Tikkun

POLITICS + SPIRITUALITY + CULTURE

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SUMMER 2012

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ever harder for them to do so. Israel's ethnocentric approach may be a valid expression of its national sovereignty. But it is hardly wise or helpful in the current fraught situation and leads inevitably to manifest injustices placed on many of its citizens.

But whilst I may criticize the choices Israelis make, I criticize them as a foreigner, albeit one who has cultural and religious links to the country and a natural affection for it. I certainly should not behave like those Irish Americans who continued to fund the Provisional IRA when its terror campaign was causing carnage on both sides of the Irish Sea. But, nor, as a cosmopolitan Jew with citizenship (in my case) in two other countries, should I any more refrain from criticism of Israel than criticism of any other country on earth. Israelis are well advised to take such criticism on board.
—Victor, *Auckland, New Zealand*

SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

As a forty-six-year-old Brit living in Dallas, with what could best be described as Humanist views, I caught the latter part of Rabbi Lerner's NPR interview about his book *Embracing Israel/Palestine* in the car today and listened with tremendous interest.

Political discourse in the United States is now so completely broken at every level that to hear a balanced, educated voice of reason is a rare treat. In the current environment it seems that your views and proposed solutions to the Middle East conflict will be shot down, trampled upon, and demonized as "liberal wooly-headed naivety" by many. I would remind such naysayers that peace in Northern Ireland was brought about after nearly 500 years by much the same approach. While no direct comparison between the regions can be drawn, the problems seemed similarly intractable and are perhaps a close enough parallel to merit mention.

Your work and embracing of other faiths and beliefs through the Network of Spiritual Progressives is so important. As you know, no sensible discussion will be had on such divisive issues unless the foundation of trust, understanding, and genuine respect for others' views is established, and I applaud you for your initiative. While I don't share your religious beliefs, your calling out the baying hypocrites for using the "word of God" to vilify their opponents had me cheering behind the wheel! At last, someone on the inside gets it!
—Steve Austin, *Dallas, TX*

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A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send 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.

TRANSCENDING CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

In the Muslim faith tradition, we have a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, as reported by Nayeem bin Massud (Al Hadis 1:347), "G-d exalted two kinds of people above others: those who spend in the cause of the Truth, and those who impart their wisdom to others." In my opinion, Richard Joel Wassersug has hit a double whammy in regard to both endeavors with his fine, brave, revelatory online-only piece, "Embracing a Eunuch Identity."

The personal sharing in that article is so needed in a world where sexual performance (increasingly stimulated, even among young adults, by sordid, cruel, objectifying expressions of self-annihilation) supplants love-making and "pleasuring" in a holistic and sexually healing sense. In this kind of a mindset, the sexual acts often suffice for a sexual identity—i.e., instead of simply being "flavors" of the expression of humankind's privilege and joy of expressive, receptive, and ardent intimacy, individuals may define and own selfhood by relentlessly focusing on one facet of their multifarious life: their sexual identity.

This piece seems to explore a way of embracing personhood that is like so many soaring passages of the Bible: transcendent of our society's imposed strictures or of cultural constraints. It reminds me that you may be living proof that, as is stated in Galatians 3:28, and similarly in Colossians 3:11: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

To me this means that our souls are not bound by the bonds of earthly labels but are sublime; they exist in a sphere in which their value and beauty is flavored by all that is learned and experienced on earth, but not confined to accidents of birth or happenstance. Richard, your contribution gives heart and inspiration to many who have been shattered by what has made you stronger and even more beautiful and good. You have inspired and moved me.

—Aminah Yaquin Carroll,
Gallipolis Ferry, WV

SAFE-HAVEN ZIONISM

Here are some thoughts in response to Rebecca Subar's web article, "Why Safe-Haven Zionism Is Incompatible with Jewish Cosmopolitanism": Many years ago, I decided that I was neither a Zionist nor an anti-Zionist but a non-Zionist and a critical friend of Israel. More often than not, I am extremely critical. But I cannot renounce friendship for a nation that has breathed life back into the dry bones of so many families such as mine that were almost blotted out in the Shoah or in other horrors of the last century.

I understood, though, that the state was the product of a dark time in the history of the Jewish people and, indeed, of most peoples. Terror and ethnic cleansing were its midwives and, clearly, its creation was based on the perceived cruel necessities of a specific time and place rather than on universal, timeless principles. Its moral legitimacy was therefore questionable. But, by the same token, so, at one time or another, was the moral legitimacy of most countries. This was obviously the case for settler nations such as the United States, Australia, or New Zealand. But dig back far enough and you have to ask yourself whether, for example, England has the right to exist, given its origins in the Germanic invasions of the fifth century CE and the apparent dispossession of its then primarily Celtic population.

How far do we have to go back before a nation acquires the right to existence through the simple fact of existing? One generation? Two? Three? It's hard to answer that question at a theoretical level. But, at a practical level, the dissolution and reconstituting of states is likely to end in new injustices and resentments and in more lives cast into the whirlwind. So, as far as I'm concerned, Israel has, for all practical intents and purposes, as much right to legitimacy and sovereignty as any other country on earth. Moreover, as the exercise of the democratic right of self-determination requires a distinct institutional and territorial context, it follows that Israelis have as much claim as any other people to exercise this right as a people.

But, as a Diaspora Jew, I do not have the right to participate in Israel's exercise of self-determination. It is a right that should belong to Israelis (and not just Jewish Israelis) qua Israelis but not to Jews qua Jews. And, of course, the same should and must apply to the Palestinians. May it happen speedily and in our own day!

Should Israelis be allowed to set ethnic criteria for immigration and other issues? Well, most countries do precisely that. For example, Germany gives immigration preference to people of German descent, which is one reason why that country's superb national soccer team has players with Slavic personal names. Ireland does it. Italy does it too.

Does Israel's Jewish majority have the right to insist on the Jewish character of its state? Let's remember that the United States is something of an exception to the norm in celebrating a largely civic patriotism. Most countries give some ethnic weighting to their national identities, even though globalism is making it

MORE LETTERS

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Tikkun as a Quarterly

Writing for the summer issue is confusing for me now that we are a quarterly, with deadlines three to four months in advance. I'm writing this at the beginning of March for you to read in July, August, and September! On one hand, I want to encourage you to take time this summer to experience with radical amazement the beauty of our planet and its amazing ability to renew its verdure. I look forward to rolling in the grass, visiting the nearby California redwoods, and indulging in the magnificence of Big Sur and the Pacific. Yet at the same time, I want to invite you to participate in the September ritual of repentance and atonement for the way we and our societies have been inadequately attentive to the needs of the powerless and have instead made peace with policies that ignore or even intensify suffering and oppression.

If you're eager for *Tikkun*'s take on the run-up to the 2012 election and other current events, the solution is to read the timely articles on our web magazine site (tikkun.org) and the blog posts on Tikkun Daily (tikkun.org/daily). Sign up for our free newsletter (tikkun.org/mail) to receive periodic links to new online-only magazine articles, and sign up for our daily digest (tikkun.org/dailydigest) to receive a single daily email with a digest of each day's blog posts. The web is where we publish material on the political and cultural developments that can't be handled in a timely manner in a quarterly. Here in the print magazine, however, we can indulge in the longer and deeper inquiries and questioning of assumptions that have made *Tikkun* one of the country's most intellectually exciting magazines and that earned us an Utne Independent Press Award last year.

Meanwhile, we are still looking for interns and volunteers to join us at our office in the beautiful San Francisco Bay Area. Over the years students, retirees, and mid-career volunteers have all played an integral role in helping us produce *Tikkun*. They have also worked with me on my books, helped keep our office running, built the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and recruited talented new authors. Spread the word! More information is posted at tikkun.org/interns. ■

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Iran, Israel, and Obama

The mainstream media have frequently framed their discussions about U.S. and Israeli policy toward Iran as a debate between U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about whether to strike Iran immediately or to wait to see if sanctions work. This narrative has set the framework for a march toward war by excluding from the discourse the nonviolent option: that we not use coercion to achieve our ends.

The Obama administration has done little to disrupt this troubling narrative. Following in the path of George W. Bush, Obama has instead helped to legitimize the notion of a preemptive U.S. military strike against Iran—a nation that has never taken direct military action against the United States.

Indeed Ben-Dror Yemini, the opinion editor for the Israeli daily newspaper Ma'ariv, said this March that Obama couldn't have been much clearer in his commitment to make a military strike against Iran unless sanctions deterred Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. "He didn't say he would vote for the Likud. But aside from that, one should pay attention, he sounded almost like the Likud leader," Yemini said.

President Obama has placated Israeli hawks with his willingness to legitimize the notion of a preemptive strike on Iran. Here, Obama meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Official White House Photo/Pete Souza

The Legitimization of Preemptive Strikes

In truth, President Clinton already blazed the path to preemptive strikes in his attempts to save the people of Bosnia from the genocide that was being carried out by Serbia. And the legitimacy of attacking a nation for a reason other than self-defense was again affirmed when the United States intervened as a silent but strong partner in the NATO intervention to stop Muammar el-Qaddafi from murdering the Libyan citizens who had rebelled against his regime. The argument for military intervention is stronger in humanitarian cases such as these, which involve the clear and present suffering and deaths of civilians.

Far weaker is the argument that an intervention can be justified whenever one is able to offer a worrisome hypothesis about what any given regime may do at some future point. This approach leads us to a world in which statements from extremists inside or outside the government of a rival state give the powerful free license to use military strikes or even start wars to preempt the feared evil of the other side.

If we go too far down that path, we get into arguments like those heard about Iran, with those who favor a preemptive strike saying, "Well, Iran's president and Ayatollah both have made statements calling for Iran to eliminate the Jewish state," and those who oppose the strike saying, "No, that's a mistranslation. Iran's leaders did not pledge to do this; they just said they wished the current Zionist expansionist regime would disappear into the dustbin of history. That is a wish shared by many Israelis who want a secure Israel but don't necessarily want it to be tied to the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza."

From the standpoint of those of us who want a peaceful world, Obama's legitimization of preemptive warfare in principle is a big victory for the war-makers of the future. It's a terrible development that could be as destructive as his decision to sign into law the part of the National Defense Appropriation legislation that authorizes the president to imprison for life and without trial any U.S. citizen suspected of supporting terrorists. And it rivals the current administration's development of drones used for "targeted assassinations" that frequently kill other human beings in the vicinity.

Israelis listening to President Obama's speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference in Washington, D.C., on March 4 were almost unanimous in acknowledging just how far he had gone to satisfy the militarists in Israel and the Jewish community worldwide. Here is the part of Obama's talk that satisfied the Israeli hawks most:

> I have said that when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say. That includes all elements of American power: a political effort aimed at isolating Iran, a diplomatic effort to sustain our coalition and ensure that the Iranian program is monitored, an economic effort that imposes crippling sanctions and, yes, a military effort to be prepared for any contingency. Iran's leaders should understand that I do not have a policy of containment; I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And as I have made clear time and again during the course of my presidency, I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests. . . . Rest assured that the Iranian government will know our resolve and that our coordination with Israel will continue.

A Peaceful Path to Non-Proliferation

We at *Tikkun* also want Israel (and all nations, for that matter) to be safe from nuclear threats. But we do not believe that the path outlined by Obama is the correct one, even if it succeeds in keeping Iran from developing nuclear weapons capacity in the short run.

We hope that Iran will, by the time this magazine is printed, already have agreed to stop any development of nuclear weapons and to open all its suspected development sites to international inspection. But such a pledge may be a hard sell to Iranian nationalists who could easily argue that militaristic threats from Obama and Netanyahu underscore the dangers Iran faces unless it has the nuclear capacity to defend itself.

A far more effective way to stop proliferation would be for the United States and all other nuclear states (including Israel) to disarm their nuclear military power and thus show that they were not simply seeking to retain their own power by insisting that others refrain from doing what they themselves are already doing. Media in Arab and Muslim states have frequently made a point of the hypocrisy of Israel, which refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty precisely to avoid having its nuclear weapons' capacities revealed to the world, now preaching to Iran about the need for Iranians to never equally arm themselves. A nuclear-free world would be a far better gift to the human race than an Iran bombed by Israel and/or the United States.

Part of our view was stated in the advocacy ad we managed to place in the *New York Times* on March 7, while

Demonstrators protest outside the White House following Obama's militaristic speech on Iran at AIPAC's March 2012 conference.

If we are serious about nuclear non-proliferation, shouldn't Israel and the United States disarm too? Israelis at this 2009 anti-nuclear demonstration in Tel Aviv staged a die-in to emphasize the massive loss of innocent life that nuclear war would bring.

Netanyahu and the AIPAC crowd were beating the drums of war among congressional representatives eager to show their right-wing Jewish and Christian Zionist constituencies that they could be counted on to support whatever Israel decided to do. We were able to run the ad thanks to the help of more than 3,000 signatories and donors (mostly *Tikkun* subscribers and members of the Network of Spiritual Progressives) and thanks to the co-sponsorship of the Shalom Center. The content of the ad is reprinted below.

Top: Jo Freeman Bottom: Yotam Ronen (activestills.org)

No, Mr. Netanyahu, No, President Obama: No War on Iran and No First Strike

Some of us who signed this ad believe that even a nuclear Iran—faced with the certainty that its first aggressive use of nuclear weapons would engender a massive retaliation sufficient to kill most of the people of Iran—would not dare take a first nuclear strike against Israel or the United States. Americans once perceived the Soviet Union to be equally evil, irrational, and driven by ideological fundamentalism—yet the Soviet Union, armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, was constrained by the possibility of mutually assured destruction. The same is likely to be true of Iran should its ideologically driven fundamentalist leaders ever decide to develop nuclear weapons.

Some of us fear that electoral pressures have pushed President Obama and many Democrats in Congress to abandon the strategy of containment used with all the other nuclear powers and instead to coerce Iran into not developing nukes.

We agree with the goal of non-proliferation, but believe that the only way to restrain the development of nukes by other states like Iran, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt is for the current nuclear powers—including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Israel—to disarm their own nuclear weapons. President Obama: show some leadership by making dramatic advances in negotiating the universal elimination of nuclear weapons contained in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty instead of only taking seriously the parts of that treaty calling for others to not obtain such weapons!

Unfortunately, President Obama made clear when he spoke to AIPAC on March 4 that he and Netanyahu only disagree about how long to use economic coercion (creating suffering for ordinary Iranians) before they revert to military attacks. Yet many of us who signed this ad believe that coercion is not in the best interests of the U.S., Israel, the Jewish people, or world peace. The only path to peace is a path of peace and nonviolence. Our means must be as holy as our ends. President Obama: please show some leadership by affirming the value of nonviolence even when dealing with a state like Iran. Break the cycles of violence that have physically, ethically, and spiritually wounded the human race for so much of its history. We know the outcome of the strategy of domination and violence. It's time to use a fundamentally different approach.

Some of us believe that Israel could actually work out peaceful relations with Iran and enhance its own security and U.S. security by ending the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, helping the Palestinian people create an economically and politically viable state, taking generous steps to alleviate the humiliation and suffering of Palestinian refugees, and supporting Palestinian membership in the United Nations. Those steps, done with a spirit of openhearted generosity toward the Palestinian people and the people of all the surrounding states, is far more likely than military strikes against Iran or endless assaults on Hamas to provide a safe and secure future for Israel.

Similarly, if the United States were to apologize for its role in overthrowing the democratically elected government of Iran in 1953 and ushering in the Shah's dictatorial regime, it would strengthen the hands of those in Iran who seek an overthrow of the even worse Islamic fundamentalist regime that now terrorizes the people of Iran.

Why might this work better than military attacks? Some who have signed this ad believe that the best path to homeland security is through rejecting the old-fashioned "domination strategy" of exercising power against those whom we fear.

Domination strategies elicit fear, resentment at not being treated as a people who deserve respect, and then a desire to strike back. Instead we believe that what spiritual progressives call a "generosity strategy" based on caring for the other, compassion, and genuine respect for differences is likely to prove the most effective way to achieve long-term safety. The more the United States detaches from its previous role as the military champion of Western economic selfishness toward other countries in defense of their own global corporations, the more our influence will increase.

The Global Marshall Plan introduced to Congress as House Res. 157 by Hon. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.)—a plan developed by Tikkun magazine and the Network of Spiritual Progressives—offers a concrete vision for such a strategy of generosity. Please read it at www.tikkun.org/GMP. We offer this in a spirit of humility, knowing that no one can be sure of what is going to happen in the future, but certain that what has happened in the past with the domination approach to the world's problems has often led to worse disasters than whatever it was designed to forestall.

None of us who sign this statement accept as legitimate the denial of human rights in Iran, the pretense of democracy, the oppression of the Baha'i, the denial of the Holocaust, or the right of Iran to verbally threaten the existence of the State of Israel. Our opposition to a war does not come from support for the Iranian regime.

The path of generosity outlined above will likely enhance, not weaken, Israeli, American, and global security, whereas an attack on Iran will make it hard for the democratic forces in Iran that oppose the current dictatorial regime to withstand nationalistic pressures to unite behind its current leaders against a foreign invader (Israel or the U.S.).

The signers of this ad do not agree on all of the statements above. Whatever the diversity of our perspectives, here's what we do all agree upon:

No war. No preemptive first strikes on Iran.

Memories of Holocaust Fuel Tensions with Iran

One reason some Israelis support a first strike is that they believe they are facing the current embodiment of Hitler in Iran and want to show that this time the Jews will defend themselves.

The Holocaust denial expressed by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is outrageous. Their verbal attacks on Israel often reflect a deep antagonism toward Jews. Their treatment of the Baha'i and their own domestic dissenters are crimes against humanity. We have no sympathy for them and hope to see their own people rise up against them. Yet not every oppressive regime is Hitler, and not every enemy of the State of Israel is the reincarntion of the Nazis. Many Israelis see Hitler everywhere. They detect him reincarnated in Nasser, in Arafat, in Hezbollah, in Hamas, in the Palestinian people, and now also in Iran.

I say this not to ridicule this Israeli perception so much as to acknowledge the ongoing post-traumatic stress disorder that shapes Israeli perceptions of the world and makes it difficult for them to make accurate interpretations of the intentions and dangers they face. I've discussed this in my new book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, where I explore in more detail how this reality has distorted daily life in Israel. The Israeli right-wingers tend to call anyone seeking peace with the Palestinians a Nazi or a Hitler. Some even called former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin a Hitler and thereby created the political climate in which he was assassinated by a religious Jew. It is this pervasive trauma that makes it so easy for Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, and many Israeli people to feel justified in taking preemptive strikes against the variety of Hitlers they identify in their surroundings.

And of course, with that as their framework, the idea of nonviolence and "a strategy of generosity" that we've proposed seems absolutely insane. Hitler could not have been stopped by nonviolence in 1939, but a generosity strategy toward Germany and Eastern Europe in the 1920s from the victors of World War I could have eliminated the conditions that made possible the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s. The New Deal's generosity toward the poor and middle class prevented the fascists and anti-Semites from attaining mass support in the United States. And the original Marshall Plan after World War II, aimed at giving aid to the countries that had been our enemies in the war, helped prevent a Stalinist distortion of communism from winning mass support in European countries devastated by the carnage of war.

