothing real there—it was based on illusion. And when people dedicate themselves and work hard to try to bring about something that is illusory, there's going to be a negative effect, which in fact happened, so there's been tremendous disillusionment, apathy, pulling away, and so on.

Organize Locally, Defend Public Sector Unions

I think we should be careful to set realistic goals—they don't have to succeed, but if they fail, the failure itself can be used as a basis to go on, and that's not the case when you get involved in national electoral politics. So the kind of suggestion you make, I think it can be developed in such a way that would be constructive. But making clear that the real goal is the development of the kind of organization that can change things on the ground; it may ultimately have a national impact, but only when it's developed far beyond what it is right now.

It's not a great secret that the business classes in the United States, which are always fighting a bitter class war and are highly class-conscious, have been dedicated to destroying unions ever since the 1930s. And they've succeeded considerably in the private sphere, but not yet as successfully in the public sphere, and that's what's being targeted now: a major effort, a propaganda effort—the media are participating, both parties are involved—to try

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and undermine public unions. And that's one of the points on this attack on public working people, turning them into the criminals that were responsible for the fiscal crisis. Not Goldman Sachs, but the teachers and policemen and so on.

We just saw that take place in Washington a couple of months ago. There was a big issue—the great achievement of the lame-duck Congress was supposed to have been a bipartisan agreement on taxes. Well, the crucial issue there was whether to extend Bush's tax cuts for the very wealthy. The population was strongly opposed to that, maybe two to one, but the Democrats and Obama, instead of making use of that fact to try to eliminate that huge tax break for the rich, went along with it.

At the same time, both parties were trying to outdo each other and screaming about the danger of the federal deficit, when the fact of the matter is that we ought to be having a deficit in a time of recession. It's an incredible propaganda achievement, for the Republicans particularly, to advocate a tax cut for the very wealthy that is extremely unpopular and that will of course substantially increase the deficit, and at the very same time present themselves as deficit hawks who are trying to protect future generations. But that's only part of it, because at the very same time, Obama declared a tax increase for federal workers—it was called a pay freeze, but a pay freeze for workers in the public sector is the same as a tax increase on those workers. So here, a lot of shouting about how we're cutting taxes and overcoming the deficit, and at the same time we're raising taxes on public-sector workers.

This is part of the large propaganda campaign to try to undermine the public sector: demonizing teachers, police, and firemen with all kinds of fabrications about how they are overpaid, when in fact they're underpaid relative to the skill levels in the private sector—denouncing their pensions and so on. These are major propaganda efforts, a kind of class war, and that ought to be combated, and I think that public opinion can be organized to combat it. Those are very concrete things that are happening right now, like the possibility of ending the closing down of factories and the mass suffering that it leads to, and turning that into something really radical: mainly worker self-managed production for human needs.

ML: Now, let's imagine that the things that you're saying, which right now are heard by a tiny percentage of the population, could be heard by virtue of somebody articulating them in a presidential primary against Obama—wouldn't that, in and of itself, be of value? Particularly if that person were going to simultaneously be saying, "and we can't expect to get the changes we want simply through the Democratic Party, so we need to use this campaign also to bring together people who are willing to continue this struggle as part of an organization that works both inside and outside the Democratic Party."

NC: I think that should be done. I don't know that one should necessarily take a strong stand on whether it should be a third party or change the Democratic Party—both are options. After all, the New Deal did succeed in changing the Democratic Party through the mechanism of popular activism.

ML: So you're not one of those on the left who say it's simply a poison to continue working inside the Democratic Party?

NC: I'm not coming out in favor of working inside the Democratic Party or opposing working inside the Democratic Party, I'm just saying I don't see a point in taking a strong stand on that question. If it can be done [inside the party], fine; if it can't be done, do it outside. In fact, it's a little bit like a standard progressive approach to reformist goals—the goal is to press institutional structures to their limits. If in fact they can't be pressed any further, and people understand that, then you have the basis for going onto something more far-reaching.

You Run. No, You Run.

ML: So knowing no one that has a better understanding of these dynamics than you, would you be willing to be a candidate for the presidency?

NC: I'm not the proper person to be a candidate. So personally, no, it's not the kind of thing I can do.

ML: Since you have the analysis and can articulate it so clearly, why would you not be a good candidate? *(continued on page 39)*

Prospects for the U.S. Left: Not Bad At All

by Richard Wolff

Prospects for the Left in the United States are far better than they seem to most observers across the political spectrum (excepting those who fantasize imminent revolutionary uprisings spear-headed by 79-year-old sociology professors). The economic crisis has bitten hard and deep. Millions of people have been impacted by high unemployment and home foreclosures, by decreased job benefits and job security, and by the realization that none of these afflictions will end soon. A sense of betrayal is settling into the popular consciousness. People are coming to believe that despite their hard work and "playing by the rules," a long-term decline is placing the American Dream increasingly out of their reach. And neither the major parties nor the resurgent far right (the Tea Party movement) offers anything like an adequate response to or program for offsetting that betrayal.

The hegemonic alliance of big business, the richest 5 percent of citizens, and the state is becoming more visible to the American public.

JOHN OVERMYER

The economic crisis activated, intensely and very publicly, the hegemonic alliance among big business, the richest 5 percent of citizens, and the state. Business and the rich insisted on (and the federal government complied with) corporate bailouts costing huge sums of public money. The state borrowed that money rather than taxing big business and the richest 5 percent of citizens. Indeed, it borrowed a good deal of the money from big business and the rich who had funds to lend because 1) those funds had not been taxed, and 2) the depressed global economy offered less attractive alternatives for those funds.

This three-way hegemonic alliance is now proceeding to utilize the suddenly and vastly increased state debt to shift the cost of the crisis onto the mass of people. First, its members depict enlarged state debt as costing too much in state outlays for interest and repayment (threatening what the state can do for people in the future). Second, they insist that therefore "there is no choice but to" cut public payrolls and services and raise taxes (in combinations depending on what voter constituencies will allow). In Europe this hegemonic maneuver is called "austerity" and is operated by national governments. In the United States it is so far more a task of states and municipalities whose preferred words are "budget crisis" and "fiscal responsibility," although the federal version is coming in the form of social security and Medicare reductions.

We are in the early years of what already is and will likely continue to be an exceptionally long-lived capitalist crisis. The mass of Americans still mostly watch in stunned shock as the capitalism that they so long celebrated as "delivering the goods" instead delivers one bad after another. Many keep hoping this downturn will pass and prosperity will resume, or that they individually will escape. Some do that very American thing and blame politicians and the state, ignoring the fact that the vast majority of the unemployed were laid off by private enterprises, the vast majority of homeowners were foreclosed on by private banks, and the vast majority of the still employed have had their benefits and job security reduced by private employers. A crucial part of the hegemonic alliance among big business, the richest 5 percent,

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and the state is the role of the state as the socially acceptable object of anger, protest, and rage deflected from the economic power and privileges of its hegemonic partners. Then, too, the United States masses no longer have the labor union, socialist, and communist organizations that in Europe informed and mobilized historically unprecedented mass opposition to austerity all last year.

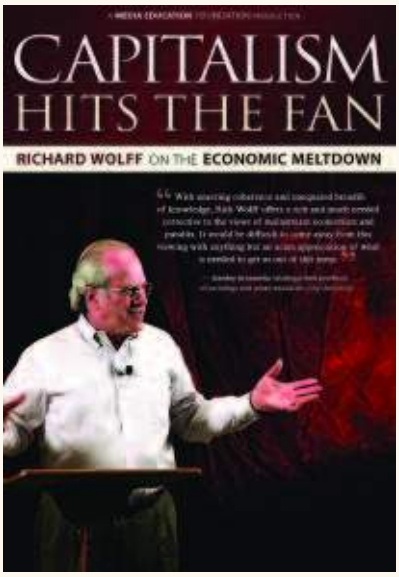
As a result, the Tea Partiers are so far the only systematically organized expression in the United States of mass opposition to the crisis and its social effects. However, they do not see the state's policies as reflecting complicity with its hegemonic partners' determination to emerge from the crisis unchecked in their activities and richer than before. Tea Party activists are, after all, specialists in demonizing the state as the root of all social problems. For them the crisis and its effects are all reducible to the government, that evil "other" whom they personify in an African American president. They function to deflect popular opposition and upset away from the capitalist economy and onto the government (as if the latter were an independent social actor and no hegemonic alliance linked them). Many of the Tea Party movement's feeder organizations—John Birchers, Moral Majoritarians, etc.—maintained networks over recent decades that were reactivated and reconfigured to produce the Tea Party movement's base. This paralleled on the right what the trade unions, socialist groups, and communist (and sometimes Green) organizations did for the European "anti-austerity movement" on the left. Moreover, that European movement on the left proved far, far larger and more socially influential than any current European movement on the right.

As often happens, the usefulness of the Tea Party movement to the hegemonic alliance is partial and temporary. Once the deflection of the masses' upset seems secure and likewise the shifting of the crisis's costs onto mass austerity, the hegemons have no further use for the Tea Partiers. Worse, the Tea Party movement's demonization of the state risks disrupting the hegemonic partnership. The latter does not want or need to cut the defense budget, or cripple the many other (and likewise costly) ways the state subsidizes and favors business and the richest citizens. It does not want to provoke a mass backlash against reduced state services, because that might rediscover the most obvious alternative to austerity, namely taxing business and the rich to avoid deficits and thereby obviate austerity. When the Tea Party movement pursues what the hegemons see as excessive government-cutting agendas, the temporary allies will find themselves on a collision course. Since the hegemonic alliance is both more powerful than—and its members include significant financiers of—the Tea Party movement, the latter's prospects in the United States now looks decidedly poor. It may well disassemble and shrink back into its more socially marginalized feeder organizations.

For different reasons and from a different history, the U.S. Left also leans toward anti-government pronouncements. Embarrassed by its long association with a USSR vilified as statism gone mad, angry at being a perennial target for state/police observation and harassment, and particularly sensitive to the imperialism of the U.S. government's foreign policies, the U.S. Left focuses much of its ire and activity against the state and state policies. Anarchist is the preferred self-description of many on the U.S. left today: a way to distance their leftism from its socialist predecessors on the U.S. left and also to express a very broadly American distaste and rejection of government per se.

However, the crucial point is that the U.S. Left has no taboo against focusing its activism also against big business and the richest 5 percent. It is open to that perspective and broadly sympathetic to it as well. It has no significant financial dependence on big business. Moreover the crisis has revived and renewed those voices on the U.S. left that stress its nature as systemic, a crisis of the economic system that does not originate in or reduce to government policies. What is most striking is the speed and extent to which public discourse in the United States has rediscovered and opened up to those voices. Debates over capitalism itself are reviving and probing its adequacy, its alternatives, and its human costs. The ideological grounds and roots for a left resurgence are developing in the consciousness of masses of American citizens

The voices of those increasingly challenging capitalism are now assembling, refining, and ever more successfully disseminating powerful critiques: their take on *(continued on page 44)*



The author has been surprised that in forty years of writing and activism he is suddenly far more in demand than ever before on the radio and TV circuit. Recently, a conservative Midwestern commercial radio host, interviewing him for the third time in six months, kept noting their agreement on how and why the economy was in deep trouble. The host regularly interrupted the hour-long conversation to urge listeners to learn more about Wolff's Marxist analysis on his website. Many Americans today, Wolff says, are hungrier to get a clear understanding of capitalist breakdown than they are scared of some socialist bogeyman.

Nourishing Hope—
in Uganda and in the United States

by Joy Ladin

It's the first Sunday of 2011, and I'm sitting on a balcony in the Ntinda section of Kampala, Uganda, watching lizards skitter up the crumbling concrete wall across the way, contrasting my coffee-drinking leisure with the sweat of the young man washing—forever washing—one of the four-wheel drive vehicles in which my hosting organization ferries around guest academics. It's another in an endless series of beautiful days—for the moment, the Ugandan battle over whether gay and transgender people have a right to exist is being fought in court, with words rather than blunt instruments. Though it's Sunday morning, the air is alive with sound: men joking or arguing, Gregorian chant from the church beyond the palms, a truck loaded with construction materials rattling over the rutted dirt road whose reds—brick red where damp from a brief night rain, and pale and dusty red in the sun—echo the red-tiled roofs of the wealthier residents' houses. The Kampala that's always visible in the distance, sprawled across the hills, is a weave of roof red and jungle-foliage green, human growth (people pour in daily by the hundreds from the impoverished countryside), and lively shreds of the chimp-haunted forests destroyed to build this city.

By American standards, Uganda is struggling. Most of its national budget is supplied by foreign aid; most of its rural inhabitants live in poverty, without power or running water (though often with cell phones), fighting to survive treatable diseases. Literacy is low. Families are decimated by AIDS, and traditional values and communal relationships are eroded by the constant lure of the city. Democratic institutions are tenuous at best; civil and regional war are recent memories and none-too-distant threats.

And yet, this country is humming with hope. The Ugandans I've met see their country growing before their eyes, buildings rising, new ways of life taking shape. The nation is so new that a Kampala radio station has a daily feature, "That's so UG," to highlight common behaviors that unite and define its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, far-flung (thanks to the paucity of roads) inhabitants. Ugandans are acutely aware of what they lack compared to older, established, "developed" nations, but for those I've spoken to, Uganda's unfinished state, for all its problems, represents possibility: not a broken world they must repair, but a world that they are creating. I saw that excitement—the excitement of being, as our sages put it, God's partner in Creation—in Sarah Kihika, who quit a booming civil law practice to become a human rights lawyer, working to create a Uganda, a world, based on human dignity by defending the rights of poor women and, despite considerable danger to herself, people even more marginalized: the gay, lesbian, transgender, and intersex Ugandans who are routinely ostracized, beaten, and killed—as was her friend and fellow GLBT activist David Kato, on January 26, 2011, a year after his picture was published by an anti-gay newspaper. I saw this excitement also in George—I didn't get his family name—who gave up well-paying work in South Africa to buy a few hardscrabble acres with the goal of improving local agricultural techniques and creating new markets for produce so people won't have to leave the tradition-nourishing countryside to make a living. I saw it in the Lantern Poets Meet, a group of fifty

The author (right) is inspired by the energy and hope of Ugandans like human rights lawyer and activist Sarah Kihika (left) despite their facing a very tough political and economic climate.

JOY LADIN

Joy Ladin, David and Ruth Gottesman Professor of English at Stern College of Yeshiva University, is the author of five books of poetry, including the recently published Coming to Life, Psalms, *and* Transmigration.