Say No to an Israeli or American First Strike or War with Iran!
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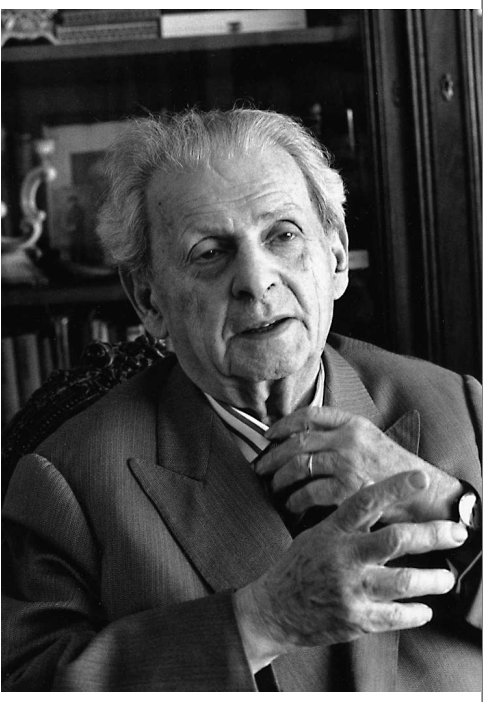
A Strategy of Generosity as an Alternative to Militarism

So imagine if the United States were in fact to acknowledge its role in overthrowing the democratically elected government of Iran, imposing the Shah, and blocking support for the more moderate elements in the Islamic revolution that overturned the Shah at the end of the 1970s. And imagine if it apologized not only to Iran, but also to all the other countries where selfish elites have worked in concert with U.S. corporations to deplete local resources at bargain rates and impede the development or continuance of small-scale indigenous agriculture. Imagine if we changed our policies so that we no longer dumped products deemed unsafe for domestic use in the Third World. And imagine if we changed our economic treaties and institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank so that they enhance the development of Third World countries instead of impoverishing them. If such policies were accompanied by the Network of Spiritual Progressives' version of the Global Marshall Plan (including its careful attention to fostering a spirit of generosity—please download and read the full version at spiritualprogressives.org/GMP or ask our office to send you a copy), that approach could substantively undermine the anti-Americanism on which the Iranian fundamentalists depend to shift the attention of their own people away from the economic failures and suffering in their own society.

If Israel were to follow the steps outlined in my book *Embracing Israel/Palestine* for achieving a lasting reconciliation and peace with the Palestinian people, the situation with Iran would also change dramatically. Does that mean that if the United States and Israel were to actually embrace and act on a strategy of generosity, all extremists would suddenly throw up their arms, learn Hebrew, dance the hora, and embrace Israel and America? Certainly not! But what this approach to the world would accomplish in only a few short years would be a huge transformation in the way both Israel and the United States are perceived, and a huge reduction in the desperation experienced by people living in poverty and by people who have long been denied respect and the recognition of their dignity. In that context, the Iranian Green Movement, which sought to overthrow the rule of the mullahs after Iran's dishonest election in 2009, would no longer be marginalized by being portrayed as a tool of U.S. imperialism or Israeli expansionism. A Global Marshall Plan backed by the United States—and a generosity of spirit by Israel as it helped create an economically and politically viable Palestinian state—would undermine the ability of the oppressive regime in Iran to take advantage of fear and legitimate anger at Israel's policies toward Palestinians and U.S. policies that impose a global economic order with vast inequalities and vast suffering. Iran's leaders would no longer be able to deflect attention from the oppressive and (*continued on page 52*)

Levinas, Hitlerism, and New Atheist Revisionism

BY JEFFREY D. BOLDT



In marked contrast to New Atheist writers Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens, who blame religion for Hitler's crimes, French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (above) saw Nazism as profoundly antireligious.

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In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, it became fashionable to view religion primarily as a source of strife. Future historians may view the rise of an intolerant new antireligious movement, New Atheism, as part of the generalized overreaction to the horror of September 11—an overreaction that also included the use of torture and mass detention, the abandonment of trial by jury, and the misguided American invasion of Iraq.

Like other atheists, the so-called New Atheists believe that there is no supernatural reality or God. But the more combative New Atheists go beyond this in claiming 1) that the religious impulse is always irrational and in opposition to reason; 2) that there is an objective secular moral standard that reason or science can apprehend; and 3) that the application of this standard leads to the conclusion that religion itself (rather than its extreme forms) is inherently dangerous and unworthy of respect. In the *Guardian*, just after September 11, Richard Dawkins laid out this view, writing that previously, "many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense," but "September 11th changed all that. Revealed faith is not harmless nonsense, it can be lethally dangerous nonsense. . . . Let's now stop being so damned respectful!"

Two of the most prominent and popular New Atheists—Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens—have engaged in a sweeping historical revisionism that goes so far as to blame religion for the genocidal crimes of Hitler and Stalin.

Ironically, near the start of the twenty-first century, even as middlebrow opinion was turning against religion, a noteworthy number of philosophy scholars began to turn toward religion as a source of secular ethical reasoning. This was illustrated by the title and argument of Hent de Vries's *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). De Vries's work took much of its argument from the tradition of French phenomenology, notably philosophers Jean-Luc Marion, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas.

An examination of the life and work of Levinas in relation to these twenty-first-century developments offers fresh insight into both the historical revisionism of the New Atheists and philosophy scholars' renewed interest in religion.

The work of Levinas was central in the turn of serious moral philosophy toward religion, and his life story is a testament to the enduring value of religious tolerance and of Judaism itself as a force for good in the world. Moreover, his article "The Philosophy of Hitlerism" illustrates the inaccuracy of many of the historical claims of the New Atheists as they relate to Nazism in particular. In marked contrast to the New Atheists, he described Nazism as profoundly antireligious and crudely materialistic—"an urging of

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the blood." A careful look at the real historical experience of an intellectual "religious renaissance" in the immediate aftermath of World War II supports Levinas's analysis, further calling into question the historical revisionism in the narrative of Nazism and Stalinism offered by the New Atheists.

Levinas's Theory of Ethical Responsibility

Levinas was certainly one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. His basic contribution was his conviction that ethics precedes ontology as the first basis of philosophy. His 1995 *New York Times* obituary notes:

> Instead of the thinking "I" epitomized in "I think, therefore I am"—the phrase with which Rene Descartes launched much of modern philosophy—Dr. Levinas began with an ethical "I." For him, even the self is possible only with its recognition of "the Other," a recognition that carries responsibility toward what is irreducibly different.

Whereas German philosopher and sometime Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger focuses on the meaning of individual being, Levinas—specifically reacting to Heidegger's integration of Nazi ideology with the philosophy of Being—seeks to restore the social nature of human life. Being, and the related "will to power," must be checked by our ethical responsibility to our fellow human beings.

While this may sound abstract, it does jibe with the most fundamental human experience. From the beginning of life, we are dependent upon others for our very survival, and this fact holds true to the very end, when we entrust our bodies to others for a dignified disposal of our remains.

For Levinas, the measure of our lives can be understood only in the context of our ethical engagement with others. Levinas makes no secret that this ethical understanding comes from Jewish sources; the philosopher also observed Halachah (Jewish law) and wrote remarkable commentaries on the Talmud. This well-known fact and his focus on transcendence have, according to Adrianne Peperzak's preface to a 1996 collection of Levinas's writings, "sometimes led to characterizations of Levinas's thought as masked theology rather than as phenomenologically rooted philosophy. . . . Levinas, however, without ever denying his roots, always insists on the philosophical character of his work."

Levinas, who was eventually held as a prisoner of war by the Nazis, offered a prescient analysis in 1934 of Hitler's materialist, pseudo-biological ideology. "Hitlerism is more than a contagion or madness," he wrote, "it is an awakening of elementary feelings."

Julia Tabor

Levinas writes in the universal and secular language of philosophy and without resort to either sectarian special pleading or supernatural intervention. Rather, he took from Judaism and made secular the idea that every individual is at once valuable herself and ethically obligated to the equally valuable "other." In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida, Levinas's protégé, said Levinas once confessed that his own understanding of ethics was about "the holy, the holiest of the holy," which included first and foremost his fellow human beings. But the only path to the holy, and thus to the possibility of transcendence, is through the effort to provide justice to others.

A Philosophy Born of Struggle and Persecution

Levinas was born in Lithuania in 1905 and immigrated to France in 1923. The languages of his family were Russian and Hebrew. The experience of reading both the great Russian novelists and the Hebrew Bible as a young man had a decisive impact on his philosophy. In 1928, having learned both French and German, he studied in Germany under both Heidegger and Edmund Husserl at the University of Freiburg. He was largely responsible for introducing both thinkers, and phenomenology, to French philosophy.

New Atheist scholars such as Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris (pictured here from top to bottom) argue that religion itself is inherently dangerous. They "appear to speak from a place far closer to what Levinas would describe as . . . violent 'urgings of the blood' than can be justified," the author writes.

The postwar urgency that Levinas felt about the need for responsibility and justice was rooted in his own experience as a French prisoner of war held by the Nazis in Germany. In quarters reserved for Jewish prisoners of war, he spent four years at hard labor at Fallingsbotel camp. His biographer Saloman Malka writes that six or seven days a week, Levinas would work as a wood-cutter, "chopping, sawing, felling trees, the hands swollen in gloves that have to be carefully patched up again at night in the barrack if you don't want to lose your fingers to frostbite."

After working all day and marching for hours through the winter woods, the prisoners were sometimes greeted by a friendly little dog, which Levinas called "the last Kantian in Germany." A man of great energy, the philosopher would return from such days to study Hegel in the language of his captors.

On the day of his release from prison, Levinas learned that the Nazis had murdered his parents, his wife's parents, and most of his own family in his native Lithuania. Much earlier, he had felt this possibility in his bones and had reached out to his fellow "spiritual progressives" in passionately articulating his concerns in 1934.

Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism

By 1934, at just twenty-eight years old and years before his captivity, Levinas wrote a prescient and highly original piece entitled, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism." In eight pages published in the liberal Catholic journal *Esprit,* he anticipates the horrors of the Shoah.

As scholar Robert J.S. Manning has pointed out, Levinas describes Hitlerism and the Nazi movement as fundamentally antireligious and opposed to the pursuit of personal freedom that he saw as characterizing Judaism, Christianity, and liberalism. In Judaism and Christianity, each man had the dignity of a soul and the freedom to accept or reject the religious imperative of justice—albeit God's justice. Levinas claims that looked at philosophically, both Judaism and Christianity offer an individual the chance to find "something in the present with which they can modify or efface the past."

In contrast he portrays Hitlerism as guided by "an awakening of fundamental feelings" that were largely fixed by history and biological inevitability. For Levinas—writing well before knowledge of the death camps—the Nazis had already raised questions about "the very humanity of man." The Nazis are "simplistic" but in touch with the "primitive powers" of an "elementary force," he writes. "They awaken the secret nostalgia within the German soul. Hitlerism is more than a contagion or a madness; it is an awakening of elementary feelings . . . [a] frighteningly dangerous phenomenon." Levinas describes the Nazis' "new conception of man" in the very Volkish and Social Darwinist terms used by Nazi propaganda itself. As Manning writes in the collection *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, the "biological factors" cited by Levinas include "the mysterious urgings of the blood" and "the appeals of heredity and the past."

Levinas wrote these reflections just after the February 1934 right-wing riots that threatened the Third Republic. The nascent French Popular Front movement was trying to stave off a far-right coup d'état. In "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," he argues that liberalism—like Judaism and Christianity—is mostly about personal freedom:

> In the world of liberalism, man is not weighted down by a History in choosing his destiny. . . . For him, they are only logical possibilities that present themselves to a dispassionate reason that makes choices while forever keeping its distance.

In other words, the task of liberalism is to live up to its own promises of freedom and dignity.

Marxism, Levinas argues, is about meeting material needs rather than obtaining freedom. But the break with liberalism is not "a definitive one" in Marxism, because "to become conscious of one's social situation is, even for Marx, to free oneself of the fatalism entailed by that situation." But, while he describes Marxism as (*continued on page 53*)

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Rethinking the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit

BY BRIAN McLAREN

Some theologians have concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity is irredeemably tarnished by its historical use by Christian heresy-hunters. The dynamic approach of Social Trinitarianism, however, transforms the doctrine into a powerful vision of benevolent community.

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I was sitting on the balcony of a high-rise hotel in Southern California. The Pacific Ocean sparkled under a smog-free sky. A rabbi we'll call Sol was enjoying the view with me. I had originally met Sol a few years earlier through a phone call: "I represent a group of several dozen rabbis," he said, "who have read all of your books. We would like to meet with you sometime." I wasn't expecting that! Since that first phone call, we had met a couple of times and a warm friendship had begun. I was in his neighborhood to speak at a local seminary, so he kindly came by to say hello.

"Sol, we've become good enough friends now that I can ask you something kind of personal, right?" I asked.

"Sure. Anything."

"What do you think of Jesus? I'm not asking that as a test question or as a prelude to an evangelistic presentation," I explained. "I'm just curious."

"Of course, he was one of ours," Sol said. "He was a Jew in the prophetic tradition. And many of my colleagues would agree with me when I say I think he spoke from God, and the leaders of the priestly tradition were wrong to reject him."

There was a pause. We both surveyed the Pacific Ocean shimmering in the afternoon sun. Then Sol continued, "But look, after two thousand years of anti-Semitism, I hope you won't expect us to get excited about the doctrine of the Trinity anytime soon."

I hope you can feel the power of his words. Confessing the Trinity served as the litmus test of acceptability in much of European history, forcing Jews into the status of outsiders and outcasts, noncitizens in "Christian nations." This exclusion and marginalization led to ghettoes and pogroms, and eventually to gas chambers, as James Caroll has discussed in his book *Constantine's Sword*. Muslims similarly experienced Trinitarian and related doctrines as a threat, as have Hindus, Buddhists, and members of indigenous religions.

Can Trinitarian Doctrine Be Redeemed?

Many sensitive Christians have concluded that Trinitarian doctrines are irredeemable, that they must be quietly minimized if not outright abandoned. Trinitarian controver-

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In Social Trinitarianism, relationships with others are seen as constitutive of personhood, so the three persons of the Holy Trinity are not merely one with each other, they are "one in each other." Scholars trace this approach back to St. Gregory of Nazianzus (above), a fourth-century theologian.

sies have been so much a part of the problem that Trinitarian thought cannot be part of the solution.

I agree they have been part of the problem. But I believe that Trinitarian doctrine—held as a healing teaching, not as an imperial loyalty test—can, properly understood and practiced, contribute much to the solution.

I find wisdom in this passage in *Anatheism* by Richard Kearney:

> The best way to tackle the violent tendency within religious conviction is to go all the way down to the source that religion does not master and that refuses to be rendered into dogmatic formulae or ideological manifestos. . . . It is in this hearkening to a source beyond and beneath oneself, a superfluity one does not possess or manipulate, that we may find new resources for nonviolent resistance and peace.

Few doctrines can surpass the doctrine of the Trinity in either the fervency or the ambiguity with which it is held. The Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon are seemingly convened all over again whenever the doctrine of the Trinity is seriously discussed, and seemingly orthodox Christians expose themselves—often to their own surprise—as closet adoptionists or Arians, unconscious Nestorians or Apollinarians, or implicit monophysitists or monothelitists. (I expect that some doctrinal experts will find fault with something I say about the Trinity.) The doctrine of the Trinity has been so central to the Christian faith that to deny it, and sometimes even to affirm it in a new way, has been an excommunicable offense.

As a result, many good Christians—perhaps most—avoid thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity as studiously as they avoid denying it. The less they think about it, the less they'll say about it, and the less trouble they'll get in for misspeaking about it. So, without venturing too far into the conceptual minefields of *homo-ousios* and *hypostases*, of being and persons, of nature and will, they try to uphold a few basic mysteries—that God is one and in some sense three; that Christ is man and in some sense God; that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son but in some sense not reducible to the Father and the Son.

Most Christians understand that the doctrine of the Trinity is historically important, but they seldom understand why. Some suspect that the doctrine is little more than a sinister tool of mind and speech control, used from the time of Constantine to centralize the power of heresy-hunters and to test Christian teachers on their submission to church authority. Others simply accept that Trinitarian doctrine is part of the gospel bargain: if you want to go to heaven, here's what God requires you to assent to. (The corollary professional bargain might be expressed like this: "If you want to have a job in a Christian institution, here's something you have to say you believe.") Relatively few have grappled with the philosophical, biblical, and practical issues that energized Trinitarian controversies throughout Christian history. Fewer still have critically examined how the doctrine has been abused as a weapon against others through history, as my rabbi friend pointed out. And even fewer have imagined how the doctrine could become a bridge rather than a barrier in the future.

Social Trinitarianism

What might a strong-benevolent holding of Trinitarian theology look like? For starters we could explore an approach called Social Trinitarianism.

Social Trinitarianism is by no means a new approach: it has its origins in the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, especially Gregory of Nazianzus. In the eighth century, it was further explored by John of Damascus. It has been revitalized in recent decades by a range of theologians including Eastern Orthodox thinkers like John Zizoulas, Protestants like Jurgen Moltmann, and Evangelicals like Stanley Grenz, Miroslav Volf, and J. Baxter Krueger. At the heart of Social Trinitarianism is the concept of perichoresis, which images God as a dynamic (*continued on page 56*)

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Privacy and Personhood in a World Without Mystery

BY RAFAEL CHODOS

It will not do merely to complain about the widespread and outrageous invasions of privacy that citizens of the developed world constantly suffer, nor to legislate against them one by one. If we really want to fix the privacy problem, we have to identify the underlying shift in society's attitudes toward what it means to be *a person*.

These invasions of our privacy come from government, which subjects our emails, our phone calls, our movements, our financial affairs, and many aspects of our behavior to meticulous surveillance. These invasions come from our employers, who monitor our performance and nonperformance in the workplace. They come from the marketplace, where the old adage, "know your customer," has been carried to extremes that could not have been imagined as recently as ten years ago. From grocery store loyalty cards and the "customer analytics" that they support to our credit card transaction histories and our web browsing histories—these data sources are now all collated and analyzed to allow prospective vendors to target us in their advertising ever more accurately. Our mere participation in the marketplace exposes us to a never-ending onslaught of intrusive appeals to purchase and to consume.

The old adage, "Know your customer," has been carried to extremes. Are these invasions of privacy starting to unravel our very notion of personhood?

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We may ask ourselves whether these invasions of privacy are something new, or whether they are merely contemporary versions of perennial patterns of social behavior. Naturally, the technology that supports information-gathering and analysis is quite new. But government surveillance has often been intense; before electronic eavesdropping was available, neighbors were enlisted to spy on each other and report to the intelligence-gathering bureaucracy. The sweatshops and factory floors of the nineteenth and early twentieth century did not allow any solitude or privacy in the first place, and supervisors constantly monitored the workplace. The consumer marketplace, however, does appear to have been a less monitored environment in the years leading up to the 1960s. Before credit cards became widespread, when most transactions were carried out with cash rather than bank checks, one could buy a vanilla ice cream cone without being solicited to buy vanilla milkshakes and related products because the purchase of the cone left no "tracks." It was the shift to credit cards and other "money substitutes" that facilitated

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the intense monitoring we take for granted today—and perhaps we should view that as something new.

But the real shift is something much, much deeper. It has to do with our conception of personhood and the notion of mystery as it relates to personhood.

Judeo-Christian Conceptions of the Unknowable Self

Throughout history every person has been viewed as having a core or center that is ultimately unknowable. All the information that might be accumulated about that person was seen as a set of clues or hints about that core, but no matter how much information was accumulated, each person and all those who interacted with that person believed that there was something in the core, something at the center that could not be named or known: it was the mystery that animated that person's whole being. That mystery was unknowable even to oneself: one might struggle to know oneself and yet never quite succeed.

As technology tracks our movements, purchases, and social activities, we begin to define ourselves as mere data profiles. By locking ourselves into these rubrics, we risk losing the sense of mystery necessary to hold our communities together.

The classical expression of this idea of the self is found in the Hebrew Bible's notion that no one can see God's face and live (Exodus 19, 33). It is of course curious that God speaks to Moses but does not allow Moses to see God's face, that hearing God's voice is a good thing but that seeing God's face leads to immediate death. This is because the voice is produced linearly and in context and does not reveal the full nature of the speaker. But to see the speaker face-to-face is to see God's whole being and its limits, and to peer into the window of the soul and the mystery at the core—and that is unavailable.

To the extent that the Hebrew Bible's notion of God is a projection of the human sense of self, it represents an advance over the polytheistic religions of the period: instead of the gods and goddesses being projections of parts of the self—such as beauty or wisdom (as were the Greek goddesses Athena and Aphrodite)—or merely characters in a narrative or placeholders in a hierarchy (like Isis and Osiris), the Hebrew Bible's God was a complete personality with a mystery at the core. The Hebrew Bible did not present a monotheistic world view; instead, God's first commandment was, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The implication is clear that God was one among many—but God was a special One; God was unknowable, and God's face could not be seen.

Personhood and Profile Data

The notion of a person as having a mystery at the core has persisted throughout Western history. But it is changing now. People now begin to think of themselves as the sum total of the information that is gathered about them: their DNA, their demographic information, their medical history, their transactional history, their "interests" and affiliations. Add all these up and, we are told, we have the totality of each person. And we, and the community in which we live, begin to buy into this new conception of personhood: we create our Facebook profiles, we fill out our job applications and our census forms, and we keep careful records of our purchases and expenditures and receipts. By the time our records are complete, we come to believe that we know ourselves. The information is no longer a pathway into the mystery. The mystery is gone, and the information we have is an access point to any information that may be missing.

We each begin to see ourselves this way, and the community also sees us this way. We are targeted as consumers via our information. Our medical care and preventive regimens, and soon our insurance programs, are constructed this way. Our dating services treat us this way. Our prospective employers treat us this way. And our governments treat us this way. Indeed all the enterprises with which we interact (*continued on page 60*)

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The Difference Between Holy and Nice

The Religious Counterculture

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

What makes a religious space feel holy? Is it the deep, loving relationships among congregants? Here, worshippers engage in the "laying on of hands" during a Pentecostal ordination service in the United Kingdom.

David Butcher

There could be no more scathing indictment of a religious institution than the one I heard recently from the mouth of a fourteen-year-old named Jasleen:

> When I was little, my family used to belong to a Seventh-Day Adventist church. I always looked forward to Saturdays when everybody was together all day, eating together, hanging out, calling each other "hey, brother," "hey, sister." When people talked to you, it felt like it was real, like, *religious love*. But here at this church, it's different. Here when they talk to you, it feels like they're being polite.

Polite. What could possibly be more antithetical to the heart of religion than the cool reserve of social propriety implied by that word? Politeness and its close cousin "appropriateness" more aptly describe the selection of the right fork for the salad course than anything religious. This girl was talking about a Unitarian Universalist congregation, but she could have been talking about any one of thousands of liberal religious communities. We've all seen it—the chilly, respectful friendliness; the ginger embrace that somehow reminds us of our separateness; the newcomers ignored at an Oneg Shabbat or coffee hour. We try to solve the problem through deputizing official badge-wearing "welcomers" or offering trainings in "hospitality" and, while some progress is sometimes made, the congregation is rarely transformed by these ex post facto measures into a community as religiously loving as the one described by Jasleen.

Worshipping at the Altar of Freedom

The problem of politeness opens a window onto one of the larger contradictions in liberal and progressive thought. We want community to be available to us—warm, nurturing, unconditionally embracing community—but we also fiercely defend our personal right not to join in. We want spiritual depth but we want to cherry-pick from our religious traditions and evaluate each community practice and article of faith on its own merits. We insist that we choose our communities and retain the right to leave at any time.

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This is a legacy of the Enlightenment and of seventeenth-century thinkers like John Locke and Rene Descartes who valorized individual liberty. They asserted the primacy of the individual as a rational, choosing actor who exists complete unto himself (masculine pronoun intended) and enters into voluntary contracts with the larger society. Culture and tradition became subject to independent evaluation by the individual. The *rights* of the individual vis-à-vis the community became of greater concern than his obligations to that community. Clearly this was and is a necessary corrective to the institutional violence of oppressive religious traditions and social structures. We can trace a happy evolution from this thinking to the feminist and civil rights movements 300 years later.

But many liberals today have taken the concern for rights, liberty, and individualism to the extreme. I'm thinking particularly of modern liberal movements, including Reform Judaism, American Buddhism, yoga communities, Unitarian Universalism, and unaffiliated spiritual progressives. Often these movements have come to fetishize freedom as an end in itself—*the* end in itself—that trumps all other values.

I was particularly struck in this regard by a recent discussion with a group of Unitarian Universalists. I was leading an exercise in which I had asked them to imagine a tight-knit community of "really religious, really observant Unitarian Universalists." I asked them to envision what foods members of this hypothetical community would eat, what they would wear, how they would raise their children, and how they would spend their time and money. What practices would be required? What would be prohibited? Category by category, the response was the same: nothing would be required, nothing prohibited. I challenged them on this point. No foods would be prohibited? Not even foods grown by farmworkers for slave wages? Not even foods made through extreme cruelty to animals? Not even foods whose manufacturing pollutes rivers and oceans? Nothing prohibited? The response they consistently gave was that while people in this hypothetical community would be naturally inclined to avoid such foods, there would be no community-wide laws governing their practices. People would opt to do the right thing presumably because they would be good people who always try to do the right thing within reason.

Most religious communities succeed in feeling "nice" or polite. A harder task is tapping into the radical inclusivity and transformative love at the heart of "Beloved Community."

Jay Hariani

Whether or not good people left to their own devices generally do the right thing is a debate for another time. Suffice it to say for now that religious traditions have developed detailed ethical commandments and elaborate technologies for remembering those commandments precisely because doing the right thing consistently is hard. But clearly, to this particular group of religious liberals, what people ultimately do with their freedom of choice is of less concern than *that* they have this freedom. Yes, they value community and social justice and caring for the earth, but freedom is a higher value still.

This story is anecdotal, but there is ample evidence that this ranking of individual freedom above community interests is ubiquitous in this country, not even just among liberals but in the mainstream of American culture. In fact, politically, the positions tend to be reversed. Political liberals advocate for greater social accountability—universal health care, for example. Conservatives defend individual liberty—the right of an employer, for example, to deny health coverage for contraception even if people's access to contraception is clearly of benefit to the wider society. But whatever we label it, the trend in American culture has been inexorably toward a world of individuals, each doing his or her own thing. Even as far back as 1978, a Gallup poll found that 80 percent of Americans believed that "an individual should arrive at his or her religious beliefs independently of any churches or synagogues." Our communities are increasingly seen as external to who we are as people. Take this trend to its logical extreme and we individuals might still form communities, but they would be communities to which (*continued on page 60*)

PLAYFUL DISTRACTIONS

BURNING MAN, "WORLD OF WARCRAFT," AND OTHER PLAYFUL DISTRACTIONS

We all need playful distractions and, as we rejoice in summertime, we are called back to our connection with the earth, with our inner spiritual depths, and with our highest visions of the good. But do Burning Man, "World of Warcraft," and "EverQuest" actually provide us with the kind of distraction that nourishes our souls, or do they in some ways deplete us? After a week at Burning Man or many hours spent with multiplayer online role-playing games, are we more or less ready to engage in the task of *tikkun*—the healing and transformation of our world? Do we gain new energies and a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to beauty and creativity, or are we provided with the latest form of the "opiate of the masses"—a form of religion for the upper middle class and the variety of "me" generations that keeps us from confronting grave environmental, economic, and spiritual crises? Do many turn to private distractions to fill these voids in their lives? Can spiritual progressives play a role in transforming the meaning of these pursuits? Or are they intrinsically destined to remain avenues of escape rather than healing sources of empowerment?

Neil Girling (theblight.net)

Burning Man, Desire, and the Culture of Empire

BY FENTON JOHNSON

To a consciousness formed in gentle deciduous lands, the vista is unimaginably bleak: the toxic, colorless void of a Nevada alkali lake bed, a blank white canvas the size of Rhode Island, flat as water and dry as parchment on which there lives nothing visible to the naked eye, remnant of the Pleistocene stretching to a barely visible horizon of tawn and purple mountains. Hot winds blow from all points of the compass and shift direction in an instant, whipping the playa into dust devils that spiral into a cloudless blue sky. At times a steady wind blows for interminable hours, during which dust fine as talc clogs the pores and lungs and reduces the world beyond arm's length to a white blur. We might be inhabitants of one of Calvino's invisible cities except that only mad dogs and white men would occupy such a godforsaken place. God / forsaken: in fact, though the concept and execution are religious at their cores, God is the word least likely to be heard. At this moment of the American Empire's decline, this science fiction setting is home for our premier arts festival, anointed by the *Los Angeles Times* as the "current hot ticket" for academic study—the landscape of Burning Man.

Each year artists and pretenders from around the world camp here in the heat of late August, 150 miles north of Reno, laying out streets, building structures to house basic services (information, medical assistance, security, latrines), and constructing sculptures and installations, bars, restaurants, dance halls, and New Age amusements—e.g., an outdoor roller skating disco, or a giant vagina through which you wiggle to be reborn into friends' waiting hands. The playa is the playground of our most powerful image makers—the software engineers and computer graphic designers of Lucasfilm, DreamWorks, Google, and Pixar who flee the constraints of civilization to play in what amounts to a free-wheeling, unregulated protectorate of California.

FENTON JOHNSON is the author of five books, including most recently *Keeping Faith: A Skeptic's Journey among Christian and Buddhist Monks*. You may find more of his work at fentonjohnson.com.

More than 50,000 people gather each year to burn a wooden effigy at this eight-day festival, which describes itself as "part of a solution to our modern malaise."

Neil Girling (theblight.net)

For the eight-day duration of the festival, a central shade structure sells ice and coffee; all other money exchanges are prohibited. As an aspect of this gift economy, Burners are asked to bring food and drink for ourselves and for others, a policy that inspires 24/7 offerings of free pancakes and open-bar cocktail parties. We are also asked to give something of ourselves in a way that expresses our creative spirit while honoring the festival motto "Leave No Trace"—a visitor at any other time of year should never suspect that for eight days 50,000-plus people called this dustbowl home.

The San Francisco Bay Area has a history of incubating movements that, for better and worse, influenced national and international culture—the Beat Generation and the unrestrained hippies who succeeded it, the Summer of Love and the unrestrained materialism that succeeded it, Silicon Valley and the unrestrained materialism that accompanies it, and now the obsession with sustainability as the politically correct response to the environmental degradation wrought by all that unrestrained materialism.

If we believe what scientists tell us about climate change, our only intellectually respectable option is despair, but there's no future in despair. Whereas Burning Man offers, according to its website, "part of a solution to our modern

malaise," a claim endorsed by a significant percentage of the hip folks west of the Rockies. I go to Burning Man to discover how it motivates people alienated from church and cynical about government; to find if it may unlock one door to learning and teaching how we may better live in harmony with each other and the planet; and to see if it lives up to its hype.

Communion at the Feet of the Man

Late August, 2010: On arriving for my first and probably last Burning Man, I join the homesteaders in staking our claim on the "streets," concentric arcs in the dust some five miles in diameter and having as their focal point a seventy-foot tower topped by a stylized Man. The playa is already dotted with dozens of elaborate, large-scale sculptures and art projects, each more fantastic than the next.

Encountered in this setting, every created object or spectacle is so improbable as to suggest divine intervention: an undulant metal sound sculpture whose speakers range from tiny to huge, under and around and through which I wander; a forty-foot globe that spits methane-fueled flames; a fifty-foot wire mesh woman lit from within at night; a graceful shade structure, rebar trees draped with perforated rubbery scarves, housing a speaker's corner under which a physicist holds forth on the hoaxes he claims Deepak Chopra perpetrates in the name of string theory. Among these sculptures roam art cars—mobile sculptures constructed over a car or a truck. Most impressively, a life-sized silver Tyrannosaurus Rex turns its head, opens and closes great claws and spouts a roar of flame from distended jaws. The animal kingdom is popular, maybe in homage to how fast we're depleting it—there are mobile barracudas, praying mantises, butterflies, caterpillars, a snail formed of beaten copper.

Sometime after midnight on the playa: I have been to the Temple of Flux to inscribe the names of the honored dead. Thousands of people are biking or walking from one installation or camp to another, but we might be galaxies in space, so vast are the distances between us. Then the wind picks up and dust swallows the Man, who becomes a smudge of green light in the darkness. Glow lamps and headlights that had been wandering haphazardly turn as one as, in obedience to some atavistic instinct, several thousand people seek shelter—no, not shelter, there is no shelter, but only companionship, *communion* at the feet of the Man.

Social Movement or Manifest Destiny?

From the Burning Man website:

> Burning Man is not confined to the artificial limits of Black Rock City. It is more than an event. It has become a social movement. Very typically, participants found significant new relationships or resolve to undertake ambitious projects as a result of their experience. Just as often, they end old relationships, deciding to get divorced or quit their jobs. The typical statement one hears sounds like a conversion experience: "Burning Man has changed my life," and this is manifestly true. Few remain indifferent or return sated.

A fellow Burner tells me she's following the Diamond Heart path, which draws on "every" religious tradition. "Every?" I ask, and she lists Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, transpersonal psychology, and "the somatic connection between the body and the energy fields."

The great three-cornered stool of Western civilization—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—does not make her list, even as Burning Man's organizers sit firmly astride that stool. The Man-to-be-burned invites comparison to other, more famous martyrs, but more significant is the participants' pervasive belief in redemption, enormous changes at the last minute ("Burning Man has changed my life"), American exceptionalism, and progress, our most important product.

A crooked but unbroken line extends from the "city on a hill" of John Winthrop's 1630 sermon aboard the Puritan ship *Arabella* to this alkali plain in Nevada. Burners are proselytizers, and the light that animates their eyes not unlike what I encounter in the Jehovah's Witnesses who visit my home Saturday mornings. Instead of seeing Burning Man as "part of a solution to our modern malaise," I can as easily see it as a late-stage expression of manifest destiny—the absolute need of white men to impose our will on every landscape, even the most remote and forbidding. Its gift economy does not eliminate money but requires that we spend it—a lot of it—before we arrive, in contrast to earlier utopian experiments that presumed frugality. I make myself uncomfortable by pointing

Burners often come seeking companionship and share a belief in the possibility of sudden, profound personal transformation. The festival's website reports that participants tend to form "significant new relationships or resolve to undertake ambitious projects as a result of their experience."

Creative Commons/Dina Litovsky

Art installations like this "Dust City Diner"—a 1950s-style eatery flawlessly recreated amid the dust devils of the Black Rock Desert—add to the festival's surreal atmosphere. Installations range from a giant vagina through which one can be "reborn" to architectural structures like the "Temple of Transition" pictured on the cover of this magazine and again on page 19.

Vertummus (4sightfoto.com)

out that the drugs fueling the party arrive as the result of untold suffering, and later I make everyone uncomfortable by questioning how an event can describe itself as an experiment in "radical self-reliance" when it requires thousands of gallons of fossil fuels, twelve-volt batteries, generators, and computerized reservations of rental trucks and RVs.

Many of the installations are designed to amaze and stupefy, which isn't much of a challenge when a significant percentage of your audience is on Ecstasy. Burning Man began in 1986 as a guy event and, though women's numbers have been creeping up, the 2010 Festival was 60 percent male and overwhelmingly white; 58 percent reported incomes of less than $50,000/year, while 25 percent made $80,000/year or more; and 85 percent were under fifty years old, with the overwhelming majority under forty. This, it strikes me, is one of the great lessons of maturity: how hard it is to build something up, how easy to tear it down! Boys are socialized to build, but many of those same boys like to blow things up. There will always be people who refuse to grow up, who take greater pleasure in tearing down—witness our endless wars, watch *Avatar*. If these fiery sculptures leave a lasting impression, it is of awe; and awe, as Edmund Burke pointed out centuries ago, is rooted in fear—fear of what we can do and of our willingness to do it.

Love cannot live in the presence of fear. Yet there is—as there must be—the eternal hope of repair and renewal.

Late in the week, long past midnight, I visit Thunderdome, a dimly lit geodesic dome from which two harnesses are suspended. A dominatrix dressed as Barbarella selects combatants (in this case, dressed as pink rabbits), who are strapped into the harnesses and provided with padded clubs. The harnesses are hung sufficiently far apart to limit serious mayhem, but the flailing is real and the scene is not pretty. Profanity is the dominant idiom. The elegantly dependent clause is nowhere to be heard.

After one bout I leave Thunderdome to seek refuge on the farthest reaches of the playa. I wander far beyond the noise and crowds and lights, and there, in the star-spangled blackness of a moonless Nevada night, I stumble on this apparition: a flawlessly recreated 1950s diner, complete with black-and-white checkered linoleum, stainless steel napkin dispensers, and those metal creamers that spill when used. Forty miles from permanent habitation, I clamber onto a round chrome stool upholstered in black leatherette, to be served coffee and a perfectly grilled cheese sandwich, Velveeta and American on white toast. Waitresses wearing matching baby-blue uniforms sport two-foot blonde beehives and jaw in Brooklyn accents. Later there will be cheesecake. The Milky Way

twinkles overhead. A dust devil whirls by. A waitress leans across the counter and tucks two postcards featuring the Dust City Diner in my vest pocket. "Send one of dese to your muddah," she says. "And keep duh uddah one, so that tomorrow you'll know this wudden a acid trip or a dream."

Except that it *is* a dream, stranger than any acid trip. The events of my waking life usually take years to penetrate my subconscious, but the week after Burning Man I dream of it every night, drifting in and out of sleep, unsure whether I'm encountering hallucinations or memories.

Before the festival opens, crews work together building camps and art. They help one another out, feed one another, care for one another. Then the public arrives and the energy begins to corrupt. By week's end the playa is taken over by seekers wanting drugs, wanting sex, wanting—they don't know what they want, they only know the wanting, and it is a powerful force, all that unchanneled desire, all those people confusing it with sex, scratching at it as at an unhealed wound, all that choosing of the apple over paradise.

This is the story of the Fall, some version of which all the old stories teach, if only we will listen.

But we never listen. We dismiss the old stories as quaint tales even as every day we act them out. The playa is the very theater of their acting out.

Desire for the Divine

Sunrise on the playa. Music drifts from all sides, pop and salsa and under and over all the penetrating bass of techno, but no one plays the great classics (e.g., Beethoven, Bach, Mozart) with which even in the disco era deejays greeted the dawn. Somewhere an art car is playing over and over *I Want to Know What Love Is* and the pop song seems apropos. Burning / Man is QED about desire, but desire for what? Or whom? Desire to live outside time, in the state the great mystics call *perfect prayer*? Desire for God?

In writing the question I realize for the first time which, of chicken or egg, came first: desire preceded God. With its rules of grammar and syntax, human speech must necessarily be the servant of reason, but desire is the antipode of reason; and so we demand—we require—a placeholder, a word to label our longing. And so out of our boundless desire we named God.