The author says U.S. progressives should be rejoicing at the gains made by the Obama administration on health care, investment in green energy, financial reform, GLBT rights, student aid, women's pay equity, and more. Here activists in Cortland, N.Y., thank their representative for voting to pass HR 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, November 2009.

CREATIVE COMMONS/CITIZENACTIONNY

young poets who debate the merits of one another's poems as though the future of Ugandan poetry depended upon them (it may well). I saw it in the nun who heads the literature department of Makerere University, which she has committed to the mission of documenting Ugandan traditions and folklore before they vanish—not merely for preservation, but so that the traditional wisdom they contain can be used to give a truly Ugandan form to a nation being flung into the future by the brainless hands of capitalism. Each of these pioneers lives as though their country were in their hands. They feel it growing in them and through them, through the national hardships they have chosen to face and the determination with which they face them. Visiting here at the end of one bad year for America and the beginning of what promises to be another, it was hard not to feel challenged and chastened by these Ugandans' dedication to *tikkun olam*. The contrast between their down-to-earth determination to create the kind of country they want to live in and the despair I had carried with me from the United States was sharpened by the diatribes of one of my fellow visiting academics. A dispirited, broken-hearted leftist briefly buoyed by the election of Obama, his only hope for America now, he said, was that it would soon complete its "suicide." The America he described is not only broken—it is *only* what is broken: bad economy, snarled political system, incoherent leadership, diminishing civil liberties. For him, America, both as idea and reality, has irrevocably failed.

Though his diatribes seemed extreme, his despair was all too familiar. Throughout the blogosphere, progressive commentators describe the first two years of Obama's presidency as years of dashed hope, disappointment, defeat, and despair.

In Uganda, where they have national health care but no doctors in the free hospitals, word that tens of millions would now receive quality medical treatment would be hailed as a historic breakthrough. Sarah Kihika and other members of the Coalition of Constitutional and Human Rights—which recently persuaded a court to grant an injunction against a national newspaper that published a list of names, photographs, and addresses of gay, lesbian, and transgender people, including David Kato's, under the front-page headline "KILL THEM!"—would hail the end of "don't ask, don't tell" and the Obama administration's executive orders granting GLBT partners visiting rights equal to those of heterosexuals in hospitals that receive government funding as great leaps forward. Struggling Ugandans would celebrate the news that the support for the long-term unemployed had once again been extended as a desperately needed act of social justice.

In the past two years, despite devastating economic collapse and vicious Republican resistance, the Obama administration has made unprecedented progress on health care, investment in green energy, financial reform, GLBT rights, student aid, women's pay equity, and other issues—progress that should have progressives rejoicing in the victories, some large, some incremental, on innumerable fronts. Instead, most of us seem to ignore, belittle, or deride these achievements. They were too long in coming, we say; they don't meet the need; they are watered-down by the compromises necessary to enact them; they don't include elements, like a public health insurance option, that would make them better.

Yes, yes, yes, and yes. But at the beginning of Obama's term, progressive commentators worried that neither Obama nor the Democratic majorities in Congress would have the vision and courage to spend their political capital on progressive legislation. Now, in retrospect, we should be applauding the fact that they did. Obama, simultaneously criticized for not leading at all and leading in the wrong direction, took one unpopular stand after another, even as his once-historic approval ratings sank below 50 percent. House Democrats took vote after vote that left them exposed to an angry, Tea-Party-leaning electorate; even Senate Democrats managed to overcome internal divisions and unprecedented minority party obstructionism and pass what political historians agree is an extraordinary amount of progressive-leaning—and progressive-inspired—legislation. Rather than applauding their

courage, political skill, and achievement, the Left has responded with disappointment and feelings of betrayal.

This response, combined with a Republican surge fueled by reactionary outrage at the very progressive achievements the Left derides, makes it even harder for Obama and the Democrats to lead this country forward. It is our job as progressives to be dissatisfied, to relentlessly push our country toward shared prosperity, equal opportunity, and social justice. But while dissatisfaction with the present keeps us pointing toward the future, dissatisfaction alone cannot drive us forward. We also need to tell the stories of our progress—the triumphs, however incremental, that can feed hope, kindle determination, and keep us slogging, despite disappointments and setbacks, along that long curve of history Martin Luther King Jr. saw bending slowly but inevitably toward justice. Our failure to tell ourselves and our fellow citizens the many true stories of our country's progress toward a better future represents a deeper failure, a failure that threatens to cut off the Left from the grassroots forces on which all progress depends. It is a failure of belief in America, in the patience, strength, and nation-building resilience that is demonstrated daily by Americans living on, or over, the edge. In this age of unfettered corporate political participation and full-throated right-wing fantasy, we cannot allow our short-term disappointments to identify progressive values with despair. If Ugandans kept telling themselves how far away they were from where they need to be, rather than how far they have managed, against enormous obstacles, to come—if they trumpeted their defeats and bitterly denigrated their victories—neither they nor their country would have any future to build. If Americans cannot embrace progressive values without giving up faith in ourselves and our country, those values will be left to rot on the vine—because without that faith, neither we nor our country can survive these hard times.

But here's the good news from Uganda: like theirs, our country isn't finished; through each of us and all of us, generation after generation, America is growing. ■

To Uphold the World

What Two Statesmen from Ancient India Can Tell Us about Our Current Crisis

by Bruce Rich

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF A GLOBAL ETHIC. THE WORLD economic system is driving a significant number of all living creatures to extinction. It is a world order—or disorder—that is increasingly undermining the biological foundations of long-term human civilization. In the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon at the 2011 Davos World Economic Forum, the global economy has become a "global suicide pact."

The global order of the past twenty years has prioritized unleashing market forces over other social values and created a profoundly unstable, interconnected world. It is a world not only of increased inequality and environmental deterioration but, as the recent global financial crisis shows, one that puts at risk the viability of whole societies and nations, not to mention democracy itself.

Bruce Rich is a public interest attorney whose professional focus on finance and ethics, as well as numerous visits to South Asia, inspired the writing of To Uphold the World. *He can be reached at brucemrich@gmail.com.*

Ashoka, known as Samraat Chakravartin *(Emperor of Emperors) ruled most of the Indian subcontinent from 269 to 232 BCE and is remembered for his benevolence. Above, a Chakravartin ruler, first century BCE, from Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, India (now at Musée Guimet, Paris, France).*

CREATIVE COMMONS

A decade ago George Soros warned that market fundamentalism was a greater threat to human society than any totalitarian ideology, noting that "the supreme challenge of our time is to establish a set of values that applies to a largely transactional, global society." In the words of Catholic theologian Hans Küng, "a global market economy requires a global ethic."

Each new environmental crisis forces us to recognize that an ethic of respect for all life is also an ethic for long-term human survival and well-being.

Yet in the wake of each new crisis, rhetoric notwithstanding, national and international political systems seem to fall back into a default position of business as usual.

In the United States we desperately need a program of social and environmental legislation of New Deal proportions, a program that would incorporate a new ethic of care rooted in the recognition of global mutual interdependence. Increasingly we hear the call for such an ethic by groups such as the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

How can we imagine alternatives? Are there historical precedents for a global ethic of care, and has any government ever tried to put it into practice?

Ancient Inscriptions Tell of an Astonishing King

An answer to these questions might take us first to, of all places, Kandahar, southeastern Afghanistan. Following September 11, 2001, Kandahar, the capital of the Taliban and the al-Qaida terrorist network, symbolized the intolerance, chaos, and terrorism that threaten to erupt anywhere with repercussions everywhere in an increasingly interconnected world. In 2010, after nine years of U.S. military intervention, the Taliban reigned in Kandahar more strongly than ever. The United States continues to seek military solutions to growing political challenges and chaos around the world, not just in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also now in Yemen, and in expanded access to bases in Colombia as a platform for possible interventions in much of Latin America.

Yet Kandahar's history has something profound to tell us. In 1957, Italian archaeologists made an extraordinary discovery there. They uncovered an ancient series of rock inscriptions in the Greek and Aramaic languages (Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Persian Empire, and is also thought to have been the native tongue of Jesus). In the inscriptions, an ancient Indian king calls for nonviolence through the practice of moderation, the honoring of parents and elders, abstention from killing animals, and more. Kandahar and most of present-day Afghanistan were part of this great king's empire. It was a multi-ethnic, multicultural state, built on fundamental values of tolerance, nonviolence, and respect for life, according to the inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic. There was more tolerance and respect for life in Afghanistan millennia ago, at least for a time, than today.

To understand the inscriptions in Kandahar, and the origin of the values they proclaimed, we must travel to another place in South Asia, a hill in southeastern India called Dhauli that visitors have climbed for over two thousand years. About six miles south of the capital of Orissa state, Bhubaneswar, it overlooks a quietly beautiful expanse of bright green rice fields stretching to the horizon. It is hard to imagine a more peaceful place, but in 261 BCE the green fields ran red with the blood of more than a hundred thousand, slaughtered by the armies of the same great Indian king who ruled over Kandahar.

Today visitors climb the hill to admire the view and examine the stone edicts the great king had inscribed near the top several years after the battle. When the British deciphered the inscriptions in the nineteenth century, they were astounded to find that they commemorate not a victory but the king's conversion to a state policy of nonviolence and protection of all living things. The king declares his "debt to all beings," announces a halt to almost all killing of animals on his behalf for rituals and food, and proclaims the establishment of hospitals for both men and animals. He declares religious tolerance for all sects and sets forth principles of good government. Over the years, he commanded similar rock and pillar inscriptions to be made in sites from Afghanistan (including Kandahar) to the southernmost extremes of India. The king's name was Ashoka, which means "without

In 261 BCE, Ashoka's armies slaughtered 100,000 or more in these fields near Bhubaneswar, India. Instead of a victory his monuments commemorate his conversion to a state policy of nonviolence and protection of all living things.

sorrow." Dhauli was the site of Ashoka's victory over the kingdom of Kalinga, the last and bloodiest conquest he needed to unify India.

In the other rock edicts scattered over various regions of India, Ashoka declares "profound sorrow and regret" for the slaughter at Dhauli; it is this remorse that fueled his conversion to a new ethic, which he calls Dhamma, "the law of piety." On sixty-foot pillars, which can still be seen today in different parts of the subcontinent, he declares the uniform and equal application of laws, and the establishment of protected natural areas. Even more remarkable from a modern perspective is a pillar edict that amounts to nothing less than a protected species act, listing all the animals the king has declared as exempt from slaughter.

Ashoka goes beyond mere tolerance to state that all religious and philosophical sects have an "essential doctrine," the progress of which he will nurture "through gifts and recognition." Here we have a remarkable third century BCE declaration of ecumenism: beneath the outward form, all religions and beliefs have an essential core that aims for the good and that is worthy of general support.

Ashoka thus poses the more disturbing question of whether there has been any lasting ethical progress in the behavior of states and societies over the past millennia. For our global civilization, fragmented as it is between self-absorbed consumerism and radicalized fundamentalisms, it is an embarrassing question.

We seem to live in an epoch that in important ways gives less primacy to respect for life than the worldview of Ashoka. Contrary to perhaps what one would expect or hope, the richer our world becomes as an economic system, the more the collective imagination of those who rule seems to atrophy so that all common goals collapse into efforts to increase production and trade. Even in a time of crisis when economic fundamentalism appears to be failing on its own terms, there is a collective failure to imagine alternatives.

It was perhaps Aristotle who first noted this pathology; in his *Politics* he wrote:

> While it seems that there must be a limit to every form of wealth, in practice we find that the opposite occurs: all those engaged in acquiring goods go on increasing their coin without limit.... The reason why some people get this notion into their heads may be that they are eager for life but not for the good life; so desire for life being unlimited, they desire also an unlimited amount of what [they think] enables it to go on ... these people turn all skills into skills of acquiring goods, as though that were the end and everything had to serve that end.

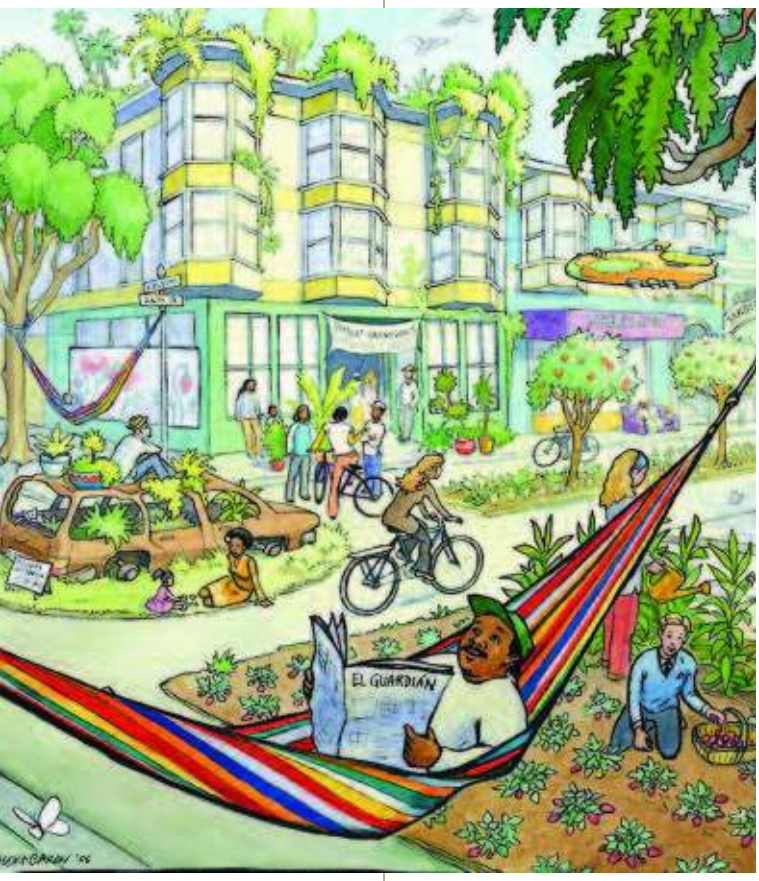
The systems created by Kautilya (above), the ruthless technocratic economist, were mitigated by Ashoka, the compassionate Buddhist.

CREATIVE COMMONS/DEBASHIS PRADHAN (TOP), UNKOWN (BOTTOM)

The First Economist

Ashoka's great ethical leap rested on the most paradoxical of foundations, the work of a man who wrote that "of the ends of human life, material gain is, verily, the most important." The author of these words was Kautilya, the chief minister of Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the dynasty under which Ashoka would, after the final bloody conquest of Kalinga, unite India for the first time. Kautilya was a contemporary of Aristotle, but he came close to taking economic means as ultimate ends, precisely the phenomenon Aristotle witnessed personally and warned about, half a world away. In Indian myth, in fact, Kautilya is represented as Chanakya, the prototype of a wily chief minister and political adviser. Kautilya was probably the organizing genius behind the autocratic, centralized state that Ashoka inherited and expanded.

As one of history's first and greatest political thinkers, Kautilya wrote the first treatise on political economy, the Arthasastra. *Artha* in Sanskrit means wealth or material well-being while *sastra* can be translated as science, so the Arthasastra describes the science of wealth or, quite literally, economics. Kautilya interprets artha as the sustenance and wealth that men produce from the earth, and, to quote him directly, "that science which treats of acquiring and maintaining the earth is the Arthashastra." Kautilya declares that economic prosperity is both the underpinning and the most important priority of society and the state.



To build our own future, here whimsically imagined by Mona Caron in her Utopian San Francisco series (see our Art Gallery at tikkun.org/daily), the author argues we will need Kautilyan realism as well as Ashokan idealism.

MONA CARON (WWW.MONACARON.COM)

To understand Kautilya's remarkable originality, it is useful to recall that in traditional Hindu culture dating back to the second millennium BCE, life was seen as possessing three goals: *kama* (the pursuit of sensual pleasure), *artha* (the pursuit of wealth), and *dharma* (spiritual good through the following of the right law and duty in harmony with the order of the universe). Dharma in fact is that order and harmony, so following dharma means realizing spiritual good by conforming to the universal order. In ancient Hindu society (as well as modern), this in practice meant conforming with the duties appropriate to one's caste and station in life. For Buddhists, it meant (and means) realizing and practicing the truth of Buddha's teachings about the nature of human life in the world. For individuals, this truth is that life is transient and characterized by suffering, and that there is a personal path of understanding and compassion for all living things that enables us to transcend this suffering and achieve enlightenment.

Both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions view dharma as superior to kama and artha, seeing it as something that overarches them and includes them in a higher spiritual order. In this context Kautilya appears as a materialist revolutionary, for he states unabashedly that "material well-being (artha) alone is supreme ... for spiritual good (dharma) and sensual pleasures (kama) depend on material well-being."

Kautilya also urges a ruthless realpolitik. He explicitly advocates espionage, prostitution, betrayal, duplicity, burglary, political assassination, ruthless opportunism, and other tactics to advance the interests of the state. But Kautilya's realism is technocratic rather than despotic; he expounds at length on the minutiae of taxation, irrigation, foreign policy, corruption and its prevention, and sustainable management of natural resources, all as means to assure the material and political well-being of society and the state.

He is a very modern man; his modern political avatar would probably be Henry Kissinger. If reborn as an economist today, Kautilya's sensibility would make him at home in any high-level international meeting of finance ministers.

After Kautilya's treatise was rediscovered and translated into Western languages in the early 1900s, social theorist Max Weber marveled that "in contrast with this document,

Machiavelli's *Prince* is harmless." According to Indologist Heinrich Zimmer, "Kautilya brought the whole historical period into being," of which Ashoka's reign was the apogee. Much of Ashoka's governance—in fact the organization of the society he reigned over—was based on the worldview and recommendations of the Arthasastra. We know this because there are correlations between some of Ashoka's recommendations in his edicts and the measures set forth in the Arthasastra. In addition, the reports of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta, described a rich, well-ordered empire reflecting in remarkable detail many of the prescriptions in Kautilya's famous treatise. Without abandoning Kautilya's administrative system, Ashoka attempted to transcend the Kautilyan view of the world through a new social ethic and politics of nonviolence and reverence for life.

Adam Smith (above), long considered the original apostle of free markets, was in fact a highly ethical economist: more Ashoka than Kautilya.

Ethical Economics: Amartya Sen and Adam Smith

The award of the Nobel Prize for Economics to Amartya Sen in 1998 marked an official recognition of the need to restore a framework of values and ethics within which all economic and political action takes place. Sen has been a voice for this perspective, and in his own writings he refers to Ashoka and Kautilya as paradigmatic figures. In a series of lectures on ethics and economics given at the University of California in 1986, Sen observed that economic thought can be divided into two schools: one that takes the "engineering," logistical approach, and the other that takes an ethical, moral, and political stance. Kautilya embodies the engineering, technocratic approach, which asserts that promoting economic gain has to be the primary goal of policy, since an economic foundation underlies all other social goals and values. The problem then is of means—how to promote effectively more of the same. (Sound familiar? Recall the Clintonite slogan "It's the economy, stupid.") The ethical approach can be found in Ashoka, Aristotle, and (surprisingly to some) Adam Smith.

Smith's writings have been distorted and misappropriated to stand for the primacy of the free market as the basis of society. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (less cited than *The Wealth of Nations* but equally critical for the underpinning of his thought), Smith goes to great lengths to emphasize the moral and collective values that are essential for social cohesion, and he attacks in some detail those who advocate the primacy of economic utility. Smith emphasizes that three values uphold the social order: justice, prudence, and beneficence. Justice is by far the most important; a society can exist without beneficence (magnanimity, compassion, and public spiritedness) though it will be "less happy and agreeable" if based on short-term mercenary concerns where no man feels he owes society any obligation. But "justice," he emphasizes, "is the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice ... if it is removed, the great, immense fabric of human society ... must in a moment crumble to atoms."

One could argue that *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a better basis for understanding the challenges of economic globalization than the technical works of numerous contemporary economists. This appears to be true for Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who told the *Financial Times* in 2009 that there is one book he always carries with him when he travels, a copy of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Among the lessons of the book, Wen Jiabao observed, is that "Adam Smith wrote that in a society if all the wealth is concentrated and owned by only a small number of people, it will not be stable."

The year 2009 also marked the 250th anniversary of the publication of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*; in an introduction to a new edition of the book, Sen emphasized the renewed relevance of Smith's earlier work in the debates over the future of capitalism spawned by the global economic crisis. "It would be ... hard to carve out from [Smith's] works any theory of the sufficiency of the market economy, of the need to accept the dominance of capital," Sen wrote. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Sen observes, Smith "extensively investigated the powerful role of non-profit values" and *(continued on page 44)*

The Indian Nobel economist, Amartya Sen (below), is probably the best known exponent of values-based economics today. In his introduction to Adam Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments, *he wrote approvingly that Smith argued that "humanity, justice, generosity, and public spirit are the qualities most useful to others."*

CREATIVE COMMONS: FORUMPA (TOP), TOBAN BLACK (BOTTOM)

The Real Education Reformers

Why Chicago Mothers and Teachers Are Doing More than "Waiting for Superman"

by Josh Healey

Last October a group of primarily Latina mothers sat in at this Chicago public school to get the school district to build a library and community center instead of selling part of the school property to a neighboring private school.

CREATIVE COMMONS/JERRY MEAD-LUCERO

Want to meet the leaders of the growing movement in defense of public education? You might be surprised where to look. While the corporate media focuses on Washington, D.C., and President Obama's Race to the Top policies, or on Hollywood and its controversial documentary *Waiting for Superman*, you can find America's true grassroots education reformers in the post-industrial heartland of Chicago, Illinois. And as with any great movement, mothers are at the forefront.

In October 2010, a group of primarily Latina mothers from Whittier Elementary School on the near west side of Chicago staged a sit-in at the school to stop the Chicago Public School system from tearing down the school's field house to become a soccer field for a neighboring private school. After forty-three days of protest that garnered national media attention, the school system agreed to the activists' demands, pledging to build a much-needed library and community center on the site instead. The mothers thus won more than just a place for their kids to learn their ABCs: they won both increased funding and the right for their school to be a site for community engagement and action.

Just six months earlier, Chicago's progressive education movement scored another victory. In May 2010, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), an insurgent slate of activist teachers, won a hard-fought election to take leadership of the powerful Chicago Teachers Union. The teachers union, like others across the country, had come under criticism for its bureaucratic, paternalistic relationship with parents and even its own members. CORE won the election on a theme of social justice unionism and democratic education, and in its first year in leadership it has taken a more aggressive stance on issues like smaller class sizes, equitable funding, deemphasizing standardized tests, and reducing union officials' salaries to bring them in line with what an actual teacher makes.

These two stories might seem like isolated victories, but given their time and location, their impact has ripple effects across the country. Why? Simply put, because for the last decade, Chicago has been the center of the corporate-led attack on public education. In 2004, Chicago Mayor-for-Life Richard M. Daley and former Chicago Public Schools Chief Arne Duncan created the Renaissance 2010 plan with a stated goal to create one hundred new high-performing public schools in the city. The results? In the seven years since Renaissance 2010 went into effect, Chicago families have seen some new, successful

Josh Healey is a writer, organizer, and the author of Hammertime: Poems and Possibilities. *Featured by the* New York Times, NPR, *and* Al-Jazeera, *he lives in Oakland, California, and works with Youth Speaks to empower young artists and activists.*

schools built, but they have suffered far more due to devastating school closures and reorganizations that occurred with little or no community input. Critics have noted that the neighborhoods where the new high-performing schools are built are the most rapidly gentrifying areas of the city, leading many to wonder whether this type of school reform is only for white, higher-income families. A recent DePaul University study on the effects of Renaissance 2010 was so dismal that it forced the researchers to title their report, "Students as Collateral Damage?"

What makes all of this matter to the rest of us is that, unlike Las Vegas, what happens in Chicago doesn't stay in Chicago. Duncan is now Secretary of Education under that other Chicago expat, President Obama. Together, Duncan and Obama have pushed the failed policies of Renaissance 2010 on a national scale, under the auspices of their "Race to the Top" initiative. Continuing the No Child Left Behind legacy of the Bush administration, Race to the Top forces states to compete for funding chiefly on the criteria of who can ensure as much standardized testing possible. Taken together, these policies encourage states and schools to remove creativity and dialogue from the classroom, instead focusing on rote memorization and the competitive ethos that corporate America desires in its future workers. Rewarding rich communities for their built-in advantages, punishing poor schools for their failures—Race to the Top isn't education policy, it's another regressive tax on America's working families.

After forty-three days of protest, they won.

Lending Hollywood luster to the corporatization of public schools is the recent documentary *Waiting for Superman*. The film, which follows a group of working-class, mostly black and Latino students and parents as they try to find success amid their failing schools, pulls all the right heartstrings. But its policy prescriptions show why all school reform is not positive reform. According to the movie, the problem with America's schools is the lack of good teachers. While never defining what actually constitutes a "good teacher," the film makes clear that the problem is the mass number of "bad teachers" and the evil teachers unions that supposedly protect them. With teachers unions cast as the villain, *Superman* offers the hero role to former Washington, D.C., superintendent Michelle Rhee.

Although she has since lost her job due to D.C. voters' anger at her abrasive reforms, Rhee was lauded in the media for her strong stand against teacher union contracts and in support of charter schools and other methods to ensure more "choice and accountability." Like Rhee, *Superman* makes little mention of funding or budget cuts, of racial and class divisions, of standardized tests and outdated pedagogy. No sir, if the students aren't passing the test—blame the students, blame the parents, and especially blame the teachers. Supported by Bill Gates' influential foundation and a bipartisan cross-section of the political and cultural elite, *Waiting for Superman* is a sleek, private-sector attack on a key base for true education reform.

So if not the teacher unions, who is to blame for the state of our schools? After all, the situation isn't pretty. Over 25 percent of U.S. students fail to graduate high school each year. In Chicago, that rate rises to over 40 percent, including a staggering 52 percent for African Americans. We have an educational crisis here, but what the *Waiting for Superman* folks do not want us to understand is that our educational crisis is by and large a product of our larger social crises. If we truly want to leave no children behind, we can start by ensuring a good job at a living wage for their parents, healthy and affordable food in their neighborhoods, and the decriminalization of their very communities and cultures.

From an economic perspective, the ongoing cuts to public services since the Reagan era have hit public schools the hardest. Before 1978, when Proposition 13 passed in California,

CREATIVE COMMONS/JERRY MEAD-LUCERO

California saved corporations and wealthier homeowners plenty by reducing property taxes in 1978. But as a result California's education system has gone from one of the best to one of the worst in the country. It's not about the country's lack of money, it's about priorities. Above, a school in Redwood City, California, holds a Day of Action in March 2010.

CREATIVE COMMONS/NZDAVE

dramatically lowering the property tax rate for corporations and the wealthy, the state ranked first in the country in education spending—and most educational outcomes. Three decades and billions of budget cuts later, the Golden State ranks forty-ninth out of fifty in K-12 spending, and has one of the worst education systems in the country. All the while, our country has poured billions into our bloated prison system—and trillions into our imperialist projects in Iraq and Afghanistan. The problem is not just the budget cuts, it is the misplaced priorities that our budgets reflect.

Our schools reflect our communities, and in 2011, those communities are as segregated as ever. It is no secret that schools in poor, black, and Latino neighborhoods receive far fewer resources than their white and middle/high-income peers, across the nation. Chicago Public Schools (over 85 percent black and Latino) spent $11,300 per student in 2010, while suburban New Trier High School (over 85 percent white) spent $17,500 per student. These are more than just numbers—they mean class sizes of fifteen students versus forty students; well-compensated teachers versus "two years and then I'm moving on"; field trips and art classes versus the only employer recruiting at the school being the Army. Students and parents understand the inequality all too well, which is why in 2008, over one thousand families with children in the Chicago Public School system staged a week-long boycott and bused out to New Trier in a symbolic attempt to enroll in the suburban school system. Education is still the civil rights issue of our nation, and Chicago is at the center of rebuilding the movement.

Many liberals are attracted to Race to the Top and similar policies because they seem to be the only reform out there. But change doesn't always mean change for the better. John Boehner is certainly a change as House Speaker from Nancy Pelosi, but Barbara Lee would be too. Yes, there are self-serving and sometimes corrupt teachers unions—but our goal should be to democratize the unions, not demolish them. Teachers unions exist to protect workers' rights, and progressive unionists such as the Caucus of Rank and File Educators are expanding that paradigm to include fighting for a more democratic curriculum and school structure. Following in the footsteps of the mothers of Whittier Elementary, other key constituencies—parents, community members, and yes, even the students—can demand more community control over the primary institution in their life. More than just reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, schools can be laboratories for true, participatory democracy.