Let us cross-examine this logic: by definition, infinity is beyond logic, beyond the capacity of reason to describe or encompass. And yet all the old stories in all the great traditions agree that God is infinite. How then may we know the Unknowable, the Infinite, God, the gods and goddesses? Surely only through that aspect of the human condition that is itself limitless: through our desire, which is not at all the same as sex; maybe a better word is *longing*.

Thus through the infinitude of our desire may we understand the infinitude of God.

Sometimes I think that God *is* desire, and that desire *is* God.

This idea, which strikes our cynical, jaded, prudish, early twenty-first-century ears as bizarre, was commonplace in the Middle Ages and lay close to the heart of the teachings of some of its most famous preachers and mystics—Bernard of Clairvaux, Abélard, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich. Some theologians of the time understood angels as pure desire, an idea that has sadly fallen by the wayside, along with the companion understanding that in the hierarchy of being, angels are inferior to humans, since they are given heaven, whereas we have to earn it.

Every human gesture begins in desire. Our post-Victorian, essentially Protestant culture insists on interpreting "desire" as "sexual desire," when—at least for *Homo sapiens*—the biological itch is merely its literal manifestation, an objective correlative of a much greater desire—for union, for communion with what many would label God and some would wisely decline to label at all.

Some scholars interpret *YHWH*, the mystical tetragrammaton spoken to Moses out of the wind, as meaning quite literally "I am what is." What *is*, at least in the human condition, is dissatisfaction, longing, desire. Desire for the good, Plato would say, desire for Beauty, which on the Burning Man website translates into desire for social justice and transformation.

At least that's the ideal, but in the practical application a lot gets lost. The party-goers, who have not thought through the event with anything like the seriousness of its organizers, arrive wanting a good high, and the festival delivers.

Nomads in Search of a Personal Revolution

In the end the Burning Man experience is so individual as to defy generalization—I write less about *what it was* than *what I wanted it to be*. It sets out to create a sacred space, which calls forth not doctrine and dogma but the dreams that live in our hearts. In a sacred space we live not in "reality" (the only word, Nabokov wrote, that ought always to be enclosed in quotation marks) but in desire—in longing—in (if one must supply a name) God.

A passage comes to mind from a letter of a Trappist monk, friend of my family:

> The return to God must come, but hard shall He have to strike before people will accept the easy and just solution. . . . The real revolution must be a personal one. Each individual must make it himself.

If Burning Man is fifty thousand nomads in search of a personal revolution, where better to seek it than the desert, archetypal landscape of seekers?

We live in a faithless age, when what so many educated people lack is not belief—there's too much of that, whether belief in the great gray-bearded Guy in the Sky to solve all our problems or belief in the power of technology to solve all our problems. We lack not *belief* but (*continued on page 61*)

Online Ministry in a Massively Multi-Player World of Warcraft

BY WILDSTREAK/SWEETWATER

I AM A GHOST in the machine. I am, really, and I am not.

Call me Wildstreak/Sweetwater. I was asked to share the story of how online gaming addiction has affected my son, but I realized I can't share that honestly without causing harm. I can't offer a happy ending, a nice wrap-up with everyone leading nice, well-adjusted lives. I don't have a solution to the crisis or a way to repair the damage that online gaming addiction has wreaked in my own family.

What I can offer is a better understanding of online gaming addiction and its spiritual effects on the players. The best way to understand something, I've found, is to become it. I have become a gamer, a role-player. I have been working "undercover" for four reasons: First, I want to reach out to the players and minister to them, offering compassion where others only condemn. I can only hope that there is someone out there who will do the same for those I love who are caught in the mire of the games and whom I cannot reach myself. Second, I seek to understand what it is that draws millions of young people to turn their backs on "real life" and submerge themselves in a world of pixels and fantasy. I seek to share this knowledge with the hope that it will support efforts to help all those who are suffering from the negative effects of online gaming addiction. Why do some people sit at a computer for hours and hours every day, building their homes in a fantasy world, rejecting reality even to the detriment of their health and relationships? Perhaps they reject the real world for good cause and the solution is for us to work to make our flesh-and-blood world better. Third, I'm a writer in search of an audience. Writing stories based on role-play is a good way to build an audience for my original work. People are guaranteed to read a story when their character is in it. If it's a compelling portrayal, they'll pass it around.

WILDSTREAK/SWEETWATER (a pseudonym) is a unicorn in the games. In the real world, jhe (gender-free pronoun) is an online minister, freelance writer, editor, and ghostwriter who gallops about the pastures of South Carolina and Georgia. Jhe has one beloved son, who loves reptiles.

And finally, my fourth reason for doing this is that I have come to love role-playing and role-players. I have come to see it as an interactive novel, the future of literary entertainment. I'm not alone.

More than Just a Game?

It's impossible to calculate exactly how many gamers are out there, but according to an article published by James Batchelor in *MCV*: *The Market for Computer and Video Games* in January 2011, "The total userbase for Sony's PlayStation Network has surpassed 60 million consumers." Sony's PlayStation Network is just one multiplayer gaming service, so that statistic doesn't even begin to count all of the people who play non-Sony online role-playing games using computers, Sega consoles, Xbox consoles, etc.

Sony is the creator of "EverQuest II," but many other game worlds also exist. Activision's "World of Warcraft" had 10.2 million subscribers at the end of 2011, according to the *New York Times*, and Trion World Inc.'s "Rift" had already attracted 1 million users within five months after its release in March 2011, according to an August 2011 *Bloomberg* article. So that adds up to 72 million players at the very minimum. My experience has been with "World of Warcraft," "EverQuest II," "EverQuest II Extended," "Second Life," "Pirates of the Caribbean," and "Rift."

Seventy-two million, minimum. Sitting at computers for hours, achieving nothing but pixel progress in real world terms. (Except on Second Life, where virtual products and services are sold for Linden dollars, which have actual monetary value. I have a friend there who makes $500 extra income per month doing this.)

Many are the 99 percent—but they have lost their voice and even their will to contribute to this society, overwhelmed as they are by the problems of "real life." And I admit, having spent many, many hours in the games, both to be there for anyone who might need counsel and emotional support in those games, and to strive to understand in order to share this experience, the allure of the fantasy world is incredibly strong. Be anyone you wish, do anything you want, fly on the

Wildstreak/Sweetwater—once a mighty "World of Warcraft" death knight—is not your typical Christian minister. Sometimes it takes a little role-playing to reach real-life individuals who are lost and wounded by a hostile world.

Laura Beckman (laurabeckman.com)

back of a dragon, ride horses, swim. Be male, be female, and make love as either. Kill without conscience, die as a hero. Torture, rape, seduce, and slay as a vampire, abandon your humanity as a vicious werewolf. These worlds are devoid of the consequence of conscience, the sting of pain.

It's only a game, after all. No harm, no foul. Just for fun. Or is there something real happening to the mind of the player? What does it do to one's soul? In the role-playing community, they say no one is ever asked to participate in a scene they are "uncomfortable" with, yet I have become friends with those who impose a strict rule of "realism" on themselves and will tolerate rape because their character could not realistically fight off the attacker. And what does this do to the mind of the attacker? Is it all a healthy working out in a safe environment of negative impulses, or can it pull the spirit down into an inescapable hell of our own making?

What happens on the metaphysical level when millions create a mental world to inhabit and infuse it with so much of their attention and energy? What happens when the creative power of thought is invoked to fashion an avatar to live through? I recently read an article that asserted that when people play games involving avatars, they "attach" to the avatars as if they were their own bodies. Is there more to it than just this?

The Work of an Online Minister

I believe that MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) can be used, just like anything else, for good or for evil. As an empathic healer, I have used them as a therapeutic modality. I use them to write stories interwoven with very subtle spiritual themes. Very subtle because, let's face it, online we're all always only seven keystrokes from "/ignore." And you can't teach a mule if you can't get, and keep, its attention. To do that in this society takes a dash of sex and a two-by-four of violence.

Some people might find some of my stories rather shocking, considering that I am a minister. I will be the first one to tell you that I am not your typical Christian minister, so please don't accuse me of hypocrisy for not acting in accordance with *your* beliefs. In my personal philosophy, sex is not the cause of the world's ills. Sexually repressed societies are much more violent than those that have a healthier, more natural view of it. The real cause of our distress in this world

is the overabundance of judgment and condemnation and the serious lack of love.

I'm a search-and-rescue angel doing my best to reach the lost in a hostile world. I'm not preaching to the choir. I slog around in the muck sometimes and I don't always come out fresh and clean. I talk dirty when the situation calls for talking dirty because some of those "bad" words pack a punch. I don't use them lightly. To me, using strong words all the time is like putting jalapeños on everything you eat. But always, always, always, my heart is focused on leading the children of God, the hosts of God, home—not by dragging them by a leash but by being the light in the darkness.

I can be hurt badly, if I allow it—if I forget my spiritual center or my purpose—and I have been. In and out of the games I can be hurt because of what I do for love of the One Spirit that is above all, in all, and through all. I trust, in the end, that it will all be worth it.

The Fast-Paced World of Normal Players

As in the real world, there are all kinds of people in the game worlds. Not all gamers are misfits and malcontents. The most basic division is between the role-players (known by insiders as "RPers") and the "normal" players. As a writer, I gravitated toward the role-players. It just occurred to me that we role-players don't even have an imaginative name for the normal players. We may have to remedy that.

In any case, these normal players take the game very seriously. They are drawn into the play for the game's story content, the loot, and the excitement of a team bringing down a "boss." Although they need what I have to offer the most, they are practically unreachable for someone like me—I don't have a fast enough computer and maybe not even fast enough reflexes to be accepted by them. They are the raiders, the Battleground heroes. They have their own language, codes for everything, and you don't want to be branded a *noob* (newbie). If you mess up with them, they can be absolutely vicious. You get kicked from the group and made to feel like the stupidest person in the world, and believe me, being stupid or slow is a capital crime with them. Unforgivable. They aren't there to make friends, they are there to kill the "boss," beat the dungeon, and make off with the sexiest loot. God help you if you make a mistake that wipes out the group.

I do know some normal players who create close relationships within their circle of friends, but in my experience the young people who are the most estranged from society tend to gravitate toward this group, which is also the largest group by far. Many of these players appear to lack social skills and have skewed priorities. My first in-game contact was with a player whose goal was to get in with the best raiding guild in "World of Warcraft." He was suicidally depressed and reclusive and said he had only one real-life friend. He told me he could understand why the two students at Columbine were able to do what they did. If I had not been there for him, this seventeen-year-old boy might have killed himself and taken someone with him.

It took me a year of working with him in the game, through e-mail, and on the phone, but today he is a healthy, happy college student. I went out to lunch with him once when I went up to New York to visit my family—he is the only player from the games whom I have met in person. I spoke with him just recently and he mentioned that he had just gotten back from a spiritual retreat. His relationship with God brings him joy now.

The Literary World of Role-Play

The role-players, on the other hand, have a completely different set of rules. There are two types of role-play: regular role-play and erotic role-play. The normal players tend to think that all role-players are just looking for erotic role-play. Not true at all.

Although role-players can take the game very seriously as well, their focus is on building relationships with their characters and creating an interesting storyline. There is a strict separation between out-of-character and in-character interactions: when participants are in role-play mode, out-of-character interaction is denoted by double parentheses ((like this)). Everything else that appears in the game world is in character. Participation in stories is the way to be recognized, and helping someone "advance their storyline" can make a friend for life. Writing skills and imagination are essential; mastering the mechanics of the game is secondary. Many talented writers can be found in this group. In some role-playing guilds, the leader of the guild may not even be a high-level character, and promotion doesn't depend on level. In most games, the player creates a level-one character and gains experience through the game up to level eighty-five or ninety. Devoted normal players seem to get to maximum level with ease. As a role-player, I have never made it to level ninety on a character, but I don't mind. I may have missed the game content, but I had the satisfaction of creating my own.

Most role-players seem to have a healthier attitude toward life and their relationships than do normal players, at least in the game. They walk. They take more time to appreciate their surroundings. They look for opportunities to interact with other players, while the normal players zoom past at top speed and rudely ignore hails. Most role-players seem to understand that real life comes first. Nevertheless it is very easy to find oneself caught up in the flow of a story to the point that there is constant pressure to get back to the world so that one's character is not left out of a storyline. There is some variation in how much tolerance there will be for out-of-character interference. Often the perception (*continued on page 63*)

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All We Have in Common

Youth Dialogue Offers a New Vision for Israel/Palestine

BY PENNY HOLLAND

Israeli and Palestinian teens from Creativity for Peace get to know one another in the quiet refuge of northern New Mexico. Programs like this provide a safe space for teens to meet as equals and hear the stories and perspectives of the "enemy."

Cathy Maier Callanan/Creativity for Peace

SIXTEEN GIRLS STRAGGLE IN, a few at a time, from a long morning of poignant and difficult conversation. They are greeted by house mothers who seem to know exactly who needs a hug at this precise moment. The girls themselves exchange tears and laughter. And even amid obvious wrestling with what they have just shared and witnessed in dialogue, a tender affection fills the air. Music comes on. A few girls set about doing chores. In the living room, three take turns with a hula hoop. In the bedroom next door, several sing along as one plays guitar. Each girl makes a point of thanking me and my colleague—the volunteers who brought them lunch this day.

Surrounding us is the quiet red rock expanse of northern New Mexico. The program: Creativity for Peace, a youth dialogue camp involving therapeutic art and experiential leadership training. The girls are Palestinian and Israeli teens from Israel and the West Bank seeking a new and peaceful path toward the future.

As a psychotherapist specializing in the neuroscience of trauma, I understand that the ongoing violence in Israel and Palestine may never cease if the emphasis for resolution continues to be built upon mistrust and the defense of borders. If we truly want

PENNY HOLLAND, a psychotherapist in New Mexico, specializes in working with trauma. She believes *tikkun olam* is best achieved through healing the trauma that is cause and effect of social injustice and violence.

peace, we must highlight and strengthen solutions to the conflict that instead seek to build thoughtful relationships between Palestinians and Israelis. Programs that bring together Jewish Israeli and Palestinian youth offer such a solution. They range from efforts based in Israel/Palestine, such as Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam and Parents Circle Family Forum, to North American programs such as Seeds of Peace, Hands of Peace, and Creativity for Peace.

Learning to Listen Differently

There are many projects directed toward a peaceful relationship between Palestinians and Israelis. They range from joint economic ventures to artistic and cultural exchanges to youth leadership and dialogue programs. Whether their peace efforts are aimed at policy, politics, or products, their common goal is to enhance relationships between Israelis and Palestinians by providing a positive, equal context for knowing each other outside the conflict's violence. By understanding the neuroscience behind why relationship-based peace programs are so successful, we can promote these programs as viable alternatives for bringing about peace in the Middle East.

Teens from Hands of Peace work together on a team-building course—building trust, leadership skills, and often lifelong friendships.

Ahmed Hamad/Hands of Peace

Research in child attachment and development, trauma, and mental illness now recognizes that our abilities to interact with and respond to life's joys and challenges are initially set up within the nervous system as a result of relationships with our earliest caregivers. If caregiving provides safety and attunement to needs, the nervous system develops pathways of self-regulation, and we are able to function in a calm and thoughtful manner. If there is danger or frequently unmet needs, there is dysregulation. Because of this new research, it is now understood that the repair of trauma best occurs through the experience of positive social connection—precisely the sort of connection that youth dialogue programs can provide. Within mindful, compassionate relationships, regulation can be restored to the nervous system, and a person can access his or her capacity for empathy, critical thinking, and creative problem solving.

Youth dialogue and leadership programs are particularly inspiring as a solution to prejudice and violence because they reach the hearts and minds of Palestinians and Israelis before too many years of trauma have left a damaging imprint. Many youth dialogue programs cite as a foundational principle a quotation of Quaker peace activist Gene Knudsen Hoffman: "An enemy is one whose story we have not heard." Dottie Indyke, the executive director of Creativity for Peace, explains that for the girls of their program, "having the 'enemy' witness and help hold the pain is, in part, what leads to transformation."

In recent phone interviews, I spoke with two young women who participated in the Creativity for Peace program. Amira, a Palestinian living near Jenin in the West Bank, participated in Creativity for Peace and now serves as its Palestinian program coordinator, when she isn't teaching science. She says:

> At camp I really felt my voice was heard by the other side. I was sharing about an attack from the army during the Second Intifada—how the army imposed a curfew and told us we were not allowed to leave our homes. . . . I remember asking my parents why I couldn't go to school. But then the army came in the middle of the night and made us leave our home and go out into the streets where there were tanks. The army said our house might get damaged because they were destroying all the checkpoints, and we lived very near to one. When I was telling this story, this girl from the other side, she started to cry and said to me, "My brother is in the army; you are talking about my brother." I learned later that when this girl returned to Israel, she refused

> to serve in the army, because of my story. . . . All we hear is how much we hate Israelis and how much they hate us. You don't have a chance to know neighbors. Creativity for Peace showed me that, if we can talk, one day it will change the situation here.

Sivan is a Jewish Israeli who is studying political science in Tel Aviv. She participated in Creativity for Peace prior to her required military duty in Israel, after which she again returned to the camp as a senior leader. The dialogue camp, she says, "affects my actions, my choices, how I live, my time at the university, what I choose to believe in—not to hate, especially in this society." But mostly Sivan speaks of learning to "listen differently" at camp. One Palestinian camper, in particular, "really challenged me and made me think," she says. "I learned a lot about her history, her life . . . that it is just as important as mine. I didn't realize how much I wanted peace for her. I am afraid for mine [the Jewish people], but who will take care of her?"

It was not until the end of our conversation that Sivan mentioned the name of this Palestinian girl. It was Amira. When I told Sivan that I had spoken with Amira only a few hours earlier, she told me, "She lives thirty minutes away from me, but we can't go to each other."

Recognizing the Dignity of the "Other"

Creativity for Peace uses a therapeutic method of "compassionate dialogue" based on theories of compassionate listening, nonviolent communication, authentic speaking, and openhearted listening. Silvia Margia, the director of the group's young leader program, says, "Once we learn to listen intently and speak authentically, we can no longer ignore the pain of self or 'other,' nor hold a perception of separation." As a social worker and a Palestinian who grew up in Israel, she is passionate about this work. "Sharing and witnessing feelings can be used to bring us together," she says. "When you learn the power of these deep emotions (anger, grief)—when you own them, take responsibility for them, no longer hide from them, they can motivate you to make change. Ignoring these emotions does not allow change."

Each youth dialogue program has its unique approach to enable compassionate listening and speaking, but all agree that dialogue is the only way to break down stereotypes, build empathy, develop an internal sense of peace, and provide a direct experience of a peaceful relationship with the "other." Youth engaged in this type of dialogue become aware of the dignity of the other and the role they must play in bringing peace to the world they share.

But they are also often ridiculed as well, called "naïve" or "traitor" by their family and friends back home. For the Palestinian girls, it is often difficult to return home, where checkpoints, daily oppression, and limited opportunities are a harsh reality of their relationship to Jewish Israel. Amira tells me: "I have been called a betrayer of my people. Some of my friends support what I am doing, but other friends believe that peace is not the way. The first thing that comes to mind for them is that peace equals negative things."

For the Jewish Israeli participants, it is common that, upon their return from Creativity for Peace, they soon begin the two-year duty as soldiers required of them by the State of Israel. A few of these teens have chosen to serve at checkpoints on the West Bank in the hopes of being able to influence the way Palestinians are treated by other members of the Israeli Defense Forces. Some, like the young woman mentioned by Amira, have refused to serve in the military altogether.

North America's Role in Promoting Dialogue

Today, more than a dozen youth dialogue programs take place in North America. In addition to Creativity for Peace, other North American youth dialogue programs include Face to Face/Faith to Faith (New York), Hands of Peace (Illinois), The Jacobs International Teen Leadership Institute (California), Kids 4 Peace (Ontario), Middle East Peace Camp for Children (Washington), Noar l'Noar (California), Peace It Together

After a hope-filled camp experience, Israelis and Palestinians return home to the grim reality of the conflict. Israeli teens are required to serve in the army. Palestinians from the West Bank endure the daily humiliation of Israeli checkpoints. Without follow-up programs, dialogue camp alumni can quickly become disillusioned.

Top: Creative Commons/Israel Defense Forces Bottom: Oren Ziv (activestills.org)

Large structural changes are needed to bring about peace in the Middle East, but social transformations also need to happen for those changes to feel possible. Therapeutic activities such as this art project at Creativity for Peace offer one small way to start the healing.

Cathy Maier Callanan/Creativity for Peace

(British Columbia), Project Triumph (California), Seeds of Peace (Maine), and Seeking Common Ground's program Building Bridges for Peace (Colorado).

Many contemporary dialogue programs trace their roots to the efforts of organizations based in Israel and Palestine. Parents Circle Family Forum, Oasis of Peace, One Voice, Ta'ayush, Givat Haviva, Reut Sadaka, Mejdi, Hamidrasha, and the Arhava Institute's dialogue programs have led the way in changing attitude, behavior, and policy in the region. A book published by Neve Shalom in 2004, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue: The School for Peace Approach*, explores "cross-cultural encounter as an educational approach used to address conflict." The aim of all these programs is to "promote a genuine and direct dialogue" and thereby bring about social change.

Most North America-based youth dialogue programs begin with a summer intensive program varying in length from one to three weeks. They typically center around an extensive daily dialogue process supported by experiential activities that include art, physical challenge, cultural exchange, and social interaction. Some organizations, such as Peace It Together, focus on collaborative film-making, yielding films that are sometimes later used in-country as a vehicle for the youth to share their experiences and promote peace within their communities. (*continued on page 64*)

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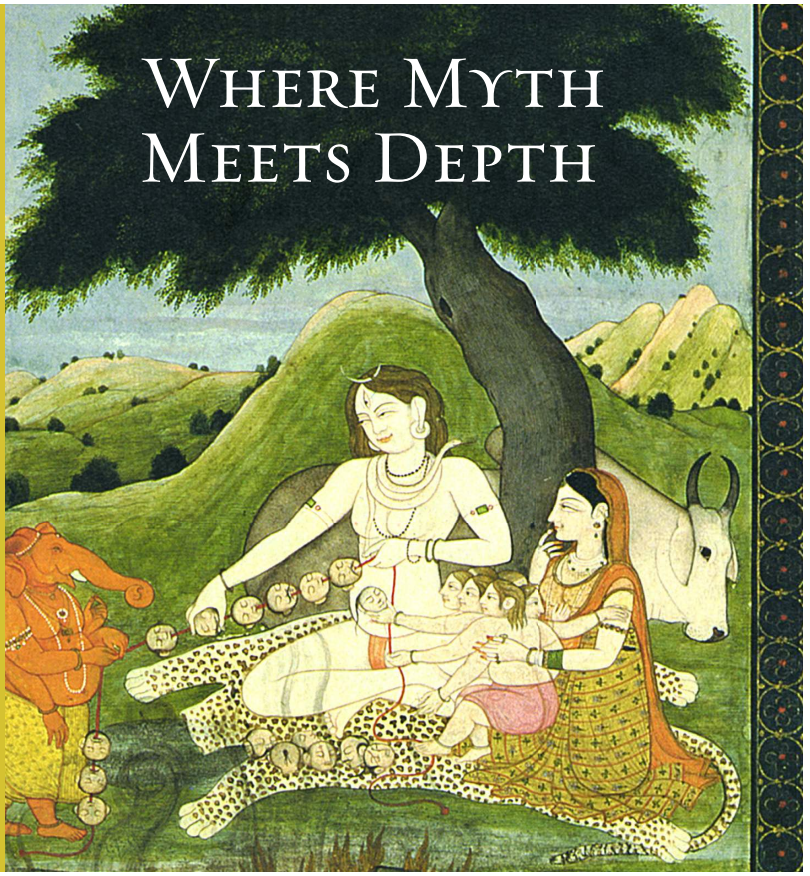

Statism and Anti-Statism

Reflections on Israel's Legitimacy Crisis

BY NATHANIEL BERMAN

In 1915, the young Gershom Scholem, already a passionate Zionist and rebel against the assimilationist German Jewish bourgeoisie, wrote the following lines, certain to shock American Zionist ears in 2012:

> [Herzl's] only thought was: the Jewish State. And that we reject. For we preach anarchism. That is, we do not want a State, but rather a free society. . . . We as Jews know enough of the dreadful idolatry of the State . . . to pray to it and to offer it our children as a willing sacrifice to its unquenchable greed and lust for power. We Jews are no *Staatsvolk*.

Intra-Jewish—and even intra-Zionist—contestations have long existed over the legitimacy of the state. Some Haredi Jews, such as these Neturei Karta protesters in New York, hold religiously principled anti-Zionist views. Most Haredim, however, view the State of Israel as no more or less legitimate than a non-Jewish state.

Ben Piven

I begin with these lines from Scholem as a way of putting into perspective the current campaign to combat the "delegitimization of the State of Israel." Much of the political activity of the world Jewish community today is being devoted to this campaign, with efforts conducted by a large range of actors, including the Israeli diplomatic corps, nongovernmental Jewish organizations, and even student activists on college campuses. What these efforts seem to ignore, however, is the extent to which the question of the "legitimacy of the state" has long been the subject of intra-Jewish, and even intra-Zionist, contestation—contestation that has only intensified over the past generation.

Indeed, much of the recent political turbulence in Israel may be understood as consisting of a broad array of challenges to the legitimacy of the state. Such challenges come from diverse social sectors, each of which is also sharply divided by conflicting attitudes toward the state. American Jews concerned with Israel need to consider the meaning of solidarity with "Israel" or even "Zionism" in view of the current turbulence. In today's Israeli political culture, opposition to the state takes a wide variety of forms, ranging from principled anti-statism to rejection of the state in its current form on diverse grounds. A review of some of the recent turbulence can serve to highlight the breadth of this phenomenon, which has recently given rise to high-profile manifestations across the Israeli religious and political spectrum.

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Israeli anarchists are known for their regular participation in Palestinian-led demonstrations against the wall. The Israeli security forces raided this anarchist's home, leaving it in disarray following a 2009 Anarchists Against the Wall protest at an Israeli Air Force base in northern Tel Aviv.

Oren Ziv (activestills.org)

A Perennial Debate Among Zionists

Before proceeding to that review, it is important to note briefly that the statism/anti-statism opposition has been a flashpoint of intra-Zionist contestation from the earliest phases of the movement. There is even a well-known Hebrew term for statism: *mamlachtiyut,* which richly evokes this perennial theme of polemics for those familiar with Zionist history. The term is most frequently associated with David Ben-Gurion and his contested view that the establishment of the State of Israel signified a break with Zionism as a non-state political/cultural/religious movement. Mamlachtiyut was advanced as the opposite of *tenu'atiyut* (movement-ism) or *miflagtiyut* (party-ism).

As a political program, Ben-Gurion's statism can be viewed as the implementation of the famous definition of the state given by Max Weber: that entity which holds a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence in a given territory. Ben-Gurion sought to put this Weberian conception into quite literal practice immediately upon establishment of the State of Israel through the crushing of the independent pre-state militias—on the one hand, dismantling the left-wing Palmach, on the other hand, conducting a military assault on a ship bearing arms for the right-wing Irgun. Nonetheless, despite these muscular actions, the contestation of mamlachtiyut never really disappeared from the Israeli and Zionist scene and has resurfaced in increasingly sharp form in the post-1967 era.

Perhaps the most well-known embodiment of this perennial debate in our era consists of the widely divergent attitudes toward the state within the religious settler movement. In this sector, one finds many with a fierce loyalty to the state—a hyper-patriotism that ardently seeks only to extend the state's full sway over the occupied territories. By contrast, however, one also finds settlers who reject any hint of subordinating to the state the historic claims of the Jewish nation to the Land of Israel or the supreme authority of religious law (Halachah) to social governance. This second group includes those who call for passive, active, or even violent resistance to particular state policies such as the evacuation of settlements. At its extremes, there are those who completely reject the legitimacy of the State of Israel as it has existed since 1948, on grounds such as its putatively secular nature or insufficient Zionist commitments—all challenges that presuppose the subordination of mamlachtiyut to other values. The most high-profile recent manifestation of settler resistance to the State of Israel was the December 2011 attack on a West Bank Israeli army base by a group of activists, aided by allies in the military and even the government.

Haredi Stances on the State

A second highly visible challenge to state legitimacy, from the Haredi community, is also of long standing but has recently intensified and achieved broader social and political impact. Haredi stances on the state include the fierce, religiously principled anti-Zionism initially embodied in the original Agudat Israel in Eastern Europe and today most numerously represented by the Satmar Hasidic movement. In Satmar thought, for example, the Zionist state is viewed as purely a creation of satanic forces. This stance takes its most extreme form in the Neturei Karta.

Haredi attitudes, however, also include what could be called a-statism and a-Zionism, probably reflective of the majority Haredi view today; these groups view the State of Israel as no more and no less legitimate than a non-Jewish state. In the past generation, however, a form of Haredi hyper-Zionism has emerged: the so-called "Hardal" phenomenon, a composite of Haredi religiosity and national-religious settler ideology. The Hardal phenomenon is a highly volatile amalgam, with the potential to compound the controversies

about the legitimacy of the state that have long existed within the Haredi world with the conflicts between the statist and anti-statist strands of the settler movement.

A Diversity of Views on the Left

On the contemporary left, attitudes toward the state also take a variety of forms. On the one hand, one finds fidelity to the classic, liberal Zionist vision of a "Jewish and democratic" state. The contemporary version of this vision usually seeks to secure its two components, the "Jewish" and the "democratic," through calling for a Palestinian state in the occupied territories. This stance can be viewed as a contemporary, left-wing version of mamlachtiyut—a rejection of evaluating the current legitimacy of the state, particularly its territorial claims, by its fidelity to religious or secular Zionist ideology and a commitment to international legal notions of sovereignty as the structural basis for political order.

However, one also finds others on the left who fundamentally oppose the current form of the state and call for its restructuring as a "state of all its citizens," entailing an abandonment of the notion of a "Jewish state." This position may, in turn, be divided between those who call for the restructuring of Israel as a non-national or binational state within the Green Line as part of a "two-state solution" and those who call for superseding the State of Israel through a "one-state solution" in all of Mandatory Palestine. Finally, at the far left-wing of Israeli political life, one finds the anarchists who periodically appear in the news due to their vigorous participation in demonstrations against the Israeli security wall. Because these anarchists are such a tiny component of Israeli political life today, it is worth noting that Jewish anarchism, either in anti-Zionist or Zionist form, is part of a venerable tradition. To take only the Zionist strand, today's anarchists can claim as their precursors such a wide array of key figures in modern Zionist history as the kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag, the first Dreyfusard Bernard Lazare, and, of course, the very young man with whom I began this essay, Gershom Scholem, who would go on to become (though without retaining his youthful political radicalism) arguably the most important Jewish scholar of the past hundred years.

An Israeli woman rebukes Israeli soldiers in January 2012 after troops demolished her home in an illegal South Hebron Hills settlement. While some settlers are fiercely loyal to the state, others call for violent resistance to state actions such as the evacuation of settlements.

Kobi Gideon/Flash90

Defining "Solidarity with Israel"

One could expand this review in a number of directions, particularly toward an analysis of the diverse stances among Palestinians toward both the State of Israel and a potential Palestinian state. For the purposes of this essay, however, I return to the question with which I began: what does it mean to be in solidarity with "Israel" or "Zionism" in the era of renewed struggles over the "legitimacy of the state"?

This brief review suggests that there is no "pro-Israel" position that could be neutral in relation to these historical and contemporary Jewish and Zionist controversies. Political activity—or inactivity—by American Jews always constitutes an intervention in a fierce, often violent, century-old debate among Zionists and Israelis. Does "support for Zionism" mean that one is for Herzl or for the young Scholem, for Ben-Gurion or for Bernard Lazare, for Jabotinsky or Ahad Ha'Am, for the IDF or for the Palmach, and on and on? Statism versus anti-statism is a perennial flashpoint *within* Jewish and Zionist traditions, not a choice *between* those traditions and their enemies. Moreover, statism and anti-statism are positions whose political valences (right/left; Zionist/anti-Zionist; religious/secular) are unpredictable and have continually shifted over time. Finally, these positions are often dialectically related. Those who are anti-statist at a particular historical conjuncture often have presented their position as based on the corruption or fallen form of the actually existing state; in an ideal, perhaps (*continued on page 67*)

Drug Prohibition Is the Problem

Reflections from a Former Judge

BY JAMES P. GRAY

The U.S. policy of Drug Prohibition is fueling mass incarceration and street violence without making drugs any harder to come by. Might it be time to follow Portugal's lead in decriminalizing not just marijuana, but harder drugs too?

Paul Lachine

DRUG PROHIBITION IS the biggest failed policy in the history of our country. I know that is a strong statement, but once more people realize the unnecessary harms and disasters this policy has inflicted, they will surely start to agree.

None of this should be surprising. Abraham Lincoln explained the situation succinctly when he said: "Prohibition goes beyond the bounds of reason in that it attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation and makes crimes out of things that are not crimes. A prohibition law strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our government was founded." Let us also not forget that, in the Book of Genesis, even God couldn't enforce a law of prohibition, and God was only dealing with two people!

JAMES P. GRAY is a retired judge of the Orange County Superior Court in California and the author of *Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed* (Temple University Press, second edition, 2012). He can be contacted at jimpgray@sbcglobal.net or at judgejimgray.com.

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I am a former "drug warrior," although, like most other people, I never really gave it much thought. When I was a staff judge advocate at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Guam, I prepared the charge sheets for the courts-martial of station personnel, and many of them were for drug violations. Furthermore, for a short time I held the record as a federal prosecutor in Los Angeles for the largest drug prosecution in the Central District of California, which was 75 kilograms of heroin, or about 165 pounds. (That was and is a lot of heroin, but today the record prosecution in that district is 18 tons of cocaine!)

But after I became a trial court judge in late 1983, I could not fail to notice how we were churning low-level drug offenders through our criminal justice system for no good purpose and often ruining their lives along the way. In addition, even when we arrested, convicted, and incarcerated high-level drug dealers, that did not at all mean that the drugs were no longer available in the areas they served. Quickly—within a few hours sometimes—other dealers would take their place.

The drug-related violence in Tijuana has become so pervasive that not even schoolchildren can escape it. Legalizing drugs could reduce such violence worldwide, the author argues.

Creative Commons/Omar Martínez (frontera.info)

After seeing firsthand what was happening in my own courtroom, I realized that we are facing two substantial harms in our country. The first is drug harm. Illicit drugs certainly can be harmful, and nothing I say in these pages is intended in any way to minimize those harms. But the second harm is caused by drug money. Drug money inflicts much more harm to people in our cities, states, country, and the world than the drugs themselves will ever cause. With all attention fixed on the drugs themselves, too few people are talking about the drug economy and the mass incarceration currently associated with it.

As a conservative judge in a conservative county—and as a fairly clean-cut person who had never used illicit drugs—I decided that I was probably in a better position to engage resistant skeptics in an open discussion on this issue than most people. Thus, on April 8, 1992, I did something quite unusual for a sitting trial court judge: I held a press conference and announced my conclusions as publicly as I could that our nation's policy of Drug Prohibition was not working—and would never work.

Unfortunately, since that time the situation has deteriorated much further. Our country continues to lead the world in the incarceration of its people. Tens of thousands of individuals, including children and other innocent bystanders, have been violently killed in Mexico and elsewhere not because of drugs, but because of drug money. The enormous profits made by the higher-ups in gangs and drug cartels continue to be facilitated by Drug Prohibition. And all of these illicit drugs are easily available to children.

Defining Goals

With the understanding that we are all on the same side of this issue—namely, that we all want to reduce drug abuse and the harm and misery that accompany it—we should design a new drug policy. As we begin this task, we should focus upon what our goals actually are in this area, because, for all of the time, efforts, and treasure our nation is spending on our policy of drug prohibition, we have never really done this.

At Insite, a legal injection site in Vancouver, clients inject their own drugs under the supervision of nurses. Harm reduction programs such as these can decrease overdoses, reduce the spread of disease associated with unclean needle use, and connect drug users to mental health services and other community resources.

Vancouver Coastal Health

Here are the top ten goals that I think we are trying to accomplish. See if you agree. They are:

1. Reduce the exposure to and usage of drugs by children.
2. Stop or materially reduce the violence that accompanies the manufacture and distribution of drugs.
3. Stop or materially reduce the corruption of companies, public officials, and individuals that accompanies the distribution of drugs.
4. Stop or materially reduce crime by both people trying to get money to purchase drugs and those under the influence.
5. Stop or materially reduce the flow of drugs into our country.
6. Maintain and reaffirm our civil liberties.
7. Reduce health risks to people who use drugs.
8. Reduce the number of people being put into jails and prisons.
9. Stop or materially reduce the flow of guns from the United States into other countries.
10. Increase respect for our laws and institutions.

You might want to replace one of these goals with another or readjust the order, but I anticipate that most people would basically agree with these top ten goals.

The Case for Regulated Legalization

I believe that treating the manufacture and sale of these drugs just like we treat alcohol—as legal for adults—will actually and fairly quickly accomplish *each* of those goals and, further, that pursuing our present policy of Drug Prohibition will *never* accomplish *any* of them. The second part of my assertion is already supported by the current state of affairs: we have been actively pursuing our present policy since the early 1970s, and since then, the entire situation has demonstrably gotten worse.

If we allowed presently illicit drugs to be manufactured by a nonprofit public agency and then sold to adults in brown packaging without any trade names or advertising whatsoever, at prices that are about half of what drugs are sold for today out on the streets, the drugs would be less available for children. Any young person can attest that it is easier for children or teens to get marijuana or any other illegal drug than alcohol. Today's illegal drug dealers don't ask for ID.

Regulated legalization would also almost completely stop crime related to the manufacture and distribution of drugs, just as the repeal of Alcohol (*continued on page 68*)

Culture

BOOKS

Retelling Hasidism for the Twenty-First Century

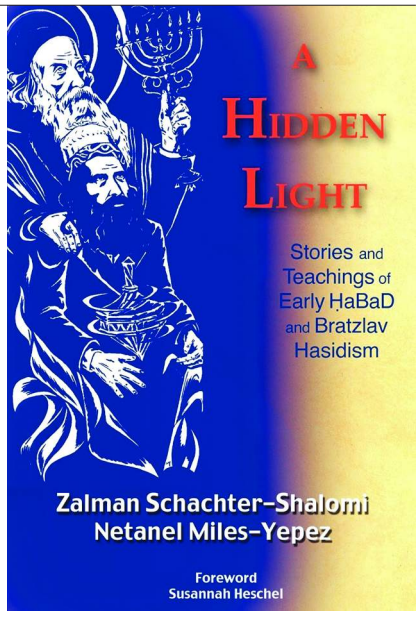
A Hidden Light: Stories and Teachings of Early Habad and Bratzlav Hasidism
by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Netanel Miles-Yepez
Gaon Books, 2011

REVIEW BY SHAUL MAGID

A HIDDEN LIGHT is the interesting experiment of an insider who stands outside a world he left but never abandoned. The work is neither critical nor apologetic, nor is it polemical. It is the loving, creative rendition of a devotee who has tried in his long career to separate Hasidism's radical theology from its rigid and conventional sociological framework. For the Jewish Renewal reader, it offers a window into the Hasidic world that inspired Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's revision of Jewish spirituality. To the comparativist, it brings to life a Hasidic world of story and teaching that utilizes the nomenclature of global religiosity and the New Age.