In my own work as a spoken word educator, I have worked in hundreds of public schools across the country. I have seen the incredible divisions and problems that plague our schools, but I have also witnessed the joy and amazement that both students and teachers attain in the process of collective learning. Our schools try to turn students into standardized robots—but at its core, education is a process of becoming more fully human. It is an invitation to listen, to learn how best to heal the world and ourselves. Walking in the footsteps of radical educators like Paulo Freire and Ella Baker, I have seen how powerful students become when they realize how much knowledge they already possess. My job as an educator is to facilitate their understanding and growth of that knowledge—for them to struggle with me, with each other, and ultimately with the world so that we can find better answers to the questions that plague us all.

Resources set boundaries, but a true national education policy would be about more than just equitable funding. It would be a policy of love. I love my students. If we love our youth, we need to provide them with a better home during the school day. Our country's public schools are a shame. Let's instead make them our pride. To do so, let's learn from the example of proud struggle in that windy city, sweet home Chicago. ■

Culture

BOOKS | FILM | MUSIC

[BOOKS]

THE IMPERIAL WAR FOR DRUGS

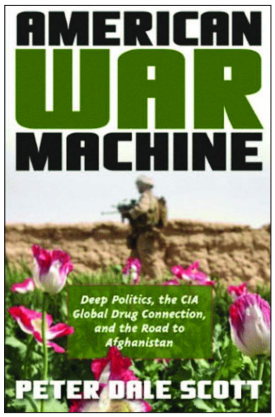
AMERICAN WAR MACHINE: DEEP POLITICS, THE CIA, GLOBAL DRUG CONNECTION, AND THE ROAD TO AFGHANISTAN
by Peter Dale Scott
Rowman & Littlefield, 2010

Review by Richard Falk

American War Machine represents a fitting culmination to Peter Dale Scott's work as our leading geopolitical sleuth if, as his disarming introductory note suggests, this turns out to be the eighty-one-year-old author's last major political book. The subtitle prefigures the theme of the book, which is to contend that the war in Afghanistan (along with several other long-lasting political conflicts) is driven by the underside of American foreign policy, consisting of drug-connected violence arising from many covert operations carried out over many years by the CIA.

Scott is an indefatigable researcher, and to the extent that open sources permit documentation, the controversial thesis of the book is sustained by well-evidenced and lucid analysis. He quotes Dennis Dayle, a former top U.S. government investigator in the Middle East, who told a conference audience that "in my thirty-year history in the Drug Enforcement Administration ... the major targets of my investigation almost invariably turned out to be working for the CIA." The line of argument is that the CIA role in linking American influence to foreign drug operations is a constant in American foreign policy throughout the countries of the global South, whether it be Vietnam and Laos in the 1960s and 1970s, or Afghanistan today.

Underpinning Scott's analysis is the startling insistence that the transnational network of drug connections is often directly responsible for keeping in power the most oppressive rulers around the world: the drug network, he argues, works with a series of prominent banks to obtain money-laundering facilities that in turn allow the funding of a variety of terrorist operations. What Scott contends so convincingly is that the deep forces of the American state that act without accountability (and are aligned with criminal and intelligence agencies here and elsewhere) are working in exact opposition to the proclaimed anti-drug and anti-terrorist priorities of the U.S. government. In this fundamental respect, the war in Afghanistan—as was the case with other American wars, most spectacularly the Vietnam War—is intrinsically doomed to fail. On this basis, Scott asserts that if the government were genuinely committed to security against terrorism or to the emergence of stability in Afghanistan, it would immediately decriminalize drugs and renounce military options in the conduct of its foreign policy toward countries of the global South.



As Scott knows, much would have to change for any of this to happen. In the meantime, Afghanistan is only the latest reminder that our country is trapped in a bloody maelstrom that is leading to decline from within and without. Scott presents many damning examples of the extent to which America's allies in the Afghanistan War are deeply implicated in drug operations and receive protection against eradication efforts from the CIA, making American policy completely incoherent with respect to opium, which is the essential source of wealth for many Afghan warlords and even government officials. Scott goes on to argue that American anti-drug campaigns do not seek to eradicate the drug trade, but only "to target specific enemies and thus ensure that drug traffic remains under the control of those traffickers who are allies of the state security apparatus and/or the CIA." *American War Machine* brilliantly explains why such a dysfunctional policy is not only endorsed in the face of repeated failure but becomes essentially irreversible through the normal give and take of politics.

Scott never claims that the global drug/CIA nexus is an all-purpose explanation of everything that has gone wrong for the United States in the world. He acknowledges that a variety of other forces are at work, including the lure of oil, alliance relations and rivalries, and the various impacts of neoliberal globalization as linked to militarism. What he does demonstrate is shocking on its own—that American overseas interventionism is significantly driven not by the goals of the war on drugs, but more accurately by its opposite: a lethal partnership between our government and an array of criminalized

drug syndicates, warlords, and oppressive rulers. This extraordinary story, with a few rare fleeting glimpses, is being withheld from the American people by the media. With this realization in mind, Scott's book mounts a vital, Jeffersonian, eye-opening challenge to the American people. In the end, Scott is imploring his readers to become attuned to prevalent political realities. Hopefully, this book will begin laying the foundations for a new politics of citizen engagement that looks below the surface and demands a governing process that does what it says and lives within the constraints of law and morality. ■

Richard Falk is UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur for Occupied Palestine and research professor of global studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara.

POSTWAR DYSTOPIA OR FAMILY PARADISE?

SECOND SUBURB: LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA
Edited by Dianne Harris
University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010

Review by Paul Von Blum

Levittown. For many, the name of this Philadelphia-area suburb conjures a vision of sterility and conformity—a postwar dystopia concealed by images of smiling children on bicycles and tricycles, crowded swimming pools and Little League fields, happy consumers at the Levittown Shop-a-Rama, and men mowing lawns and women sitting on outdoor furniture in front of identical but comfortable houses.

Cultural critic Lewis Mumford convinced many that the suburb was a place with bland people leading bland lives with similar tastes and incomes in a parody of the American dream. And indeed, this savage critique contains some truth. I know because I lived in Levittown as a teenager for about five years in the mid-1950s, shortly after its beginning in 1952. My residence in this iconic "planned community" coincided with its most traumatic historical experience: the momentous struggle in 1957 to break the color line that builder William Levitt imposed with his whites-only policy.

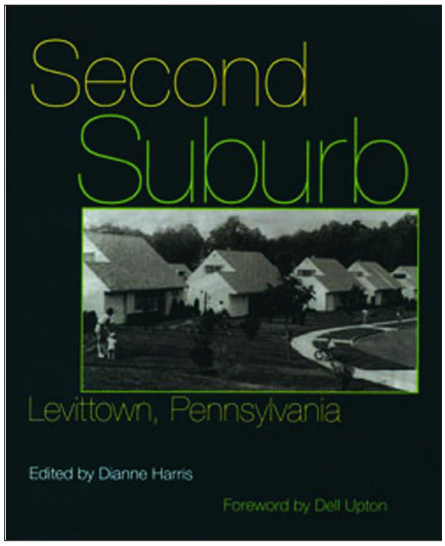
My parents, Peter and Selma Von Blum, played a crucial role in this historic civil rights battle as active supporters of the first African American family to move into Levittown, braving widespread hostility, debilitating ostracism, and extensive violence in the process. Many of my 1950s neighbors, however, were deeply conformist, even retrograde, especially on matters of racial equality. Many seemed perfectly content to equate the good life with modest material comfort and middling levels of personal and family consumption.

Still, social reality is complex and nuanced, and there is much more to say about Levittown beyond Mumford's critique. I have waited for this new book for about half a century. *Second Suburb* provides a rich and diverse set of essays about Levittown, contributing significantly to such fields as urban/suburban studies, architectural history, sociology, and many others. Editor Dianne Harris has assembled a stellar group of scholars to explore various dimensions of Levittown's architecture, history, politics, and culture. Essays locate the "second suburb" (described as such because Pennsylvania's Levittown followed in the footsteps of another suburb by the same name built in Long Island, New York, in 1947) in a broad context of post–World War II suburban growth, with all its demographic, economic, political, environmental, and architectural consequences.

Richard Longstreth's chapter, "Looking at Levittown from the Outside," offers a revealing glimpse into the history of the Levitt & Sons Company itself. In the late 1930s, the firm had built a development in Manhasset, New York. Seeking to limit the community to "refined" American families, the company adopted a policy to restrict buyers from "undesirable" elements. In 1936, that also meant prospective Jewish buyers, a bizarre restriction given that the Levitt family was itself Jewish. This perverse choice of profit over principle (not to mention religious and cultural disparagement, perhaps even self-loathing) would emerge again, with equal harshness, in Pennsylvania in the late 1950s.

Longstreth also chronicles the pervasive anti-union animus of the Levitt enterprise. Unlike most other American builders of the era, William Levitt and his associates refused to hire union labor, maintaining that doing so would drive up construction costs—the historic rationalization for corporations seeking to maximize profit by maintaining lower wages. Longstreth likewise reveals the company's insistence on various covenants for purchasers of its Levittown houses. Among other restrictions, new owners were not permitted to erect fences and were required to mow their lawns at least weekly. This drive for uniformity reflected a near-totalitarian vision that reinforces the harsh views of Levitt & Sons' most vigorous critics.

Several other chapters add to the intellectual depth of this volume. Harris's examination of architecture and modernism reveals how Levittown was designed exclusively for white people. Curtis Miner writes about the evolution of 1950s kitchen design, a topic to which few social scientists and humanists pay much attention. Christopher Sellers provides an account of environmentalism in Levittown, and Chad Kimmel offers an historical narrative about the gasoline riots there during the energy crisis of 1979. These and other contributions reflect the multidimensional historical reality of



Levittown, diminishing if not entirely eliminating the stereotypical visions of the place as a conformist, unremarkable lower-middle-class suburban ghetto.

Original comic strips by Bill Griffith and historical photographs of Levittown add an engaging visual component to the book. "Griffy" is a well-known underground comic strip artist who grew up in New York's Levittown. His strips extend the tradition of comic strip cultural critique, especially in mentioning such anti-establishment icons as Jules Feiffer and Paul Krassner as well as *The Realist* and *Mad* magazine, publications that inspired the minority of young people who sought transcendence from 1950s social conformity.

The photographs are mostly from the 1950s, but range through the early twenty-first century. They depict swimming pools, churches, schools, and external and interior shots of various model houses, allowing readers to actually see the subject matter of this important book.

Doubtless, the key story in Levittown's generally unremarkable history is the integration battle of summer 1957. This theme infuses the volume and is the specific subject of two of its chapters. One is a brief and moving reminiscence by Daisy Myers about the 1957 riots. She, her late husband Bill, and their three children were the first African American family to move in. They were "greeted" by howling racist mobs and a systematic attempt to force them to leave, seeking to ensure that Levittown would remain an all-white bastion twenty miles from the nation's founding at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

Thomas Sugrue's chapter, "Jim Crow's Last Stand," provides a scholarly account of the 1957 racist events. His opening comments underscore a point I have repeatedly made in my teaching and writing over the years:

> But Levittown deserves a place as prominent as those of Montgomery, Little Rock, Birmingham, or Selma because the history of modern suburbia, embodied by Levittown, is central to modern America. Levittown exemplified (then and now) patterns of entrenched segregation that knew no regional boundaries. Because of that, it became a battleground in the freedom struggle every bit as important as its better known southern counterparts.

Sugrue's chapter touches on all the salient details of that struggle—including the heroic resistance of the Myers family and sympathetic whites like my parents and others—and documents the pervasive hostility that all the participants and their children endured for months after the Myers moved into their Levittown home. Beyond the window breakings, the "KKK" markings, the cross burnings, and economic retaliation, I recall being called "nigger lover" for months afterwards, often by adults who never knew me, my parents, the Myers, or any other participants in this historic struggle.

Sugrue focuses on the admirable efforts of Quakers and other liberal Protestant groups and progressive Jews in Levittown who resisted the massive racism in 1957. The fact that many white residents of Levittown voted for Barack Obama in 2008 does not negate the presence of a deeper racism that still pervades and despoils the national landscape. Its manifestations are sometimes overt, as in police racial profiling, and sometimes institutional, as in continuing discrimination in housing and employment. All people of goodwill—Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, spiritual progressives, and nonbelievers alike—can learn from the past in order to address the malaise and misconduct of the present.

Second Suburb is surely a good place to begin. Especially for readers committed to a more comprehensive understanding of race in America, this volume is indispensable. And for others who are more generally curious about the shaping and structure of America from the mid–twentieth century to the present, the book provides a compelling vision of how suburban life contributed to those developments. ■

Paul Von Blum is a senior lecturer in African American studies and communication studies at UCLA and author of a new memoir, A Life at the Margins: Keeping the Political Vision.

MOURNING A FORESKIN

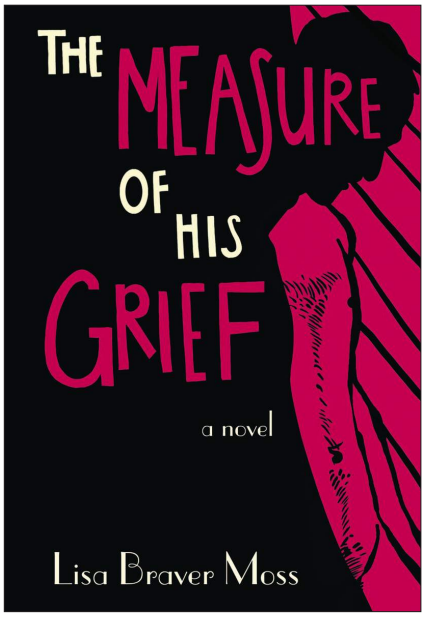
THE MEASURE OF HIS GRIEF
by Lisa Braver Moss, CreateSpace, 2010

Review by Patricia Karlin-Neumann

"Just as he has entered into the covenant of Abraham, so may he be entered into the life of Torah, the blessing of family life, and the practice of goodness."

I DON'T BELIEVE THAT THESE words, spoken at a *brit milah* (the covenant of circumcision), are found in Lisa Braver Moss's provocative novel, *The Measure of His Grief*, but they nonetheless provide a paradoxical frame through which to view the search for wholeness of its protagonist, Dr. Sandy Waldman.

Sandy experiences an inexplicable pain in his penis during the shiva period of mourning for his father Abraham; for him, the brit (covenant) is lost in the milah (circumcision). Brit celebrates a relationship with the Divine and with community. Sandy's physical pain leads him to attempt to undo his own milah. Mourning his circumcision, he strains the covenants he has made in his life; cuts himself off from his medical colleagues, his wife, and his friends; disputes medical and religious justifications for circumcision; and becomes an obsessed and slightly unhinged crusader.