To understand this book, one must first understand what was perhaps the first great scholarly debate in twentieth-century Jewish mysticism. This debate was between Gershom Scholem and his one-time mentor Martin Buber on the nature of Hasidism, a type of Judaism that is practiced in many of today's ultra-Orthodox communities. In 1908, Buber's *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* appeared in German, followed by his studies of the tales of Nahman of Bratslav and a volume on the tales of the Hasidim, later translated into English in two volumes as *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters* and *Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters* in 1948. Buber argued throughout his career that Hasidic tales were the best way to view the innovative dimensions of Hasidic spirituality and devotion. Scholem argued that Buber, in focusing on Hasidic tales, was using Hasidism to further his own philosophical agenda and had neglected the history of Hasidic literature. Scholem's position was perhaps best stated in his essay, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," which appeared in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* in 1971.

This dichotomy of tales versus homilies continued for the next few generations. It appears that in the academy Scholem has won the day, while outside the academy Buber may still be more influential. Buber believed that Hasidic life, its hallowing of the everyday, its imaginative portrayal of the possibilities of small miracles, its *volkgeist* (populist spirit) and devotional practices, are best illustrated through Hasidism's fantastical tales. On Buber's reading, this spirituality of transforming rather than transcending the world, born deep in the Pale of Settlement in the eighteenth century, was a precursor to what became existentialist thought in the twentieth century. Buber claimed that Hasidism was an illustration of a "Jewish Orientalism" on the European continent at a



time when many of his romantic colleagues were looking for "authenticity" in Sanskrit texts and other writings from the Indian subcontinent.

The Hasidim were neither philosophers nor trained theologians. They were readers of Jewish texts and, more importantly, they were, among other things, practitioners of ecstatic devotion. Buber claimed that, like him, the Hasidim cared little for kabbalistic metaphysics, even as they freely used kabbalistic literature and nomenclature to achieve their objectives. They were radical and audacious, and, in Buber's imagination, they saved Judaism from the dry formalism and elitism that dominated it in much of the West, as well as from the rigid legalism of Eastern European orthodoxy. Whereas Scholem tried to situate Hasidism in a historical trajectory, Buber

tried to channel it by tapping into its spiritual repository.

Scholem's interests were largely historical. His question, "What did Hasidism contribute to the history of Jewish mysticism?" drew him to Hasidic homilies in which masters forged a new path of what he called "mystical psychology" to bring the complex world of kabbalistic metaphysics to the masses. For Scholem, while the stories had literary significance, they were hardly central to Hasidic theology. Scholem's main objective was to assess the mystical character of Hasidic writing to determine whether it contributed anything new to the history of Jewish mysticism. Although scholars continue to write on Hasidism using various combinations of both genres, the Scholem-Buber dichotomy deeply informed much of the literary output on Hasidism until the end of the twentieth century.

Moving Beyond the Scholem-Buber Debate

In this light, *A Hidden Light* accomplishes two things: First, it is a retelling of Hasidic tales. Second, it breaks open the dichotomy of tales versus homilies by using the tales as a necessary foundation for close readings of Hasidic homiletic literature. More broadly, *A Hidden Light* is a retelling of Hasidism in the twenty-first century, combining all that has happened from the time Buber wrote his first works on Hasidism over one hundred years ago, through Scholem's critique, the decimation of European Jewry (including Hasidim) in the Holocaust, and the renewal of Hasidism through the American counterculture and the Israeli neo-Hasidic cultural revival.

Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez's choice to focus solely on the Habad and Bratzlav Hasidic dynasties in this volume (Schachter-Shalomi wrote an earlier work on the Baal Shem Tov) is not an exercise in idiosyncrasy but a reflection of the times. Bratzlav is a Hasidic collective founded by the Hasidic master Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav and continues to this day. For his disciples, he was the first and only master. Habad is a Hasidic dynasty founded in White Russia by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, who died in 1812. It has grown to become a dynamic, and arguably the most well-known, Hasidic dynasty outside Israel. Buber and his generation were initially taken by Nahman of Bratzlav's audacious and enigmatic personality. His creative genius continues to inspire many scholars and experts, even as the Bratzlav movement remains small. Habad developed in an area of Eastern Europe without much Hasidic activity and remained largely separate from the centers of Hasidic life until the interwar period. In the postwar era, Habad underwent a surge in popularity under the tutelage of its seventh rabbi, Menahem Mendel Schneerson. Buber had little interest in Habad even after its ascendency (Buber died in 1965), likely because his firsthand experience of Hasidism was in Poland during his lengthy stays as an adolescent with his grandfather and rabbinics scholar Solomon Buber. In addition, Habad's intellectual and acosmic theosophical system did not fit into Buber's plan of depicting the volkgeist of Hasidic simplicity as a model of his dialogical philosophy. Habad's acosmic theology and its notion of contemplation (*hitbonenut*) did not fit neatly into Buber's world-affirming dialogical perspective.

Schachter-Shalomi, on the other hand, became a Habad Hasid while still in Europe after World War II, first looking to the sixth Habad master, Joseph Isaac Schneersohn, and then to his successor and son-in-law, Menahem Mendel Schneerson. Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez are looking for a new kabbalistic metaphysics—what Schachter-Shalomi calls the "kabbalistic-hasidic persuasion" (in *Paradigm Shift*)—through which he could construct a new Jewish worldview for the New Age. Their agenda is arguably more sweeping than Buber's use of Hasidim as a template for religious existentialism and a model of Jewish Orientalism. For them, Nahman is the wild-eyed radical genius and countercultural hero, while Habad, particularly the first Habad master, Shneur Zalman of Liady, is his studious and deliberate metaphysician. Jewish Renewal needs both Nahman's personal rebelliousness and Habad's cosmology to function as a comprehensive New Age Jewish alternative. It is significant for Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez that Nahman and Shneur Zalman met briefly, and, as they tell it, seemed to have mutual respect for each other even as their ways of serving God were different. This meeting arguably served as the germ cell of *A Hidden Light*. Bratzlav and Habad serve as important markers of the extremes of the Hasidic movement: Nahman as the radical individualist and Habad as a dynastic paragon of Hasidic kabbalism and institutionalism.

A Non-Historical Approach

There are three basic elements of *A Hidden Light* that make it a significant new non-historical approach to the study of Hasidism. First, its juxtaposition of stories and homilies argue, by implication, not only that the Buber-Scholem dichotomy is false but that a deeper reading of the homilies requires an understanding of, or at least familiarity with, the psycho-spiritual engine of Hasidism that the stories bring to life. While some scholarly studies have taken this approach, none to my knowledge have done so as part of a constructivist project.

Second, the authors' wide knowledge of other spiritual traditions is utilized by their frequent and sometimes lengthy references to Sufism, Christian monasticism, scholasticism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Theosophy, and Jungian psychology. These are not merely passing references. Rather, like Buber but with a slightly less romantic vision of Hasidic life, the

authors exhibit the ways in which Hasidic spirituality is akin to the many spiritual traditions it never knew. This kind of constructivist comparison does not seek to further any scholarly agenda on comparison more generally but is meant to affirm that Schachter-Shalomi's more integrated use of non-Jewish traditions in his previous writings is well-situated in his rendering of Hasidism. Whereas Buber wanted to present Hasidism as an example of Jewish Orientalism, a century later these authors present Hasidism as a foundation for their global Judaism.

Third, Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez incorporate over sixty years of oral traditions from Habad and Bratslav, many never before in print, to strengthen their case that the oral traditions of Hasidic life deepen our understanding of what drove their more theoretical writings.

A Hidden Light does not pretend to be historical. For example, in an appendix, the authors briefly recount the obscure story of Moshe, the son of Shneur Zalman of Liady, who converted to Christianity. Schachter-Shalomi acknowledges hearing rumors of this as an adolescent in Habad and offers a fairly straightforward version of the apologetic rendering of the story as depicted by his first Hasidic teacher, Joseph Isaac Schneersohn. Absent is any of the critical assessment now made public by David Assaf in his book *Untold Tales of the Hasidim*. His account of Jacob Frank and the Frankists shows no sign of his having read the most recent work on the Frankist movement by Pawel Maciejko or Ada Rapoport-Albert. For its historical data, *A Hidden Light* relies mostly on Schachter-Shalomi's life as a Hasid and the existing literature internal to Hasidism, which hardly offers an objective viewpoint.

Tools for Jewish Renewal

Like Buber, Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez are not interested in history, nor are they interested in "objective" or contextual accounts of Hasidism as a movement. They are interested in the way in which Hasidism, through both its stories and its homilies, creates a template for a post-halachic Judaism for the New Age. They are keenly aware that the Hasidic world they present in this book is far from the post-halachic Judaism of Jewish Renewal. But they argue that the underlying spiritual forces that generated the Hasidic critique of the normative Judaism of its time contain the necessary tools to open Judaism to the world in our time.

A Hidden Light is in many ways the inverse of Schachter-Shalomi's earlier book *Paradigm Shift* (1993). In that programmatic work, Schachter-Shalomi paints a broad-stroked portrait of his new Jewish vision, touching on many aspects of the nexus between his kabbalistic-Hasidic approach and the New Age. In *A Hidden Light*, he goes inside the Hasidic tradition and offers a reading of Hasidism that adds texture and nuance to his vision in *Paradigm Shift*. For example, he offers a long excursus on Shneur Zalman's well-known essay on *hitbonenut* (Jewish meditation) in the Habad classic *Tanya*. He also offers a reading of the early Habad notion of *zimzum* (the myth of divine contraction) that has been the subject of much scholarly debate. In a chapter on Nahman, he offers a translation of Nahman's famous "Torah of the Void" (*Likkutei MoHaRan* 1:63) in poetic meter interspersed with his neo-Hasidic commentary.

Historians of Hasidism will undoubtedly find this book frustrating in ways not dissimilar to the way Scholem found Buber's work on Hasidism frustrating. But a lot has happened in the seventy years since Scholem first wrote his critique of Buber. The spiritual translation project Buber began in 1906 has born much fruit in the postwar era. The first wave of neo-Hasidim in Buber's time consisted of a small circle of literary and artistic elites, many of whom were looking for new ways to forge an identity in a newly secularized Jewish world. That has yielded to a second-wave neo-Hasidism of Jewish Renewal in postwar America that has touched the nerve center of Jews looking to wed their "tune-out/turn-on" consciousness with Jewish spirituality. Before the war, neo-Hasidism was of interest mostly to artists and historians. Its second-wave tentacles have reached many Jews in the pews through "Torah and Yoga," "Moving Torah," Jewish meditation, and other contemporary Jewish spiritual hybrids.

Hasidic songs (*niggunim*), tales, and customs, as well as nostalgia for the ostensible authenticity of Hasidic life, are commonplace in contemporary Israel and the Diaspora. Yet Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez are not advocates of this nostalgia. For them, a new paradigm has begun that renders much of this nostalgia obsolete. What remains of Hasidism for these authors is a radical experiment in Jewish living that requires an equally radical translation of its teachings. *A Hidden Light* brings readers inside the engine room of Schachter-Shalomi's learned imagination in an attempt, I think, to convince skeptics and critics that Jewish Renewal is not some fashionable lightweight Judaism for the New Age. It is, for these authors, a serious and radical rereading of Hasidism's own radicalism. Much has happened in the century since Buber's first attempt to reframe Hasidism for his day. *A Hidden Light* is an attempt to frame it for ours. ■

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A Memoir of Gender Transition

Through the Door of Life
by Joy Ladin
University of Wisconsin Press, 2012

REVIEW BY JHOS SINGER

IN *THROUGH THE DOOR OF LIFE*, Stern College professor Joy Ladin offers this analysis of why her colleague Moshe Tendler reacted so negatively to her announcement that she is transsexual: "Rabbi Tendler isn't only worried about what I am; he is worried about what I mean."

This pithy line sums up why things transgender unsettle us so. It also hints at why this book is a worthwhile read for anyone. Ladin unfolds, in essay after essay, just what it took for her to figure out what she means and come to peace with it.

As a transgender person myself, I know this particular state of disorientation intimately. As I grew up I wondered, what did it mean that I, a biological female, could be so essentially male? What did it mean that I wanted to wear boys' clothes from the time I was able to distinguish the difference between men's and women's garb? What did it mean that perfect strangers felt enough of a need to know my gender—when I was five years old—that they would unceremoniously ask, "Are you a boy or a girl?" When I finally realized the answer to that question was, "No, I'm not," I started to get a glimmer of what I *meant*.

My transition story is similar to Ladin's in many ways—both of us are Jewish and transitioned in our forties while raising young children and in a committed relationship. However, the sociological backdrop for transmen and transwomen is very different, and Ladin lived through years of stuggle without the pressure relief systems that I enjoyed. Nevertheless, with a heap of pluck, the balm of love, and the promise of a new generation, she made her way through.

Relationships in Transition

Through her sometimes wrenching and sometimes funny memoir, Ladin discovers surprising strengths in her family of origin, even as she grasps the fragility of her thirty-year marriage.

Her mother proves to be a wonderful shopping date, and, after a few short days of reorienting her parenting, her mother is able to see that she now has a daughter rather than a son. Ladin recalls the following from their first retail outing: "'Do you have shoes?' my mother asked. These, she told me, would be comfortable and practical. 'Naturalizer is a good name,' she said, . . . 'but here they are too expensive.'" The elder Ladin surprisingly doesn't miss a beat, and the younger settles into her new daughterly role, noting that this boutique bonding was a rite of passage for them both.

The impact of transition on Ladin's marriage was another rite of passage, irreparable and painful to all parties involved. It is in these disclosures that Ladin takes us very close to her own bones. Her ability to receive her wife's disappointment and anger with compassion is inspiring. After one particularly painful interaction, Ladin says, "In the silence that follows, I hear her heart breaking again." And we are made privy to the escalating price Ladin is paying to redeem her true expression of self, to find out what she *means*.

With honesty and humility, Ladin takes us on her orienteering journey away from maleness and toward her well-hidden femininity. With her readers riding shotgun, she recounts a ricocheting trajectory from full-bore wretchedness to exquisite peace. We follow her through decades of questioning, myriad attempts to override her truth, and finally a series of cliff leaps that bring her out of the oppressive narrows of gender conformity and into the expansive, if daunting, land of her own liberation. Ladin learns how to create birdseed boobs, what hairstyle will work with her curly mop, and the ins and outs of pursuing high fashion on a shoestring budget. Some episodes are funny and others are tragic, but together they produce a classic hero's tale.

Had Ladin not been a teacher in an Orthodox women's college, she might have blipped a little less obviously on the gender radar screen. As it was, the newspapers reported on her transition, the Jewish press weighed in, and, like it or not, Joy Ladin became a Jewish transgender poster girl virtually overnight. The return to her teaching position was plastered all over the news. She became an accidental beacon, an unassuming hero, and a spiritually naked spokeswoman for transcendence and transformation.

Most of us, with or without the additional excitement of gender dysphoria,

clomp through life attempting to figure out what our lives mean. Ultimately what we *mean* is described by the company we keep. That is to say, our true worth is calculated by those around us and how we affect them. Regardless of our value in dollars and cents, how many years we breathe, or how many inches gird our waist, what really counts is whether our being leaves a trail of scorched earth or warm memories.

God's Coming Out and the Self-Doubt of Moses

Ladin's memoir blows the lid on the fact that being transgender is actually a fantastic opportunity to find out what it means to be fully human. She reveals that moving from a murky sense of self to a blazingly awakened state of consciousness is within reach, even for those who think they don't have the stomach for it. Additionally, she has to grapple with her own spirituality and evaluate what God means to her. She wrestles with God's own "coming out." When Moses has his encounter with God at the burning bush, he asks, "Who are you?" and God nonchalantly answers, "*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*." Loosely translated, this means, "I will be what I will be." With God's example as a guidepost, Ladin chooses to discover again and again what she means and who she will be.

Growing up, as we all do, in a world where binary gender is the rule, one of the first lessons learned is that one is either a boy or a girl. If we sense that there was some mix-up in our prenatal gender assignment, questions arise. Why do I feel so uncomfortable in my own skin? Can people tell? Am I the only one? Eventually all these questions reduce down to one: why me? Which, as it turns out, is an excellent question—one any respectable spiritual warrior (of any gender) should be asking oneself constantly. "Why me?" is a potboiler, one-size-fits-all, awesome question suitable for almost every existential crisis.

Even Moses has to wrestle with this question. The first time Moses utters this question, he actually says, "*Mi anochi?*" (Who am I?). Moses doesn't understand why God would choose him, of all people, to play the role of liberator, leader, and inspirer of an oppressed people. Moses doesn't see that his own struggle with identity is his qualification. Hebrew by birth, with an Egyptian royal upbringing, and having married into an upper-middle-class Midianite family—who better than Moses to lead a social revolution? His incredulity at being chosen to tackle a seemingly impossible job is understandable. His skills were developed so he could herd sheep, not people; he doubts his abilities as an orator; and with a lethal anger management problem in his history, he is well aware that entering into a confrontation with Pharaoh may upset the pastoral life into which he has settled. *Mi anochi?* Who am I to make a difference? Who am I to be followed? Who am I to spark a social revolution? I guess that if this was a head scratcher for Moses, it is going to be a mystery for the rest of us. That said, I hope with all my heart and soul that all of us who have found ourselves on the business end of that question are able, someday, to manifest an answer.

When the question "Why me?" arises, most of us are, like Moses, simultaneously wondering, "Couldn't you have picked someone else?" Whatever higher power we believe "chose" us is questioned and beseeched—"Why me?" And, of course, the punch line is not delivered by an outside, Divine presence, but rather in how we rise to the challenge of finding out the answer. Moses's question "Why me?" isn't answered by God; it's answered eventually by Moses himself.

Ladin follows this biblical example, and that is the beauty of her story. She shows that "Why me?" is a question to be answered simply through bold, gracious, and honest expressions of our true selves. Why me? Because the world isn't complete until each of us manifests our essence. Why me? Because you are the only one who can tell your story. Why me? Because you are important.

Comparing Stories

As I read Ladin's winding, zigzagging tale, I was struck by how very different it was from my own gender journey. As she notes, "No woman will be surprised to hear that it's easier to become male than to become female." I agree wholeheartedly. I was blessed to have been born at a time when my drive to wear Levi 501s raised no eyebrows. For transwomen-in-training, there was no equivalent access to cross-gender fashion expression. At the very least, I had some pre-transition freedom in what clothes I was able to put on my complicated body. While Ladin found out how to create makeshift breasts on a shoestring budget, I could flatten my chest with an easily procurable undershirt or, in a pinch, a sports bra. Once transition was underway, Ladin had to master the art of makeup, vocal placement, body language, and the incomprehensible art of color coordination, while all I had to do was drag a razor over my face (or not). She had to replace her entire wardrobe; I already had mine. Nevertheless, we shared many of the same stumbling blocks: which bathroom to use, when to switch pronouns, how to tell our children, and constantly wondering why God would choose us for such a miserable task.