Moss, long an activist herself in the controversy over circumcision for Jewish ritual purposes, gives Sandy many opportunities to articulate the anti-circumcision position. The novel's protagonist argues with rabbis and *mohelim* (those who perform the ritual circumcision), with feminists and physicians. To Moss's credit, her novel evokes thoughtful and even civil discussion with a range of perspectives, creating a living-room conversation with an Orthodox mohel, a feminist female rabbi with a hyphenated name who nonetheless upholds the tradition of ritual circumcision, a liberal cantor, a "conscientious objector" (a Jewish woman seeking a brit without the milah: a covenant ceremony for boys like those newly created for girls), and a Jewish man who is an "intactivist" (a proponent of leaving baby boys intact) who leads a foreskin restoration group. By making space for all of these characters to explain their understanding of the issues and the stakes, Moss makes both doubt and affirmation of circumcision comprehensible positions in a Jewish context.

The civility of this discussion is not often replicated in a real Jewish living room, in synagogue, or in a rabbi's study. Like many of my colleagues, I have seen marriages between two Jews irrevocably ripped asunder by differing perspectives on brit milah. I have tried to mediate while a Jew and a non-Jew argued passionately about circumcision, even when they had made a decision to raise their son as a Jew. When I was pregnant and attending a class for prospective parents, the nurse leading it provided literature on circumcision; "But if you're planning to circumcise your son for ritual purposes, don't bother to take it," she said. When it comes to ritual and tradition, these are rarely logical and cerebral discussions.

Sandy thinks he will resolve his mourning and his profound sense of nakedness by following the guidance of those engaged in foreskin restoration. With tape and weights, he hopes to undo his milah. In one comic moment, at a book signing for his wife's new cookbook, the stainless steel device he has fastened on to grow his foreskin dislodges and, clattering, drops and rolls, landing at the feet of his wife, giving new meaning to the firefighter's advice to "stop, drop and roll." In the midrash, Rav Amram, tempted by an illicit sexual relationship, literally yells "fire," thereby calling in his fellow rabbis to prevent him from ruining his life (*Kiddushin* 81a). Dr. Sandy Waldman is incapable of seeing his self-destructiveness, let alone yelling to save himself.

Impatient with his self-indulgence, Sandy's wife leaves him; his daughter is estranged. His colleagues are wary of his obsession, as he scores physicians on their views of circumcision. He abandons the blessing of family life and seems indifferent to the practice of goodness. Yet, there is one part of the blessing from the brit milah—"so may he be entered into the life of Torah, the blessing of family life, and the practice of goodness"—that takes root. By being drawn into a controversial question of Jewish ritual practice, Sandy makes his way into Torah study to understand, to question, and to stake his claim. The book ends with his adult bar mitzvah, at which he pointedly reads the Torah portion of *Korach*, the fiercest rebel in Jewish sources.

Through her fiction, Lisa Braver Moss has found a new way to insinuate the circumcision controversy into the Jewish conversation. In this, she has done a service for the Jewish community. May that conversation result in increased Torah study, richer blessings of family life, and a sustained practice of goodness. ■

Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann, ordained at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1982, is the senior associate dean for religious life at Stanford University. She is the first university chaplain from a tradition other than Protestant Christianity in Stanford's history.

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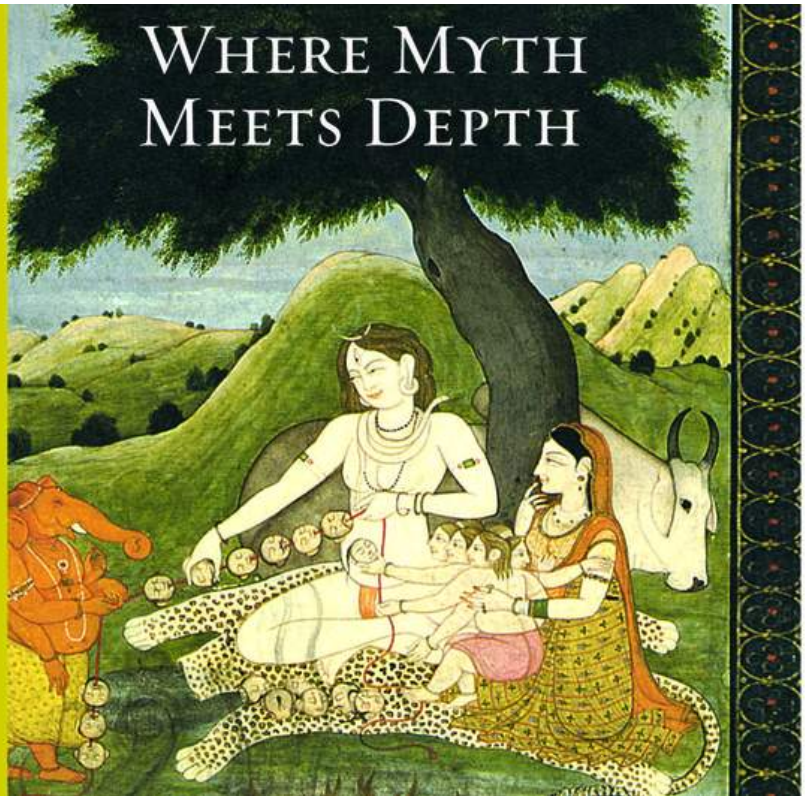


OVERCOMING THE TRAUMA OF THE HOLOCAUST

THE HOLOCAUST IS OVER, WE MUST RISE FROM ITS ASHES

by Avraham Burg
Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Review by Jonathan Friedman

An individual and collective internalization of love is the true precondition to peace in the Middle East, according to Avraham Burg's heartfelt book on Israel/Palestine, *The Holocaust Is Over, We Must Rise From Its Ashes*. But how to tap into that healing love, when trauma runs so deep?

Burg—a former member and speaker of the Knesset, from Israel's Labor party, who has written on a number of occasions about ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—has much to offer to conversations about how to move Israel past the trauma of the Holocaust and toward peace. In *The Holocaust Is Over*, his focus is more about the soul of Israel rather than a proposal for peace, but the connections are clear: Holocaust memory, identity politics, and the Israel-Palestine conflict are indelibly linked by trauma, and the inability to resolve the lingering effects of this trauma has crippled all efforts at peace.

In the years that have passed since the publication of Burg's book in 2008, Israel has moved further away from the place of healing and reconciliation he calls for and instead toward a place of greater fear and anger. In the past several months alone, settlement activity in the West Bank has resumed (if it ever really stopped); the now infamous Citizenship and Reentry Law, in place since 2003, has been extended again, preventing young spouses of Israeli citizens who come from the West Bank from obtaining residency in Israel; and a bill has cleared the cabinet that would amend the citizenship law to require non-Jews to take an oath of loyalty to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. (Fortunately, this bill doesn't enjoy majority support in the Knesset.)

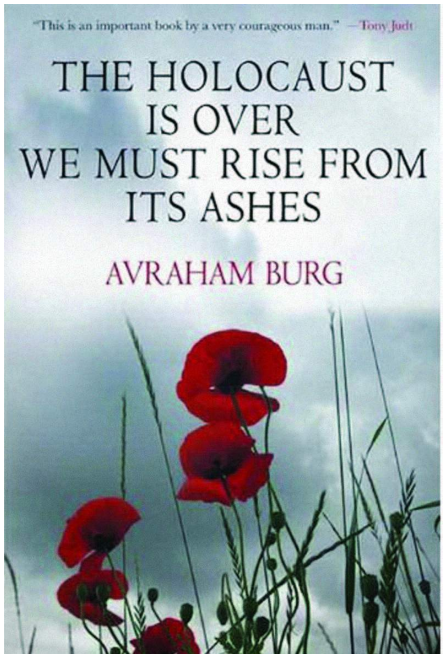
Recent reporting adds to the bleak picture: in the December 13, 2010, issue of *Time*, Karl Vick reported that because of the separation wall in the West Bank, fewer Palestinian youth have any contact with, or even knowledge of, ordinary Israelis. In an article from September, Vick made the even more damning case that Israelis feel little urgency for peace. On the other side of the political spectrum are advocates like Aryeh Rubin, who argued in *The Jewish Week* in October that liberal Jews are "endangering" Israel and that the only antidote to Auschwitz is Israel and its military might. Just in the first few days of 2011, we witnessed the toll that this "might" takes: a thirty-six-year-old kindergarten teacher, Jawaher Abu Rahmah, choked to death from tear gas spread by Israeli forces while she watched a demonstration at Bil'in, a village where demonstrations against the separation wall have persisted since 2005. The Israeli Supreme Court ruled over three years ago that the IDF had to move the wall back, but it has yet to implement the decision. Meanwhile Qassam rockets continue to be fired from Gaza, resulting in an obligatory and predictable response from the Israeli Air Force.

In this bleak context, Burg's monitory is more relevant than ever.

A Different Perspective on the Holocaust

One of the major requirements for Israeli society, according to Burg, is the need to link the Holocaust to the broader history of past and ongoing genocides. Burg never questions the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but he laments the absence of a universal application of its lessons. He decries Israel's support for Serbia during its ethnic cleansing of Kosovo; he has qualms about Israel's relationship with Turkey given, among other things, its refusal to acknowledge the 1915-17 Armenian genocide; and he questions how it can be that so few Israeli students know much about the genocides that preceded the Holocaust.

He may be overstating it when he says, "The Final Solution was launched somewhere in the new world, decades before Auschwitz. Extermination took place in



the New World of North America, and four decades before the Holocaust in Europe, Germany perfected the model in Africa," but the need for Israelis to see the connections with the Namibian or Armenian past is profoundly urgent. In 1904-7 in German South-West Africa (today's Namibia), tens of thousands of the Herero people were murdered by direct German orders—thousands by shooting, and the rest by poisoning, death marches, and incarceration in concentration camps. For Burg, the chief lesson of the Holocaust is to condemn human rights violations everywhere and not to have relations with immoral regimes. (The reality here, however, is that if Israel undertook this policy, it would find few states in the world with which to have relations, and Israel itself would probably be on the banned list.)

Unlike scholars such as Tim Cole and Tom Segev, who document in great detail the politicization of the Holocaust inside and outside of Israel, Burg takes a personal, impressionistic approach. His chapters are relatively short and peppered with anecdotes about his parents and observations about the pervasiveness of the Shoah in Israeli state and society. Burg's father, Yosef, was a refugee from Hitler's Germany who went on to become a prominent leader of religious (Mizrachi) Zionism. Burg's mother, Rivka, was a survivor of the 1929 Hebron massacre. He insists that his parents gave their

children happy lives, insulating them from the pervasive effects of "Shoahization" (his word). It was his mother, who died just before the publication of the book, who boiled down the problem of Israel's trauma in one simple conversation. As Avraham and Rivka drove through the streets of Jerusalem after celebrating what would be her last birthday, she said simply, "Avraham, God probably loves me very much ... all my life I was surrounded by love." Remembering the conversation that followed, he writes:

> Thoughts on the power of the love that saved my mother were spinning inside my head. A short time later, we spoke again and the conversation turned to the news. The Israeli Air Force was bombing and killing innocent people in Gaza, on its beaches and streets, and in Lebanon's villages and cities. My mother's grandson is an IAF pilot, the captain of a transport plane.
>
> "I'm so glad he's not a combat pilot," she commented.
>
> "Why?" I asked, surprised.
>
> "Would I want my grandson to drop bombs on innocent people?"
>
> I was silent in the face of the courage of love that shone from her. As someone who lost her childhood in Hebron in 1929, she could afford to be a bit less tolerant.... But it seemed that the same love that surrounded her had also seeped into her. She became for me an embodiment of the ultimate Jewish heroine.

For Burg, one of the first steps in moving past trauma has to be an individual and collective internalization of love. This may sound naive, but if one sees this as the maximization of Hillel's dictum of "do not unto others," which Burg quotes later on in the book, then at least its connection to one of the major, if not *the* major, strands of Jewish thinking is unmistakable. Judaism, in Burg's worldview, is all about the Golden Rule, and the state that represents the values of the Jewish people should demonstrate its best practice.

The Abused Child Grows Up

Israel, however, is far from this ideal. Indeed, Burg likens his country to "a battered boy" who becomes an abusive father. In his eyes, "Israel arms itself to the teeth like the weak boy who comes to class equipped with a bat, a knife, and a slingshot to overcome his real and imagined bullies." One could certainly make the argument that the state has been warped by the existential threats it has faced in its six decades of existence, and the absence of Palestinian and Arab partners in peace for much of that time is not in question, but there have been opportunities for breaking the cycle of violence in the past decade that Israel could have taken. The blanket rejection of negotiating in the event of any terrorist attack gave terrorists an absolute veto over peace, and most recently, the Netanyahu cabinet refused to extend the moratorium on settlement activity for three months, knowing full well that direct talks with Palestinians would come to a halt. (All the while, government officials speak of their readiness to talk without any preconditions, even though one could view the insistence on resuming settlement activity or decoupling it from the talks as a precondition.) There is little doubt, though, that the increasing number of settlers in the West Bank over the past two decades, up from 280,000 in 1993 to over 500,000 in 2009, has rendered the border problem as a more insoluble issue than either the refugee problem or the question of Jerusalem. In terms of optics, the refusal to consider an extension of the moratorium, even as a confidence-building measure, solidifies the impression that the current Israeli administration is more concerned about land than peace.

Borders and settlements are strikingly absent from Burg's writing, but he does make an impassioned plea for Israelis to admit their role in creating the Palestinian refugee problem. In his words:

> We have to admit that, post-Shoah, we valued our lives because we wanted to live after so much death. We were not sufficiently sensitive to the lives of others, and the price that they paid for our salvation. Please forgive us, and together we will put an end to the unhealthy refugee mindset that torments us all. Let us stand together for our common future.

If this kind of sentiment has been rare in Israeli public discourse in the past, it will be practically nonexistent if the so-called Nakba bill passes subsequent readings in the Knesset; this bill will prohibit state funding to any organization that marks Israeli Independence Day with sorrow for the Palestinians.

A Jewish and a Democratic State?

For Israel to move forward it must radically reorder itself as a political entity. Aluf Benn, among others, has written about Israel's identity crisis and the tensions between Israel's proclamation as a Jewish and democratic state. Is it possible to be both? Not in a strict or literal sense, because both involve different sets of codes and expectations about behavior in the public sphere. Burg doesn't tackle this issue with great specificity, but he has a number of recommendations. He wants Germany to be set "free" from its past, which is probably artless language for removing the specter of the Shoah in diplomatic relations whenever possible, and he also would like to see the legal notion within Israel of prosecuting crimes against the Jewish people give way to a broader construct of prosecuting crimes against humanity. Most importantly, he suggests that Israel revisit its Law of Return, even though a number of countries have this "ethnic fast track" to citizenship. He sees as problematic both the racial definition of the Jew dating back to Nuremberg and the matrilineal definition of Orthodox Jewry. For Burg, Jewishness should come from within and be about more than having a Jewish mother. At the same time, he wants to see Israel become "a democratic state of the Jewish people which belongs to all of its citizens and [in which] the majority will decide on its character and essence."

It would have been helpful for Burg to sketch out what this would look like. Would this ultimately bring complete civil control over personal issues such as marriage, divorce, and death? Would it mean a neutral public sphere for all? Would there be a separation of church and state? How would Israel's "Jewish character" (if there is only one) be expressed? What if the majority decide on an ultra-Orthodox theocracy? How is Burg's definition of democracy congruent with what is arguably the most pressing demand of a democracy—equality before the law? Burg does not offer answers to these important questions, but that is not his task. He is offering theory and framework, and for him, Israel has to begin anew with a different Judaism, a different approach to democracy, and a different understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust. This will involve a hefty dose of Emmanuel Levinas, who sought a world where the self derives its fundamental ethics from the receiving and unconditional embracing of the absolute other, as well as a healthy process of "working though" and letting go of trauma—which may, to paraphrase historian Dominick LaCapra, lead Israel to counteract some of its extreme effects and allow it to rebuild its individual and social life. ■

CHOMSKY
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NC: In our system, a candidate has to be someone who is an orator, or someone with some charisma, someone who tries to arouse emotions. I don't do that, and, if I could do it, I wouldn't. I'm not the right kind of person.

ML: That might be just why you're the right person. The right kind of person is precisely the person who wouldn't want to do it.

NC: Well, you do it. Your writing is very, very good.

ML: Okay, thanks Noam.

[I've already stated publicly that I'll run the moment some group of wealthy people donate a billion dollars to that campaign so that we can hire organizers that would work on building a movement that grows out of the campaign and focuses on the environment, peace, social justice, economic democracy, human rights, and the New Bottom Line proposed by the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Until then, I'll continue to edit *Tikkun*; work on building the Network of Spiritual Progressives' campaigns for the ESRA and for a Global Marshall Plan; write books on theology, psychology, and social transformation; and spend time in prayer and meditation and celebration of the grandeur and mystery of the universe. And while *Tikkun* and the NSP don't participate in electoral politics (they are nonprofits banned from doing so), I personally have been reaching out to better-known figures like Bill Moyers, Marian Wright Edelman, Senator Bernie Sanders, Rachel Maddow, and former Congressman Joe Sestak in the hopes that they and others might join together in an effort to build that kind of electoral campaign in 2012.]

ML: Do you have any other strategic advice for those of us who are seeking a transformation of our system?

The Urgent Threats of Climate Change and Nuclear War

NC: I DON'T THINK THERE ARE ANY DEEP, dark secrets about this. There are many specific goals that we ought to be working hard to achieve; some of them are those that you've formulated in ESRA, others are the kind that I've mentioned.

Then there are others that are overwhelming in importance. For example, the looming global environmental crisis, which raises questions of species survival. It's very urgent right now. Even some in the business press over at *Business Week* are nervous about the fact that the new Republicans that were elected are almost entirely climate-change deniers. In fact they quoted one recently who may be gaining the chair of an important committee, who is so off-the-wall he said, "We don't have to worry about global warming because God wouldn't allow it to happen." I don't think there's another country in the world where a political figure can get away with that. Yet here there has been a major corporate propaganda offensive, quite openly announced, to try to convince people that the environmental crisis is a liberal hoax. And it's had some success, according to the latest polls. The percentage of Americans who believe in anthropogenic global warming, human effects on climate change, is down to about a third. This is an extremely dangerous situation: it's imminent; we have to do something about it right now.

There are other issues that deserve our immediate attention. The threat of nuclear war is very serious, and in fact is being increased by government policy. Right now one of the more interesting revelations from the WikiLeaks cables has to do with Pakistan: it's obvious from the cables that the U.S. ambassador is well aware that the actions that the Obama administration is taking with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan are increasing a very serious threat to the stability of Pakistan itself, and are raising the possibility, not trivial, that the country might fall apart, and that its huge store of nuclear weapons might end up in the hands of radical Islamists. I know there's not a high probability, but it's conceivable, and what we're doing is accelerating that threat. Also, supporting India's huge nuclear weapons buildup and blocking efforts supported by almost the entire world to move toward a nuclear weapons-free zone in the extremely volatile Middle East region—those are issues of great importance.

So there are plenty of urgent tasks, they just require always the same thing: efforts to educate, to organize, to bring together the forces that are concerned and develop strategy and tactics and implement them. So supporting, say, gay rights in the military is important, but it has to be linked to other efforts if it is to have a significant effect on the society.

What Do We Do about Religiophobia?

ML: AS A SIDE QUESTION, WE IN THE NSP and *Tikkun* have found that our positions and analyses—which are in some ways more radical (going to the root) than many of the programs that you hear coming out of the Left, because we do have a class analysis and we do have an analysis of global capitalism—are nevertheless not paid much attention by the rest of the Left because of what we've experienced as a pervasive religiophobia. And that has also

THREE REASONS TO JOIN THE NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES (NSP):

1. The NSP's prophetic and utopian vision can move American political discourse in a way that pragmatic, "realistic," or technocratic liberal programs fail to do.
2. By insisting on "The Caring Society—caring for each other, caring for the earth," the NSP speaks to the heart and not just the head.
3. By advancing the Global Marshall Plan and the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ESRA), we give people a picture of what a healthy society could look like.

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been experienced by people like Jim Wallis and those involved with *Sojourners*, and people around the *Christian Century*, and other progressive religious organizations. And I'm wondering if you have any advice to us on how to overcome that religiophobia, since it seems ludicrous to us that a secular left would not understand that, in a country where you have 80 percent of the population believing in God and 60 percent going to church at least once a month, it would be in their interest to have a unification with people who have a spiritual or religious consciousness.

NC: I think you should approach them, not just on the pragmatic grounds that it's in their interest, but also on the grounds that it's the right thing to do. I mean, personally, I'm completely secular, but I certainly recognize the right of people to have personal religious beliefs and the significance that it may have in their lives, though not for me. Though we can certainly understand each other at least that well, quite apart from pragmatic considerations. I mean, say if a mother is praying that she might see her dying child in heaven, it's not my right to give her lectures on epistemology.

ML: But it's not just issues of epistemology, because there we could have a good debate; it's that there is a climate or a culture in the Left and the liberal arenas that simply assumes that anybody who would have a religious position must be intellectually underdeveloped or psychologically stuck, needing a father figure or scared of the unknown, or some other psychologically reductive analysis. That approach—a kind of ridicule of anybody who could possibly think that there was a spiritual dimension of reality, when it's pervasive, pushes people away even if they agree with much of the rest of what the Left is saying. How does one raise that issue? How does one deal with that issue among lefties who are simply unaware of the elitism and offensiveness of these suppositions? There was a time when it was extremely difficult to raise the issue of patriarchy, sexism, or homophobia, because people thought, "well that's ridiculous, it's just not true, it's not happening"—there was a huge level of denial. Do you have any advice for us on how to deal with that level of denial that exists in the culture of the Left? In my own study of this—I've done a rather extensive study of the psychodynamics of American society, which involved over 10,000 people—we found that this was a central issue for a lot of middle-income working people, who agreed with much of the Left's positions, but felt dissed by the Left.

NC: Well, the way you approach people is to explain to them that not only is it not in their interest to diss other people, but it's also morally and intellectually wrong. For example, one of the greatest dangers is secular religion—state worship. That's a far more destructive factor in world affairs than religious belief, and it's common on the Left. So you take a look at the very people who are passionately advocating struggling for atheism and repeating arguments that most of us understood when we were teenagers—those very same people are involved in highly destructive and murderous state worship, not all of them but some. Does that mean we should diss them? No, it means we should try to explain it to them.

Israel: U.S. Public Opinion Is Changing

ML: Let me ask you a little bit about Israel. Our standpoint is that Israel is headed for perpetual domination of the Palestinian people—a position that you recently articulated, that neither two-state nor one-state is likely to occur, but instead continuing domination. So, I'm asking you what strategies you suggest for those who are not satisfied with the organizations that advocate for peace, but do so in a way that frames the issues solely in terms of Israel's interests. *Tikkun* would have a much bigger impact in the Jewish world if, for example, we had been willing to denounce the Palestinians more, particularly during the second intifada, and if we were to frame our issues solely in terms of why it's irrational and self-destructive for Israel. But since we are committed to a different view—since we come from a religious perspective that every human being is created in the image of God and is equally deserving of care and support—we find it unconscionable to be quiet about the human pain and destructiveness that the Occupation of the West Bank and the transformation of Gaza into a huge prison camp has generated. Yet the Washington-based peace people and many (not all) among the secular Left in the Jewish world think that the smartest strategy is to downplay that issue and to play up only Israel's interest. Do you have any advice for us on how to champion the end of the Occupation and the end of the oppression of Palestinians, when *we*—*Tikkun* and the NSP—are unable to frame the issues solely in terms

of self-interest for Israel but are morally obliged to raise those issues in terms of the suffering of Palestinians and the ethical dimensions, even though doing so seems to be counterproductive to building support in the Jewish world?

NC: Well, first of all I'm not at all convinced that it's counterproductive to building support—maybe among the existing Jewish institutions it is, but you're not going to influence the Zionist organizations. But especially among younger Jews, yours is a position that has growing appeal. I'm coming not from a religious perspective but from a secular one and doing exactly the same thing, and the changes I've experienced over the last couple of years are enormous. Critical analysis of Israeli policies is one of the most popular issues on campus now.

However, my own view is that the *real* issue for us is not what Israel is doing but what the United States is doing—it's in our hands to determine how this turns out. If the United States continues to lend completely uncritical support to the Israeli policies of expanding their control and domination, as is in fact happening, that's what will eventuate. But that can change. And it can change by bringing the American population—Jewish and non-Jewish—to recognize that these U.S. government policies are unacceptable and have to be reversed. If the U.S. were induced or compelled by popular opinion to join the world on this issue, and I thoroughly mean that, then there could be a short-term resolution—not the end of the story, but at least significant improvement—by at least moving to a two-state settlement stage and an ongoing longer process. I think that's quite realistic.

ML: And how do you imagine that change taking place? Given the constellation of forces right now in which this seems to be the only issue in which Democrats and Republicans are totally united, producing votes of 415 to 20 in support of crazy resolutions…

NC: You're speaking of Congress, but I think we should look at the population, which is by no means unified on this. In fact, the majority of the population favors the formation of a Palestinian state, and our goal should be to organize the population so that the popular will is expressed in state actions. This has happened in the past: it happened on South Africa. I mean, the Reagan administration was strongly supporting apartheid, condemning the ANC as a major terrorist organization, and within a couple of years it shifted. The same thing happened with East Timor—as major atrocities continued through 1999, the Clinton administration continued supporting the Indonesian atrocities strongly, and then, rather suddenly, under international and domestic pressure it shifted position.

ML: Yes, but neither of those countries had a significant section of this population here in the U.S. supporting the existing repressive regimes and committed to them on a deep personal and emotional level. Whereas here, while I agree that there is a growing split in the Jewish community on these issues and *Tikkun* reflects the perspective of a very large section of Jews under the age of fifty, I don't see a similar split among Christian Zionists, who represent a very large part of the population—much larger than the Jewish population, anyway.

NC: The Christian Right also supported apartheid. There are all kinds of differences, on the other hand, in the case of Israel-Palestine. By now there is a growing section inside the military and inside intelligence that is pulling for an end to U.S. support for Israeli intransigence because it's harming U.S. operations in the field. If that spreads to the population, it could lead to a major wave of anti-Semitism. There are lots of differences among the cases, but the point is that policies can change, and my own sense is that even within the Jewish community, younger Jews are drifting away because what Israel is doing is just intolerable to their general liberal attitudes; I think we should welcome that move and try to direct it toward changing U.S. policy.

ML: Yes, the focus on changing U.S. policy is one of many reasons our NSP focus on the Global Marshall Plan is so important. The central point of our Global Marshall Plan is that "homeland security" cannot be achieved through the current "strategy of domination" of countries around the world, but only through a new "strategy of generosity" in which the U.S. acts in a caring way toward the people of the world. That same kind of caring and generosity will not likely take hold in Israel, where it would change everything, making peace a real possibility, not just a permanently elusive goal, until it takes hold in the West, primarily in the U.S. So that is one of many reasons why I agree with you that our work is in changing the foreign policy approach in the U.S., and that will only happen through a massive educational program at the grassroots level. By seeking city councils and state legislatures to endorse the Global Marshall Plan, we at the Network of Spiritual Progressives (spiritualprogressives.org/ GMP) will be able to raise this new way of thinking about homeland security and eventually make a significant change in the mass consciousness in America on the question of what really works to bring safety, security, and peace to the U.S. and to the world. ■

NUCLEAR WEAPONS
(continued from page 13)

We do not want nuclear weapons pointed at us. Right now, thousands of nuclear weapons are on "launch on warning," giving the president of the United States about fifteen minutes to decide if there is a computer glitch or if we are under massive attack. There are nuclear devices pointed at every major American city, including Washington, right now. Our security is dependent on the reasoning, mercy, and goodwill of people in Russia right now. They are not our enemies. Collectively we are people who appear to be willing to do genesis in reverse, and just take things back to the very beginning … for what? And why are they doing it? Because we are putting them in this same position by pointing nuclear weapons at them.

In September 2009, Nobel Peace Laureate Oscar Aria, then-president of Costa Rica, said at the Security Council Summit that 22,000 eyes of death face humanity every night in the form of nuclear weapons. I agree with George Kennan who

said the willingness to destroy so much with these devices is nothing less than a blasphemy and an offense to God.