On my way, I met feminists who were aghast when I told them I was heading toward manhood. One woman said, "Jhos, you can be anything you want as a woman; *that* is what we have been fighting for all these years. Becoming a man is going to limit you." And her teaching was right. I have learned that men are much more limited in their expression of self. But I, by virtue of my female and feminist past, am not. If I am able to bring some

of that liberation to manhood, maybe that's "Why me?" Early in my transition, my youngest child said to me, "I think it's cool that you are becoming a man 'cause it's kinda like you get to be both and that's just, well, um, that's really cool!" If my child is able to enter into future relationships with that same sense of acceptance and awe, well, maybe that's "Why me."

I recognized similar moments in Ladin's tale. When her mother tells her she looks beautiful, when she is reinstated as a teacher, or when her story touches others, she knows what she means and why she was chosen to walk this path. When she finally allows her children to see her in a fully female presentation, one of her daughters begins to cry. "Why are you crying?" Joy asks her.

"Because I've never seen that light on your face, even when you look at us," her daughter replies.

"Yes," Joy answered. "That's one reason I want you to see me as my self—to share that light with you."

As Ladin tells her tale, she graciously reveals her fears, depression, and doubt. As a reader, I feel like I have been privy to the inner workings of the mind and body of an Olympic hurdler. In each chapter, Ladin faces another obstacle, builds speed, raises her heels off the ground, and manages to clear the fence like a gazelle escaping a predator. She generously lets the reader see her at her agonized worst, and she humbly shares her moments of personal triumph over depression, anger, exhaustion, and doubt. Most importantly, it is clear that it is her faith, her Jewish spirituality, and her own quiet wisdom that see her through. Ladin's real teaching goes beyond gender or Judaism however. Hers is a universal message about what it means to be a good parent, partner, child, teacher, and friend, and above all to be the best version of yourself that you can manage. After reading Ladin's book, we should all be inspired to "be what we will be," and no matter how hard the becoming, we should be assured that we too are created in the image of the Divine. ■

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Literary Bridges to the Middle Eastern "Other"

Tablet & Pen
edited by Reza Aslan
W. W. Norton & Company, 2011

Out of It
by Selma Dabbagh
Bloomsbury USA, 2012

REVIEW BY ASHLEY BATES

THE ARAB SPRING has challenged Western stereotypes of Middle Eastern civil societies. We've seen insatiable demand for democracy in a region that most analysts had written off as politically passive or hopelessly brainwashed by authoritarianism and misogyny. We've seen formalized instruction and training on how to engage in nonviolent protest. We've seen defiant, hijab-wearing female activists—including an Egyptian young woman whose YouTube videos helped launch the revolution. We've seen brilliant social media campaigns that mobilized a courageous, tech-savvy populace despite brutal government crackdowns.

Two recently released works of literature, both written before the Arab Spring, introduce Westerners to an array of fictional characters and real people who exemplify the creativity, agency, and diversity that have always been present in the Middle East but have received scant attention in Western media. *Tablet & Pen* is an anthology of Middle Eastern poetry, fiction, and nonfiction that spans the last 100 years; incisive and often controversial works by both classic and lesser known authors are translated (some of them for the first time) into English from their native Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and Turkish tongues. *Out of It*, an engrossing, suspenseful debut novel by British Palestinian author Selma Dabbagh, explores the psychological effects of the Israeli siege, the ongoing conflict, and Palestinian factionalism on each member of a secular leftist, predominantly Gaza-based family.

"Fiction just has this extraordinary power to transport people and to make them able to understand other worlds because of the emotional connection that it provides," says Dabbagh. Fahmida Riaz, a Pakistani writer of feminist poetry featured in *Tablet & Pen*, agrees: "Literature always helps," she says. "Had I not read British authors, I'd be just thinking of every Brit as oppressors." Perhaps most importantly, says Rukhsana Ahmad, a translator of Urdu works in *Tablet & Pen*, literature helps erase "the film—the curtain of difference between us—that we often tolerate."

Now, as the Arab Spring struggles forward and as Western governments continue to carry out devastating drone strikes and threaten war, ugly caricatures of "enemy" nations ought not blind us to the suffering caused by our governments' policies. Nor should

they guide our understanding of a culturally diverse region with a proud history of resilience and resistance.

An Anthology That Speaks to the Heart

Reza Aslan, the editor of *Tablet & Pen*, has witnessed the stereotype-busting effects of his anthology. At a 2010 Los Angeles book tour event, Aslan presented a poem by Palestinian writer Zakaria Tamer called "The Enemies," which was written immediately after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The war was a colossal military defeat for the Arab dictatorships involved, but the dictators nevertheless spun stories that denied or diminished the apparent disaster. Tamer's sarcastic, defiant poem explores how civilians—far from being brainwashed by their leaders—knowingly changed the Arabic references to these events in order to assert their dignity and resolve. Tamer writes in one part of the prose poem:

> The Arabic language has been awarded the highest declaration in our homeland for the way in which it took part in the transformation of a military defeat into a victory. It managed to term the war a withdrawal. It then became steadfast resistance and steadfast resistance turned into bravery—and bravery was called victory. We have defeated the enemy and we'll be able to defeat their fifth column too, which seems to be the only element not to appreciate the fighting qualities of the Arabic language.

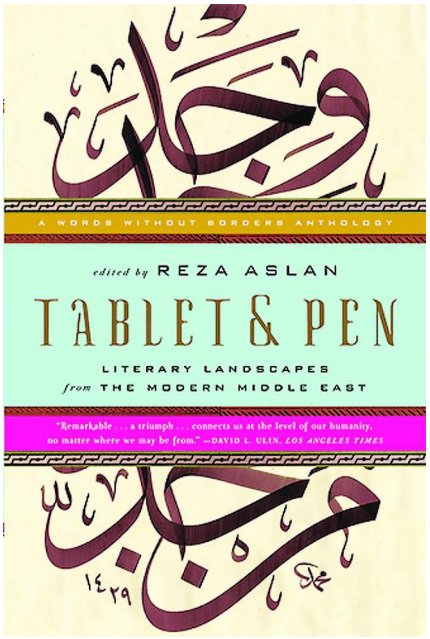
After Aslan's presentation of Tamer's poem, a group of about four or five Israeli audience members came up to thank him. Some, says Aslan, were "visibly shaken and moved." They had previously believed that Arabs were simply delusional about the war. This was the first time that many of them had understood this pivotal moment in history from the other side in a manner that spoke to the heart and not the head.

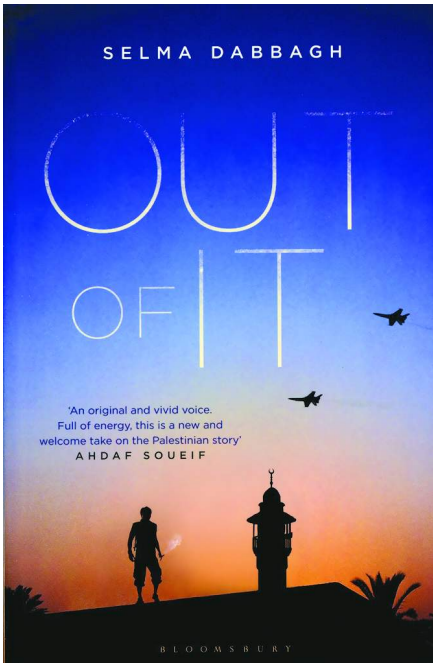
The popular appeal of Aslan's anthology is a testament to the potential for literature to improve East-West understanding. Following Aslan's November 2010 appearance on the Colbert Report, the hardcover edition of *Tablet & Pen* jumped to number seventy on the Amazon.com bestseller list. The paperback edition was released in November of 2011 and is widely available in bookstores.

A Novel Without a Villain

With all hope, Selma Dabbagh's novel, which will be released in the United States in August, will have a similarly lasting impact on the consciousness of Western readers. Like the contributors to *Tablet & Pen*, she presents complex, believable characters and does not hesitate to show the shortcomings within Palestinian society—particularly the devastating impact of Palestinian factionalism. "I was always very anguished about the idea of not wanting to be irresponsible in terms of my representation of the Palestinians," she says. "I didn't want to make them overly noble or constantly victims."

There's consequently not a single villain in *Out of It*—readers feel empathy for the would-be suicide bomber, the Palestinian spying for Israel, the Palestinian plotting to assassinate a rival leader, and the sell-out former politician living a life of luxury in the Gulf. The link between these and other characters is formed by the many inescapable ways in which political and social forces invade personal space and color every Palestinian's experiences, no matter where in the world he or she is living. "I think a key thing that connects us is this sense of connection to the cause whether you're engaged in it or not," says Dabbagh. This insight comes in part from personal experience—she has visited the West Bank and Gaza but was raised in the United Kingdom by a British mother





and a Palestinian father who was forced to leave Palestine shortly before the 1948 War broke out.

The least sympathetic character in the novel is arguably Lisa, a British activist who treats the Gazan activist whom she's dating with condescension, lecturing him about how best to represent his people. Dabbagh says she sees bits of herself in this character. "I think I could be sometimes a little like that in terms of being a bit prescriptive," she says. The novel itself does not

prescribe overt solutions—instead, it creates a visceral sense of how the conflict affects the lives of Palestinians.

Dabbagh says she hopes *Out of It* will be translated into Hebrew and read by an Israeli audience. While she anticipates criticism for not including Israeli characters, she says she hopes readers will understand that her focus is on the Palestinian experience. Her writing reflects the reality that, for most Gazans, Israelis are not physically visible but are controlling the besieged area at a distance. They are "in the air [i.e., operating the drone airplanes] and at the checkpoints."

Dabbagh focuses more on building a rapport between the reader and the characters than on outlining a historical argument. Early drafts of her novel included many accounts of Palestinian history from 1948 and 1967: one chapter focused on the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon, and various characters gave monologues on historical events. Dabbagh ultimately decided to cut all of this, aiming to create characters "who are believable enough that in ten years the reader might still remember them and the frustrations and the difficulties of their experiences." She explains:

> Even if they don't remember an explanation given about something like administrative detention . . . they will still have a feeling of a Kafkaesque Israeli military system. So if they read a newspaper, they might think, "Well, this might be possible, because I kind of had this hinted at before. It might be that it really is that impossibly difficult; the reasons for arrest and detention can be that intangible and inexplicable and unchallengeable." Knowledge of the factual situation can be readied by a fictional presentation of it.

Dabbagh's novel is also uniquely accessible because it can be read with little background knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She avoids referring to Hamas or Fatah by name, for example. "I wanted to feel like everything here should be explained within the book," she says. "I tried to keep the word Palestinian and Israeli out of it as much as possible . . . I just wanted to try to focus on the characters and their lives and what was affecting them, and keep muted everything that could make it sound like journalistic reportage."

Dissident Poets, National Poets

Like Dabbagh, many authors in *Tablet & Pen* offer painfully honest portrayals of both heroic and horrifying moments in the Middle East, with a focus on the psychological impact of social and political events. In fact, most of the authors in the anthology have spent time in prison. One particularly haunting piece, "Dreaming of Baghdad," is written by Iraqi Kurdish author Haifa Zangana in memory of a heroic friend who was murdered at Abu Ghraib—the same prison where Zangana was tortured and where American soldiers became torturers themselves. Nazeem Hikmat, a famous twentieth-century revolutionary Turkish poet, wrote "Since I Was Thrown Inside" *from* prison. Sixty years after Hikmat wrote that piece, Iranian author Reza Baraheni wrote in the 1970s about his experience being tortured repeatedly—all for the crime of writing poetry. Aslan says of this theme:

> We [in the West] can't wrap our minds around it—that you write a poem and then you're never heard from again because of it. . . . In countries in which freedom of speech and freedom of the press are tightly controlled if not just outright forbidden, the poet becomes the journalist, the historian, the social critic. Literature becomes the window to this world. It becomes the mirror that's held up to society to show its faults.

The title of *Tablet & Pen* is related to this theme; it's also the title of a poem in the anthology by Pakistani author Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who lived from 1911 to 1984. Aslan chose it in part because "there's something beautiful about a book having an allusion to a tablet and pen," and also because "the poem itself and the poet are so indicative and so representative of everything else" in the anthology. In his early career, Faiz produced literature that helped give shape to the very idea of Pakistan by advancing the notion of a distinct Pakistani nationality. Then, when that nation came to be, Faiz was among its fiercest critics. The same pen that he used to help create Pakistan, he used to criticize Pakistan—for which he was thrown into prison. "It's the perfect example of who these writers and poets are," says Aslan, adding that it's also an example of "this other idea that the pen becomes the record for the soul of the individual, the soul of the culture, the soul of the nation, the soul of a people."

"Find Yourself Here Among the Ugly Debris of Defeat"

During my time working as a journalist in Gaza in the spring and summer of 2010, I was most struck by the sense of entrapment. As a white Westerner, I could move relatively freely between Israel and Gaza, while most of the young people I met in Gaza had never seen the world outside. Many elites who had managed to escape didn't return, leaving behind families who understood but were heartsick nonetheless. Others I met—among them political scientists, filmmakers, journalists, and humanitarian activists—chose to stay despite the personal toil of war trauma, isolation, and perpetual uncertainty.

I thought of these courageous individuals as I followed the struggles of Dabbagh's characters, many of whom are among the few who *are* able to travel. In Gaza or abroad, the feature

that unites Dabbagh's characters is their pervading sense of duty to their people, even when that duty is expressed through guilt, frustration, and hopelessness.

I also thought of these courageous individuals as I read an epistolary piece in *Tablet & Pen* by Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer who was assassinated in 1972 by an Israeli car bomb. His piece, "Letter from Gaza," was written in 1957 but is just as relevant today. It explores what motivates people to stay and portrays an unforgettable (and tragically common) exchange with an injured young Gazan girl that captures the essence of why Palestinians feel such loyalty to a homeland in turmoil. At the end of Kanafani's piece, the fictional letter writer tells his brother, who is living abroad: "This obscure feeling that you had as you left Gaza, this small feeling must grow into a giant deep within you. It must expand, you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat."

Iman, a main character in *Out of It* who returns to Gaza after living abroad, expresses similar sentiments throughout the novel. In one scene, Dabbagh captures the eerie aftermath of a bombing during which Iman sits in an abandoned playground and contemplates how to help her people despite their terrorized, dehumanizing situation:

> Iman sat on the playground wall away from the signs of donors promising reconstruction. A ginger cat strutted out in front of her and lay on its side, making a show of its belly, before it gathered that Iman was no fun at all and gave her its back. It leapt up on to the wall further down, lifting its head to squeeze its eyes at the growing light.
>
> This was her lot. This was her life, the life of her father, her mother, her brothers. This was their lot, their country, their place in the world. This was what she had come back for and it was for her to find a meaningful role within it.

These days—as tensions with the West persist, fledgling democratic revolutions forge ahead, and economic concerns grow deeper—many Middle Easterners are reflecting on their place in the world and what role they will (or will not) take in effecting change. Works like *Tablet & Pen* and *Out of It* may not solve the oft-debated political questions, but they help inspire the foundation of empathy on which our foreign policy could and should be based. ■

ASHLEY BATES is the assistant editor at *Tikkun*. Her work has appeared in *Ha'aretz*, the *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, the *Nation*, and *Huffington Post*. Her website is ashleyebates.com.

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When American Jews Were Divided and Weak

Jews Without Power: American Jewry During the Holocaust
by Ariel Hurwitz
MultiEducator, Inc., 2011

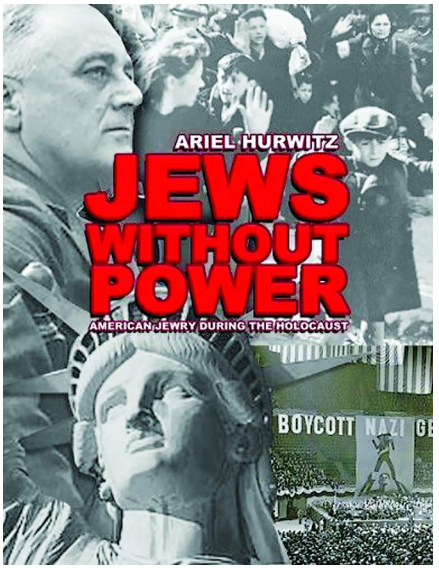
Millions of Jews to Rescue: A Bergson Group Leader's Account of the Campaign to Save Jews from the Holocaust
by Samuel Merlin,
edited by Rafael Medoff
The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2011

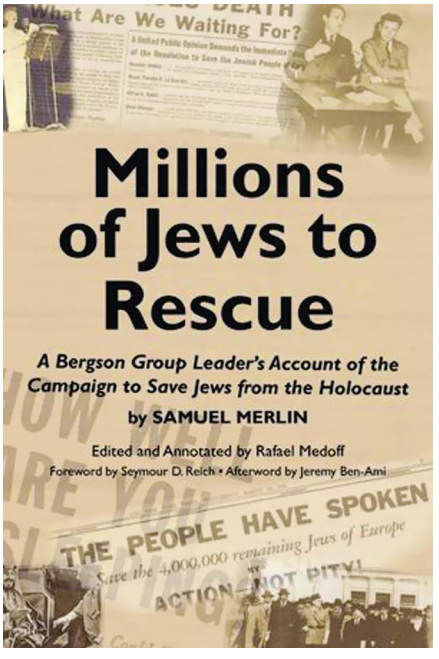
REVIEW BY RALPH SELIGER

IT'S EXTRAORDINARY to see how different the contemporary American political climate is for Jews than it was seventy years ago. Today, the "Israel lobby" is widely regarded as all-powerful, and all but one of the 2012 Republican Presidential contenders—along with the Democratic incumbent—have eagerly sought Jewish support. In the 1930s and early '40s, Jewish lives were barely worth a mention for most Americans.

The authors of these two books address this subject from opposite vantage points on the political spectrum. Samuel Merlin, author of *Millions of Jews to Rescue*, was a member of the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* (the National Military Organization or Irgun)—the right-wing "Revisionist" underground associated with Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Menachem Begin. Ariel Hurwitz, author of *Jews Without Power*, immigrated to Israel from the United States as a member of the radical-left *Hashomer Hatzair* (The Young Guard) youth movement; he has lived on a kibbutz since the 1950s and is the author of *Against the Stream* (1994), a history of Hashomer Hatzair in North America.

Merlin (1910-1996), born in Kishinev, Russia, labored for decades on what, as an actual Bergson Group participant, must have been an emotionally difficult task. Although he succeeded in writing one other book for publication in 1969 (*The Search for Peace in the Middle East*), this second book was not published until 2011, fifteen years after his death. Ably edited and annotated by Dr. Rafael Medoff, it is the author's account of the Bergson Boys (also called the Bergson Group) led by Hillel Kook—better known by his alias, Peter Bergson. Bergson and his comrades, all veterans of the Irgun in their twenties and thirties, first came to the United States from Palestine to agitate for a Jewish army, but later achieved fame rallying American opinion for the rescue of Europe's Jews from Hitler's genocide.





Merlin looks back to his activist years as one of the Bergson Boys with passion and certitude. Dr. Hurwitz writes as a professional historian, carefully weighing facts and complexities. Thus, Hurwitz's book is less judgmental and more comprehensive, but Merlin's straightforwardness is compelling.