The readiness to use nuclear weapons is a violation of the fundamental principle that must guide our relationship to the natural world—reverence for life. Reflecting on this absurd existential condition which most people refuse to address squarely, I think we need to ring a wake-up call, like adding a modern day commandment. This eleventh commandment will tie our most basic spiritual principles into the theme of nuclear weapons: *Don't kill everybody.*

The idea that one can worship at the altar of the quest for ultimate dominance through nuclear weapons and then prevent others from joining the cult is unrealistic. The greatest stimulant to the proliferation of nuclear weapons is the reliance on nuclear weapons by the most powerful. The president of the United States has said he is seeking the security of a world without nuclear weapons. The secretary general of the United Nations has stated that obtaining the elimination of nuclear weapons will be a public good of the highest order. Yet, because we have not created a constituency that will put political pressure on the president to advance nuclear disarmament, in the current military budget there are tens of billions of dollars pledged to upgrade warheads and delivery systems. Last year the United States spent over $50 billion on the nuclear weapons venture and, according to *Atomic Audit* published by the Brookings Institute, the United States alone has spent over $5.5 trillion dollars on this venture since the dawn of the nuclear age, and all these expenditures without substantial debate.

With the Cold War decades away, knowing that the weapons are useless against terrorists and suicidal to use against a state with nuclear weapons, is it not time that we raised our voices to end this irrational immoral and unsustainable situation? How can we continue to threaten even states without nuclear weapons with "all options on the table" mantras and then expect them not to pursue nuclear weapons programs?

It is time to create political pressure based on the moral and practical imperative to abolish nuclear weapons.

Nuclear Weapons Are Not Just about Nuclear Weapons

I CONTEND THAT THE REASON FOR THIS failure of political pressure is that we have not made the clear and powerful moral argument. We have not said to our political leaders: "Shame on you. Shame on you for continuing to threaten to use nuclear weapons. Shame on us for tolerating this. Shame on you for putting the oceans at risk. Shame on you for allowing species to be killed at alarming rates. Shame on you for calling us who want to have a sustainable future idealists; we're the realists!"

A new level of cooperation is needed to protect the environment and that will not be obtained in a world where some project threats to use nuclear weapons.

Ahmed Djoghlaf, who is the UN's leading figure on biological diversity said: "If the 9 billion people predicted to be with us by 2050 were to have the same lifestyle as Americans, we would need five planets." The magnitude of the damage to the ecosystems is much bigger than we ever imagined. The rate of extinction is currently at 1,000 times the natural, historical, background rate of extinction. The most recent study by the International Union of Conservation of Nature found that 17,291 of the 47,677 species assessed are threatened with extinction and 70 percent of the fishing stocks are at risk.

The levels of cooperation necessary to protect the global commons—the living systems upon which civilization depends such as the oceans, the rainforests, and the climate—makes the spiritual imperative of loving one's neighbor as oneself to be the practical imperative of this moment. I contend that that level of cooperation cannot be obtained in a world with nuclear haves and have-nots. The same diplomats on Monday who have to say, "We're threatening your country and your people with nuclear annihilation" will find it a bit difficult on Tuesday to say, "Let's cooperate to protect the oceans." Nuclear weapons are not only about nuclear weapons; they are also about our values and how we communicate with one another. What could be more dysfunctional and in need of our attention and calls for change?

The destruction of natural biodiversity in the interests of short-term profits expresses values. Do we value life and its manifold graces? Do we value short-term acquisition of products, many of which are not particularly useful? When issues are communicated in this kind of framework, then the political effectiveness of morally informed activists, such as the Network of Spiritual Progressives, will increase. Common sense honest expressions that include values are powerful.

Peace is preferred and our common interests in living together far outweigh the costs of hostility. There is always a way for peace to be realized, and often the simplest truth is the deepest and most powerful. Is it not a great wonder that we have found a way to harness atoms, releasing energy for destruction three times the heat of the face of the sun, within a thousandth of a second? That energy contained in an atom is mysterious and mystical. Just because we can use it does not mean we fully understand its meaning. You cannot see it with your eyes or touch it with your hands. The same power that gifted our intellects with the capacity to discover this destructive capacity has also gifted us with the wisdom to move the world to a place without nuclear weapons.

How many so-called experts predicted that the Berlin Wall would fall as it did? None of the intelligence services predicted it. How many even imagined that apartheid was going to end without a bloodbath? Just a few decades ago, who could have predicted that with our little Blackberries we would have access to more intelligence than the CIA or the KGB had thirty years ago? No one could have predicted these things, and we can't predict the future. The reality of the future will exceed our imaginations.

We can predict whether we are going to be the human beings that we know we are capable of being. The same power that gave us the capacity of destruction that arises from the splitting of the atom has also given us the power of love, compassion, peace, wisdom, and gratitude for the mystery and majesty of life. I will close simply asking that great power of love to bless us, give us the courage to accept the blessing, and bring us into the state of oneness and wonder and gratitude. ■

GOD AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
(continued from page 16)

people, that volcanoes are angry, that the stock market "shakes off" bad news, and so on. It is the stuff of instinct, of children's books, poetry, and colorful journalism.

The second form of anthropomorphism is not as easy to detect or neutralize. It is part of thinking itself. As Kant argued, space and time may or may not be "out there" apart from our thinking. More commonsensically, we know at some level that whereas we are born and die, the universe may not have had a beginning at all and may not end. Certainly, the universe is neither beautiful nor ugly nor safe nor dangerous, except to us. But neither, *really*, is it large or small or old or young. We might say that the universe "just *is*." But metaphysical "being" too might be an indiscriminate extension of what our own persistence feels like to us. And so on. Like metaphor in language, this form of anthropomorphism is endemic to all human perception and thought, and we just have to live with it. We *are*, after all, part of the universe—even though we may be the only part evolved enough to ponder its form and meaning—and so can't be *totally* wrong.

Where, then, should religious anthropomorphism lie on the spectrum between children's-book animism on the one hand and *Nature*-article objectivity on the other? Choosing the first as inevitable, atheists will gleefully quote the pre-Socratic wit, Xenophanes, who reasoned: "If lions could think, their gods would have manes and roar," or cite Ludwig Feuerbach, who more seriously portrayed God as the wishful *projection* of human virtues onto an indifferent cosmos—and regard both as evidence of God's nonexistence.

In defense of this critique, serious theologians and philosophers have long sought to move to the other pole, devising ever less anthropomorphic descriptions of God. Among them are Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* ("God or Nature"), Hegel's Absolute Spirit, Whitehead's Process, Tillich's Ground of Being, Hartshorne's Eminent Self-Creation, Kaufman's Creativity, and Green's Sacred Evolution. Important to note is that while each helps de-anthropomorphize divinity (at the price of God's addressability—but that's another story), each also leaves God presiding over the Beginning and underlying all historical developments; each leaves God, though not human in any way, omnipresent, beyond understanding, and without end (*Ein Sof*), and thus, like the God of the Bible, the suitable object of *awe*. It would seem that the capacity to inspire awe, by size, beauty, power, and age, is the one capacity without which no God, in our estimation, could be considered *God*. Do you recall God's answer to Job? Even a de-anthropomorphized God, it seems, would answer Job in essentially the same way.

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What If God Is Young and Weak?

I think that these theologians and philosophers' hyperbolic descriptions of God might be, if not a mistake, then an unexamined habit. For God may not be the oldest and strongest force in the universe, but the youngest and weakest one, neither celestial on a throne, nor embedded among subatomic events, but enacted in daily human encounters, choices, and deeds. This is a God to cherish, not to fear. Our tradition of depicting God with a human voice "and an outstretched arm" may not, then, be the result of naive anthropocentrism, but rather a reflection of the fact that voluntary goodness *emerges from* the matrix of human life in acts of love, duty, beauty, compassion, forbearance, and wisdom—it emerges from motherly, fatherly, brotherly, sisterly, and neighborly acts whose recently evolved, high-order complexity is essential not only to our happiness, but to our continuance and even to that of life on earth. Is it not miracle enough that a whole new level of being/doing is struggling to its feet on this planet? And if we are inclined to concede that the emotion of awe is necessary for any God to be God to us, may we not feel awe at a child's first words? Or radical amazement at the flowering of the Torah on this speck of dust drifting among the mindless, wheeling stars?

Influenced variously by the Hasidic masters, Felix Adler, Martin Buber, Emanuel Levinas, and Abraham Joshua Heschel were among the pioneers of the line of Jewish, existential, "theo-humanistic" religious thinking that we find in practitioners today as different as Michael Lerner and Harold Schulweis (both Heschel students). This line of thinking is happy to see divinity at work in ethical human relationships—people with each other and with other living things. It speaks often of human *partnership* with God. It celebrates the godliness of certain human deeds. But that divinity, that partnership, that godliness is derivative still, and dependent upon the much greater

godliness of God the Creator/Sustainer/Evolver of the Universe, who remains in place, as it were, at the alpha and omega points of existence. I propose that we can let go of this conception and, in holding God to be good only, consider seriously that our ethical actions are the very substance of God, and say *dayenu*. I have tried to describe this variant of humanistic Jewish theology in my book *God Is the Good We Do*.

In Conclusion

As every reader of *Tikkun* knows, the word "tikkun" means healing, repair, uplift. Healing, repairing, and lifting-up are deeds, not just doctrines; they are transformations of the world around, not just private adjustments of attitude. Tikkun, one might say, is the obligation that evolution bequeaths to the creatures it "blesses," first with consciousness and then with conscience, to effect life's further evolution *without* causing or countenancing involuntary suffering.

Let us resist the tradition of claiming that God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." Let us stop competing with each other to compose dizzying encomiums to God's cosmic creativity, eternity, wisdom, and might (shadows of kingship, all), and embrace instead the humbler truth at hand: that divinity is evidenced—indeed constituted—not by how the stars twirl or how life began, but by how graciously we step forward into the next moment. ■

PROSPECTS FOR THE U.S. LEFT
(continued from page 22)

the current global crisis is that capitalism is what hit the fan. Their solutions are not restricted to re-regulation or punishment of corrupt speculators. They affirm but also go beyond massive public employment programs and other economic stimulants paid for not by borrowing (and socially burdensome deficits) but rather by taxing corporations and the richest citizens. Their solutions increasingly include transformation of enterprises such that workers collectively, cooperatively, and democratically owning and operating enterprises would become a growing business sector. These would compete—on an economic playing field leveled by government support—with the older, hierarchical, capitalist enterprises where a few major shareholders select a top management that makes all the basic decisions about what, how, and where to produce, and what to do with the profits.

With the mass addition of democratically worker-run enterprises, U.S. workers could finally enjoy freedom of choice between work lives in the two alternative work organizations: capitalist or collectively worker-operated. Consumers could vote for whichever they prefer by buying its outputs. In short, the U.S. Left is working its way to a comprehensive alternative program to exit the crisis, one taxing the corporations and the richest 5 percent—those who contributed most to the crisis, who are the most able to pay for resolving it, and who have received the most state aid so far and therefore "recovered" the most.

The U.S. Left is constructing analyses and programs that have large and growing audiences and constituencies in the country. It will have to rebuild old or build new organizations to be able systematically to inform and mobilize that constituency. To do that, it will need to overcome its antipathies to organization per se. It will have to conceptualize democracy as the preferred structure of organization rather than the opposite of organization. However, the prospects for succeeding in new organizations of the Left are not bad given the ongoing crisis, the growing recognition of its severity and longevity by ever more Americans, and the likely fading of the Tea Party movement as the only other mode of expressing protest and demand for alternative social development.

Those sympathetic to the Left have their work to do, but the prospects for success suggest excitement and energy and no longer the demoralization that afflicted them for so long. In contrast, the Tea Partiers' proposals for shrinking government offer immediate pain and suffering to the mass of Americans, while also fraying their connections to the hegemonic alliance in the United States. Tea Party prospects are not good. A resurgent U.S. Left can steal from the Tea Party movement those of its supporters who can identify business and the rich as adversaries, who harbor anti-capitalist impulses. That would leave the Tea Party movement with its fundamentalist social values and the burdens of a strained connection to an increasingly unpopular hegemony symbolized and championed especially by the Republican Party. The political terrain in the United States has shifted and the U.S. Left now has major opportunities. ■

TO UPHOLD THE WORLD
(continued from page 29)

argued that "humanity, justice, generosity, and public spirit are the qualities most useful to others."

Ashoka's Ethical Revolution

Everyone who studies Ashoka's edicts comes away with the conclusion that they embody something new and unprecedented in history. Ashoka speaks not just to his own subjects but also to future generations and all humankind.

Ashoka's Dhamma can be seen as a practical code for promoting Adam Smith's three foundational social values. Ashoka's edicts emphasize key elements of justice: uniform, due process of law—perhaps even equal application of the same penalties to all people regardless of caste or class—and religious tolerance. He declares his commitment to quickly hear complaints and efficiently dispatch business, as well as his compassion for the poor, the aged, and for prisoners. The edicts also record regular grants of clemency, thereby reinforcing an ideal of justice. And they call for restraint, abstention from violent action, and frugality; in other words, they call for prudence, which for Smith combines understanding with self-command. Ashoka's emphasis on charity and donations, as well as his promulgation of public hospitals and public works of benefit to humans and nonhumans, is a policy of beneficence toward all life.

Historians believe that Ashoka may have seen his Dhamma as a practical solution to the challenge of holding together a

multinational empire. The Kautilyan analysis of the state is in most regards a technocratic one, clearly insufficient as an ideology to unite a vast multicultural polity. Rational analysis of the acquisition and management of wealth and power is useful in building the economy and the state but alone cannot inspire unity or long-term loyalty. Dhamma provided a common civic ideology, based on a secular reinterpretation of the shared transcendent values of the time.

Though Ashoka developed his policies roughly 2,300 years ago, some elements of them seem more progressive than some aspects of political discourse in the United States during the past thirty years. Certainly Ashoka had no reservations about establishing a state-supported system of medical treatment centers, and the idea of government-sponsored veterinary hospitals as a social obligation for other sentient creatures is something not even the most left-wing Democrat would suggest. Ashoka, while not abolishing the death penalty, seems to have had more reservations about its use than some U.S. state governors. He expresses compassion for prisoners—neither a widespread public sentiment nor a priority for most politicians over the past decades in the United States. He declares that he has spread his public works beyond his borders to neighboring lands, endowing abroad hospitals for humans and animals, and propagating useful and beneficial plants. We could do worse than focusing our foreign aid priorities more on public health and ecology.

He bans feeding animals the remains of other animals, a measure that would have prevented the spread of mad cow disease in the United Kingdom. The idea that a head of state in the Western world should also urge at least partial vegetarianism on the grounds of empathy for other living creatures is again one we can hardly imagine. Ashoka's emphasis on the role of the state to make expenditures and donations through public works is in marked contrast to the emphasis on privatization that has dominated much economic and political thinking over the past decades. And his edicts also include specific injunctions on improving the efficiency and transparency of public administration.

Beyond Rational Self-Interest: Reverence for Life Anchors Society

A reflection on Ashoka's great experiment raises the critical question of whether social ethics and governance can over the long term be rooted simply in negotiated or agreed-upon rational rules—the project of the Enlightenment—or whether the cultural glue that holds society together ultimately derives an important part of its perceived authority from a shared belief in transcendent values. For Ashoka, Dhamma is not religious in a conventional Western sense of belief in a monotheistic god. But it is a belief in underlying transcendent principles governing existence beyond the shorter-term calculations of material advantage and power in Kautilyan statecraft.

Vaclav Havel has written that "If democracy is not only to survive but to expand successfully ... it must rediscover and renew ... its respect for that nonmaterial order, which is not only above us but also in us and among us, and which is the only possible and reliable source of man's respect for himself, for others, for the order of nature, for the order of humanity and thus for secular authority as well."

The "reduction of life to the pursuit of immediate material gain without regard for its general consequences," in Havel's words, has led to the oblivion of being and history. This shortsightedness has exacerbated—and is an underlying cause of—what he sees as the fundamental problem of our time: "lack of accountability to and responsibility for the world."

The analysis of Hans Küng is similar: he calls, above all, for an ethic of planetary responsibility in place of the "ethic of success," a new global ethic based on "concern for the future and reverence for nature." Havel observes that the more the technological forces of globalization bring us together, the more aware many become of their residual differences. In our globalized world bereft of transcendence, our situation is like that of prisoners in a common planetary penitentiary "in which the inmates get on each other's nerves far more than if they see each other only occasionally."

The necessity for a grounding in the transcendent does not necessarily mean the belief in a personal God in the Western sense, as Ashoka's Dhamma shows. Indeed many have characterized Buddhism as a fundamentally atheistic belief system. But it does imply an orientation beyond the present, the imminent, and the purely human—it offers a sense of humankind's place in an order and cosmos, the meaning and purpose of which is not short-term use and gratification. As Küng writes, "Only the bond to an infinite offers freedom in the face of all that is finite."

The problems brought by the relentless penetration of the logic of economics and technology into every sphere of life will not be solved by more economics and technology. A way forward will come from mindfulness and reverence for the world and life, from an acceptance—and social practice—of values beyond and outside the interventions of instrumental reason, but which could guide and limit these interventions in a different spirit. In the Jewish tradition the concept of *tikkun* involves collaborating with God to heal and transform the world; every individual is thought to have a special tikkun, a particular role or mission in accomplishing this. Tikkun recalls some aspects of dharma, the concept of each person having a specific role or duty within a transcendent order that upholds the world.

The ancient Egyptians had *maat*, a concept similar in some respects to dharma. Maat meant order, morality, individual duty, self-control, also artistic symmetry and balance. Maat was grounded in the cosmic order, in the transcendent, and was personified in the pharaoh. In the words of historian Paul Johnson, "To break an artistic canon, to infringe pharaoh's law, to sin against god; all were a denial of maat." When justice, social order, prosperity and compassion prevailed in the land, there was an abundance of maat. The opposite of maat, Johnson tells us, "was not change, but covetousness, associated with deceit and violence.... 'The man who lives by maat will live for ever, but the covetous has no tomb.'" Ashoka also had a belief in the transcendent rootedness of his Dhamma, declaring that "Dhamma is effective for all time, for even if its object is not attained in this life, endless merit is produced in the life to come."

If one were to venture a definition of the core of Ashoka's "essential doctrine," indeed of his whole Dhamma, it would be reverence for life, rooted in a Buddhist ethic of compassion for all sentient beings. Albert Schweitzer, who coined the term early last century, said:

> The great fault of all ethics hitherto has been that they believed themselves to have to deal only with the relations of man to man. In reality, however, the question is what is his attitude to the world and all life that comes within his reach. A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him—that of plants and animals as well as that of his fellow man.

This sort of ethics goes beyond the realm of mutually just treatment of human beings. Reverence for life means upholding the world—embracing, but also anchored outside of, purely human-centered action.

Transcending the Tragedy of Politics

Yet the gap today between such an ideal and the paralysis and weakening of governance around the world seems as great as ever. We must also view Ashoka's ethical and political project in its tension with Kautilyan values in the context of what Max Weber called the "tragedy of politics." We cannot ignore the fact that part of the basis of politics is violence, power, and force. In politics, Weber said, "It is *not* true that good can only follow from good and evil from evil, but ... often the opposite." This understanding is the basis too of Reinhold Niebuhr's question, couched as a statement, to James Bryan Conant, the President of Harvard, immediately after World War II: "How much evil we must do in order to do good."

Thus the greatness of Ashoka lies not only in his conversion to the policy of Dhamma following Kalinga, but in his heroic effort to reconcile the underlying, tragic tensions between the traditional ethical duty (dharma) of the king and warrior, which prioritizes force and violence; the revolutionary materialism of Kautilya and his espousal of the pursuit of economic power (artha); and a universal ethic of nonviolence.

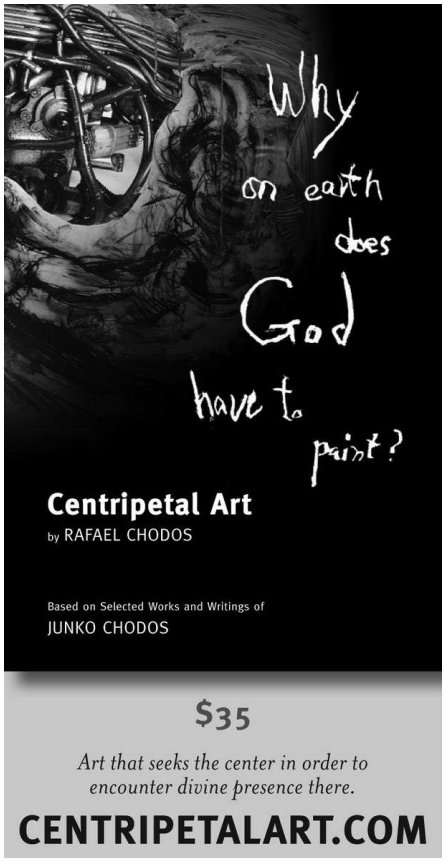
Ashoka sought and fought to reconcile and transcend what in his time and for most of human history has been irreconcilable. He seems to have believed that ultimately it would be possible to reconcile in practice social duty, political duty, and a universal ethic of respect for all life and nonviolence. He wagered on transcending the tragedy of politics. For his time he was wrong. Much of the failure was rooted in the cumbersome, top-down nature of governance that may have been the only mode possible for a large sub-continental area at the time.

We have yet to find a satisfactory articulation of a global ethic, which everyone from Christian theologians to Vaclav Havel, George Soros, and even terrorists such as Osama bin Laden call for. Havel has said a common ground for transcendence in our age would begin with finding "a new and genuinely universal articulation of that global human experience ... one that connects us with the mythologies and religions of all cultures and opens for us a way to understand their values. It must expand simply as an environment in which we may all engage in a common quest for the general good." Arnold Toynbee recognized a similar need—and opportunity. He pointed out that the non-Western cultures of the world have realized that Western culture and history have become a part of the culture and history of every other society on earth. We now have to realize that the West cannot escape the inevitability that the past of non-Western cultures will become a part of the West's own cultural future. The future, he wrote, will neither be Western nor non-Western—it will inherit elements of all cultures. And this is one more reason why Ashoka's grand experiment is so timely today. His life and realm spanned East and West at the time of what was an incipient economic linking together, indeed a kind of globalization, of the civilizations of most of the ancient world.

Unlike Ashoka's time, or indeed all times past, today the global system offers historically unprecedented practical means (through the Internet and the proliferation of global networks of social movements) for a bottom-up, self-organizing politics of enlightenment. Such a politics would be a worldwide political project—based on the values of the "essential doctrine" that is the core of Ashoka's Dhamma—for a global system grounded in reverence for life, nonviolence, tolerance, inclusion, benevolence, self-control, and justice.

The vision thus stated sounds wildly utopian, but we have Ashoka to remind us that long ago a great leader of the world's most powerful empire dared to try to put into practice what for his times must have seemed even more utopian. In comparison, a second New Deal seems like a modest proposal indeed.

We will need Kautilyan realism as well as Ashokan idealism to achieve such a transformation. But such a project has been slumbering in human history for a long time. In the words of the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, written when the twentieth century was still young, "Ashoka's thought had been standing on the wayside for all these ages longing to find a refuge in the mind of every man." ■



DEVOTION: FUTURISMO

We cared less about the things and more about the smears and blurs
and fluxing stuff. We hated the depiction of history and yesterday's
devotions. We put on goggles and sped past God and the seductive
punctures in the skin of his son. We put wings on everything –
glued feathers to our ankles, flew, if you closed your eyes
and thought of beauty as an ungainly filly that cantered and nickered
as it stood still. We entered the future backwards, not aliens, not robots,
more like workers with dispensable shovels rising into the blasted
new/old country, becoming the bosses of ourselves, firing ourselves,
grumbling about the work. We confused beauty with velocity,
airplanes with auras, because what's a moving object but a breed
of being spread across the retina, numina, reds and yellows,
the present ripped and difficult and everything's a space ship.
And what about the future of the soft machine? Señor gets tired.
Señor leaks from his gaskets, needs new bearings and shocks,
beauty is killing him. Señor stays awake all night as the wind
throws its language against the window like a blind bird body.
A kiss should be like this. In the morning the sticky, catalytic smell
of hot patch and pleas for mercy. The flights of pigeons, the entrails
of road kill mean my country will suffer and murmur and shit
and go blind. The beautiful obliterating snows will drift and melt
and freeze and ravish the surface and light will glaze the trash –
the most meager skin made magnificent. Beauty's neither
here nor there but deadly and Señor's ashes still not scattered
but carried twice to new cities, X-rayed and checked through airports.
"Organs?" "No, ashes." The formal feeling works backwards
from letting go to stupor to great pain. Señor wants a future,
wants a smear of violence or color, wants a beholder
to see him like a tulip bulb sunk with bone meal and wintered
and unfurled come spring like a picture of the floating world.
Señor, on what things will we stick our kisses? I think
halfway between a wheelbarrow of dirt and a facsimile machine,
is beauty. I think it's a horse that moves between the skin and the unseen.

— Bruce Smith

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Heaven's Snake

BY JOSH KORNBLUTH

"Is the cornsnake Jewish?"

This was a tough question to answer. I was visiting with the first-grade class taught by my then-girlfriend, who had introduced me to her students as "Farmer Josh"—and then thrust a large-ish cornsnake into my less-than-willing hands. The little ones crowded around me, and excitedly asked me questions about this miraculous creature, about which I unfortunately knew nothing. It was possible to bluff some expertise regarding the snake's eating and grooming habits—but on the subject of its Jewishness, I was frankly stymied.

"Cornsnake" certainly *sounded* like a Jewish name—not so different from "Kornbluth," really. Perhaps the Cornsnakes and the Kornbluths had even come from adjacent shtetls in the Old Country. And the animal did have an ambivalent air about it (another telltale sign of my people), alternately twisting around my wrist and trying to escape up a shirtsleeve. But was it descended from Abraham, or merely from a nondenominational, ethically challenged reptile in the Primeval Garden?

I wanted to confess to these kids that I just didn't know—that I had some questions even about my *own* Jewishness. And yet I couldn't bear to let them down: they were so excited! I suppose I also longed to impress my girlfriend by fielding all queries with an effortless grace and charm. In the end, I improvised the kind of answer-as-question that my late grandpa might have responded with: "Why *wouldn't* it be Jewish?"

Several years later my girlfriend had become my wife, and I was bringing our son to the East Bay Vivarium in Berkeley, kind of a cold-blooded wonderland. With his first day of kindergarten approaching, he was feeling somewhat unsettled—and we thought perhaps it would comfort him to have a pet. After looking around the store—at all manner of lizards, turtles, and the like—he spotted a bin of tiny baby cornsnakes, and chose the prettiest one: a female he named Snakey.

We brought Snakey home and set her up in a tank, with a heater and a water bowl and a log to hide in. As I watched her writhe and slither, I couldn't help but think back to that former student of my wife's—and to wonder: was Snakey Jewish?

As I had come relatively late in life to the study of Judaism, I didn't have easy access to the kind of rabbinical wisdom that this issue seemed to call for. And as we lived in Berkeley, there seemed at least a fair chance that the snake was Unitarian. But the question wouldn't stop nagging at me—so finally I made a list for myself of possible pros and cons.

On the plus side: Snakey was persistent, much like the Jewish people, who had somehow remained intact over thousands of years. She never ate leavened bread. She enjoyed basking in blistering conditions that resembled Israel or Miami Beach. And the cruel vicissitudes of life often made her come out of her skin.

On the minus: She demonstrated no particular grasp of Martin Buber's "I and Thou" philosophy (though she had a terrific grasp of mice). She rejected an empty Manishewitz matzo box that we once offered her as an alternative refuge to her beloved log. And facially she kind of resembled the Rev. Pat Robertson.

Eventually I decided to wait and see if she would ask for a bat mitzvah when she was about to turn thirteen. But alas, she never made it that far. A little while ago, at the tender age of ten, Snakey started acting erratically—moving in a herky-jerky fashion, ceasing to maintain her usually glistening exterior, regurgitating her food. And just a short time later, she passed away.

The folks at the Vivarium said it was probably some sort of internal disease, one that nobody could have detected. They assured us that these things happen, despite the best of care. But I couldn't help wondering whether there was something I might have done differently: fed her smaller mice, lowered the temperature in her tank, read to her from the Torah.

In the time she was with us, I had begun my own tentative, serendipitous approach to my ethnic roots. As she grew, I grew (though far less rapidly). And in honoring our home with her spirit, she inspired my family to deepen our spiritual practice. Snakey—or, to use her pre-Ellis Island name, Snakovitch—added a mythological dimension to our days, inspiring us to connect the mysterious world around us with the burning questions within us. In an important sense, she made our little apartment into a home.

But was she Jewish? For the answer, I may have to await my own encounter with the creator of all things—creatures with legs or without, circumcised or circumscribed, reptilian or Reform. ■

Josh Kornbluth is a monologuist who lives in Berkeley with his wife and son. His latest solo show is Andy Warhol: Good for the Jews? *You can follow his doings at joshkornbluth.com.*

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