The initial objective of the Bergson Boys—Bergson, Merlin, Eri Jabotinsky (son of the founder of Revisionist Zionism), Alex Rafaeli, and Yitzhak Ben-Ami (father of J Street's president, Jeremy Ben-Ami)—the creation of an army of "Palestinian and stateless Jews" to fight Hitler, merits further exploration. (Interestingly, from the other end of the spectrum, Hannah Arendt had also strongly favored the creation of such a force.)

Merlin states that 133,000 to 135,000 Palestinian Jews had volunteered to fight, but the service of most was refused because of the British insistence that Palestinian Arabs join on the basis of one-to-one parity. Palestinian Jews would presumably have been happy to serve in either the British armed forces or a separate Jewish army—more motivated (for obvious reasons) to fight the Nazis than were most Palestinian Arabs, who volunteered in much smaller numbers. Most Jews were turned down because the British didn't want their fight against the Axis powers to be known among Arabs as a pro-Jewish cause.

An additional 100,000 to 200,000 Jews under arms could have significantly aided the Allies in North Africa and elsewhere in the Mediterranean; this force might have been able to launch more operations for rescue and resistance (such as the missions of Hannah Senesch and other Hagganah commandos dropped behind enemy lines) that other national forces were unwilling to pursue. The British eventually allowed the formation of a single Palestinian Jewish brigade that fought in northern Italy. These soldiers also assisted displaced Jews and smuggled some into Palestine.

Anti-Semitism Blunts Aid to Europe's Jews

After the genocidal intention of the Nazis became known, the Bergson Boys switched gears to agitate for an energetic U.S. and Allied effort to save European Jewry from annihilation. For newcomers to America, they proved themselves remarkably adept at publicizing the plight of European Jewry, rallying substantial support from prominent non-Jews as well as Jews, including members of Congress from both major parties and the former president, Herbert Hoover. Eleanor Roosevelt was among the tens of thousands who saw their traveling pageant, *We Will Never Die* (with music arranged by Kurt Weil), which debuted in New York's Madison Square Garden in March 1943, selling out two performances on the same night.

Mrs. Roosevelt was sympathetic but complained to Peter Bergson about a paid newspaper ad that hit her husband hard for achieving so little in the face of such dire need. Caustic newspaper ads, as well as the aforementioned pageant, were largely the work of Ben Hecht, a Hollywood screenwriter, novelist, and playwright who became an important member of the Bergson team. The newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst donated space for hard-hitting ads by the Bergson Group and ordered editorials supporting their cause.

Both authors agree that U.S. policy before and during most of World War II was dictated by forces that opposed relief and rescue for Europe's Jews. Anti-Semitism was a serious problem. After *Kristallnacht*—the "night of broken glass" (November 9, 1938), when the Nazis orchestrated nationwide attacks on German Jews and their property—a congressional bill to bring in 20,000 German refugee children was blocked for anti-Semitic reasons. A year later, a similar bill to shelter 10,000 British children (primarily non-Jews) passed without trouble.

Hurwitz cites polling data indicating that 41 to 58 percent of the American public "believed that Jews had too much power" in the United States, and as many as 24 percent "expressed their belief that the Jews constituted a menace" to this country. Meanwhile, Roosevelt had brought such an unprecedented number of Jews into his administration that the New Deal was derided as the "Jew Deal."

Yet, according to Hurwitz, Roosevelt shared "biases prevalent in his gentlemanly circle, which perceived

a flaw in the behavior and manners of the Jews." He favored distributing Jews widely in small numbers, so that "the local populace will have no objection." But the combination of his progressive domestic agenda with his clear-eyed strategic grasp that Nazi Germany was the country's greatest enemy—even after the Japanese had initially mauled U.S. forces in the Pacific—ensured Jewish loyalty and devotion.

Arousing further anti-Semitism was both genuinely feared by some and maliciously used as an excuse to argue against effective aid policies by others. An oft-repeated administration and Allied refrain was not to provide ammunition for the Nazi propaganda claim that the Allied cause was a "war for the Jews" by advancing explicitly pro-Jewish measures. This ignored the fact that Jews were being targeted by the Nazis in a uniquely brutal and lethal way.

Neither the Evian Conference in 1938 nor the Bermuda Conference in April 1943 succeeded in advancing solutions to the Jewish refugee crisis. The closing communiqué at Bermuda didn't even mention Jews. After Bermuda, Hurwitz reports that Rabbi Stephen Wise—head of the American Jewish Congress and the single leading figure in American Jewry at the time—was in despair. The head of the World Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizman, declared that "the world is divided into countries in which Jews cannot live, and countries which they must not enter."

Hurwitz writes in detail on how a variety of U.S. State Department officials—including the indifferent Secretary of State Cordell Hull and the pernicious Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long—obfuscated and delayed for precious months in responding to Jewish requests to verify reports on the ever-expanding genocide. They constituted a wall of resistance in general to relief and rescue proposals advanced by Jewish groups.

Divisions Among Jews

Both writers relate in somewhat different ways the painful divisions within the American Jewish community on how to deal with the calamity befalling their kin and coreligionists overseas. American Jewry's internal strife in the 1940s partly had to do with the fact that the Bergson Boys were from a minority Zionist faction that most American Zionists viewed as extreme. Another factor was the cultural divide between the more established German Jews who dominated the centrist and anti-Zionist American Jewish Committee and the relatively recent arrivals from Eastern Europe who had created the more liberal and pro-Zionist American Jewish Congress, as well as the Bundist/Socialist-leaning Jewish Labor Committee. It's noteworthy that almost all American Jewish groups today see themselves as either Zionist or pro-Israel in significant ways, including the American Jewish Committee.

No less a leading contemporary Jewish establishment figure than Seymour D. Reich—a former chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and ex-president of the American Zionist Movement and of the Israel Policy Forum—wrote a forward to Merlin's book, condemning the attacks on the Bergson Group by the establishment of that day. And Jeremy Ben-Ami added an afterword expressing pride in his father's role as one of the Bergson Boys. He argued that "All Jews from right to left should have been able to support" its rescue mission. He also pointed out that most individuals recruited into the Bergson Group—such as Ben Hecht and Stella Adler—were liberals augmented by varying degrees of support from such leftists as Upton Sinclair, I.F. Stone, Sinclair Lewis, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson.

Merlin is particularly harsh on the meekness of the American Jewish establishment. He had a field day with the way letters from Rabbi Wise appear to have addressed FDR obsequiously, beginning with the salutation, "Dear Boss." But Hurwitz contends that Jewish leaders may have been correct in carefully maintaining their access to the White House.

In the end, Hurwitz argues that it was not outside agitation that moved the Roosevelt administration into action, but the work of a handful of dedicated non-Jewish officials at the Treasury Department, importantly supported by their Jewish boss, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. The one sustained and sincere official American effort at rescue, the War Refugee Board, was effective in limited ways, saving as many as 200,000 Jewish lives.

Merlin cites the Bergson Group's success in mobilizing wide bipartisan support for a rescue bill in Congress, but Hurwitz doubts that Congress would have given a rescue agency adequate funding or teeth to do its work. The War Refugee Board was an

executive agency signed into existence by FDR on January 22, 1944. It would have been immeasurably more successful if launched a year or so earlier, when evidence of the Nazi "Final Solution" became clear.

The War Refugee Board was placed under the direction of John Pehle, one of those Treasury Department subordinates who had compiled a well-researched document entitled "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews." It was delivered to Roosevelt under a less provocative title, but not before Treasury Department officials learned of a devastating event that graphically illustrated the problem: to avoid setting "a precedent," the U.S. military rejected a request from the World Jewish Congress to evacuate 4,000 Jews from the newly liberated Italian island of Rab; shortly afterward, the island was recaptured by the Germans, with all that this meant for the Jews. Morgenthau was outraged.

Hurwitz indicates that FDR's overall record on refugees was mixed rather than uniformly bad. He writes that FDR intervened in the 1930s to ease State Department requirements for visa applicants and combined the Austrian immigration quota with Germany's after the *Anschluss* (the German annexation of Austria), which helped more Austrian Jews to get out. But it was his appointees who had steered the State Department maliciously in the first place. Breckinridge Long's directive to consular officials to impede and delay granting immigration visas to Jews had a devastating effect. Hurwitz reports that only 48.2 percent of immigration slots allotted for Germany and Austria were filled from 1933 to 1940; filling these quotas alone would have accommodated 113,000 refugees.

From what I know of Roosevelt from other sources—including the story of Jan Karski, the gentile Polish underground resistance fighter who met with FDR to report on his eyewitness knowledge of the Warsaw Ghetto and the genocide, only to be shocked at the president's disinterest—he was coldly focused upon winning the war and little else. And he believed that the Jewish issue was a diversion from the war effort. He acted only when compelled by Morgenthau's threat to expose the inhumane practices of his own government.

Merlin and other writers who touted the work of the Bergson Group, such as historians David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, are correct that the public pressure they generated was useful in forcing FDR's hand. It also seems to me that the much-maligned Rabbi Wise and other more cautious Jewish leaders were correct in keeping their channels open to the administration—but they should not have fought the Bergson group tooth-and-nail, even to the point of attempting to have them deported or drafted.

In the end, there probably needed to be both an inside game as pursued by the Jewish establishment and the outside effort to rally public opinion, as brilliantly pursued by Bergson. Indeed, even in a book that pours some cold water on their enthusiasts, Hurwitz also writes that as young newcomers to the scene, the Bergson Group provided fresh energy to a rather old and tired Jewish leadership.

Plans for Rescue

So what specific measures did the Bergson Boys and the Jewish establishment advocate? One was to loudly and frequently broadcast to the Nazis and their confederates that the Allies knew of their crimes against the Jews, for which they'd be punished. Such a statement was made once or twice, but not repeatedly.

It is noteworthy in this connection that press reports on the genocide were published but usually buried in the back pages. This was even true of the Jewish-owned *New York Times* and *Washington Post,* whose publishers were fearful of being identified as Jews or as partial to Jewish causes. How else do we explain the complete lack of awareness by Allied forces when they came upon concentration camps?

They also advocated the establishment and financing of temporary "free ports" or safe havens for refugees in neutral countries or in Allied territories. The governor and legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands had offered itself as such, a plan vetoed by the administration allegedly for fear of letting in Axis spies and saboteurs. The War Refugee Board set up one internment camp in Oswego, New York, for 1,000 refugees. Sweden provided itself as a refuge for the Jews of Denmark and Norway. Other possibilities, woefully underutilized, included Switzerland and Allied-liberated North Africa.

Such plans involved bribing Axis officials and transporting Jews from Nazi client states, especially after the tide of war had changed and some Nazi allies wanted to disengage from the losing side. Admiral Horthy of Hungary ordered an end to deportations to Auschwitz after a U.S. bombing raid on Budapest (erroneously believing that the bombing was a reprisal for these deportations). Tragically, the murder machinery resumed at a clip of 12,000 gassed daily once Hitler had replaced his former ally with a virulently anti-Semitic regime that lasted several months.

Geographically, Palestine was an ideal potential free port. The Bergson Boys even suggested the concession that Jews be sent there on only a temporary basis, so as not to spook the British, who limited Jewish immigrants to 75,000 under their 1939 White Paper. Naturally, the British were quick to veto such a plan.

Another involved bombing rail links to the death camps and hitting the camps themselves. The U.S. military rejected this as a diversion from the war effort, but Hurwitz points out that this was a matter of priorities. U.S. bombers hit industrial targets a few miles from the center of Auschwitz, even killing and injuring some Auschwitz slave laborers in the

process (I personally knew one Auschwitz survivor who had lost an arm in such a raid). And Hurwitz points out that about one hundred U.S. planes dropped supplies to Polish forces during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, even after their cause was doomed and most of the material landed in Nazi-occupied areas.

There was also a paper chase. The War Refugee Board encouraged and financed the distribution of real and false passports and citizenship or residency documents. One famously heroic figure in this effort was the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who saved many lives in Hungary before disappearing into Stalin's Gulag.

Implications for Today

Both books remind us that the institutional memory of American Jews today is that they as a community failed their fellow Jews being slaughtered in Europe. The historian, Ariel Hurwitz, concludes that this is an overly harsh judgment, given the weaknesses and divisions of American Jews at the time and the unprecedented and hard-to-fathom scale of the cataclysm their brethren faced overseas. The late activist, Samuel Merlin, disagreed, writing with bitter conviction that American Jews should have been more resolute.

During the post-war decades, anti-Semitic discrimination in the United States became disreputable, if not illegal, and American Jews emerged into an unprecedented time of economic, cultural, and political acceptance. J. J. Goldberg's 1996 book, *Jewish Power: Inside the American-Jewish Establishment*, registered a triumphal note that American Jews had finally arrived at a place where they felt secure about exercising power explicitly as Jews.

Still, it is a lingering sense of guilt over their historic powerlessness that helped build a very effective Jewish "Israel lobby." This lobby is not nearly as coherent and powerful as some critics think, but it drives a substantial minority of Jews toward a largely militaristic stance in foreign policy and works increasingly against the grain of liberalism that still defines most American Jews. Yet, derived as this is from these tragic events, still in living memory, only a dramatic turn toward a secure peace for their kin in Israel is likely to alter such an insecure mindset. ■

RALPH SELIGER writes mostly about Israel and Jewish cultural and political issues for *Tikkun*, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, *In These Times*, and other publications. He also blogs for Tikkun Daily and for Partners for Progressive Israel (formerly Meretz USA) at meretzusa.blogspot.com.

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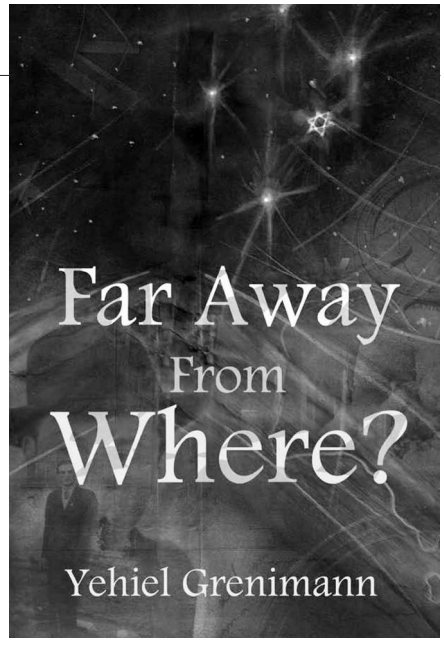
Much More Than a Historical Novel

Far Away From Where?
by Yehiel Grenimann
Mazo Publishers, 2011

REVIEW BY JEFFREY M. GREEN



IT IS PROBABLY impossible to imagine ourselves in the place of the Jewish survivors of World War II and the Holocaust immediately after the war, but this is exactly the task that Yehiel Grenimann, the son of survivors, set for himself. Yanosh and Eva, his central characters, were hidden on the Aryan side of Warsaw, thanks to their connection with the Polish nationalist underground. Yosef Borowski, known as Bora, the third major protagonist, was a partisan leader during the war. The novel begins with the entry of the Soviet army into Warsaw and ends with Yanosh and Eva's imminent arrival in Australia, where, despite pressure from Zionist activists in the displaced persons camps, they have elected to go rather than risk illegal immigration to Palestine.

Unlike a historical novel based on research and imaginative projection into the past, *Far Away from Where?* develops information the author received from his parents. It is an effort to understand them—not as individuals, since the protagonists are not meant to represent them, but as people who shared harrowing experiences and found the courage and strength to begin life again despite enormous losses.

Grenimann makes it clear that the Jews had to choose from among a very limited range of options after the war. Eva and Yanosh choose to start a family, and Eva's pregnancy is a major element in the novel. Eva chooses to bring traditional Jewish ceremonies into their life, although Yanosh, an assimilated, antireligious intellectual, resists. Eva and Yanosh also choose to seek a better life for themselves in Australia rather than throw their lot in with the national struggle in

Palestine. In contrast, Bora chooses not to lay down arms after the war, but to continue striking at SS officers and German war criminals. None of the characters has the luxury of considering attractive alternatives at leisure. They have to decide quickly, with little or no information.

I have been Grenimann's friend for decades. I also met his late father, the heroic partisan leader upon whom, to a degree, the character of Bora is based. Hence I know that he has moved along a complex trajectory from his secular Zionist background in Melbourne to becoming a Conservative rabbi who works for Rabbis for Human Rights in Jerusalem. Today this son of Holocaust refugees works with displaced Bedouins in the occupied Palestinian territories; this experience feeds his efforts to portray the inner worlds of those still looking for a stable home.

You might say that John Green's decision to leave Australia and become Rabbi Yehiel Grenimann was a reaction to his parents' decision to go as far away as they could from Europe and the Middle East, a rejection of their prioritizing personal security and comfort over Jewish solidarity and risk. So you might expect to find a judgmental, Zionist attitude in his book. But you won't. Yehiel is sympathetic to the desire of his protagonists, Eva and Yanosh, to lead a normal life in a hospitable country. He also makes us aware that the Jews of Poland were hardly of a piece. They entered the dreadful period of the Holocaust with diverse backgrounds and ambitions, and those who survived remained as diverse as they had been to begin with—though tragically diminished in number.

Perhaps the most important lesson of this book for us today is the way it conveys what should be obvious: times have changed. The Jewish people is no longer recovering from the immediate trauma of slaughter, fear, deprivation, and doubt, although our collective loss remains beyond words. The constraints that dictated the decisions made by Eva, Yanosh, Bora, and the other characters in Grenimann's book have dissipated. The survivors' pain—the loss of family and friends, the destruction of the world they had grown up in, the traumatic burden that the war left in their souls—is largely in the past. We are the second, third, and fourth generations after the Holocaust. We remember, but we remember what we have heard and read, not what we have experienced ourselves. Unfortunately, many of us have not yet developed a worldview consistent with the historical changes that have taken place.

The title of *Far Away from Where?* conveys many messages. Eva is worried that Australia is too "far away," but Yanosh asks: What are you reluctant to be far away from, after all we have gone through? We, Grenimann's readers, are far away in time and geography from the Holocaust. While we mustn't forget what we are now far away from, we must acknowledge that we are, in fact, far away. Our actions, today and tomorrow, must be based on that recognition. ■

JEFFREY M. GREEN's translation of *Until the Dawn's Light* by Aharon Appelfeld was recently published by Schocken Books in New York.

DOI 10.1215/08879982-1629218

MUSIC

A Jewish Composer for Our Time

Living Breathing Earth

Navona Records, 2011
Album by Meira Warshauer

Streams in the Desert

Albany Records, 2007
Album by Meira Warshauer

REVIEW BY ANNA RUBIN

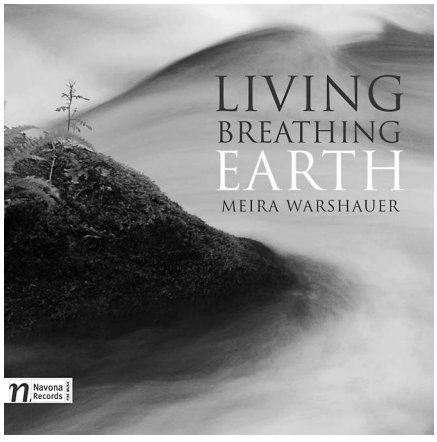
WHO KNEW that by 2012 the world of classical music would be so wonderfully eclectic, unpredictable, and adventurous? Who knew that composers would freely borrow from folk and popular styles, as well as ancient traditions? Listeners are welcoming this trend with relish, turning toward this "new" music for inspiration, soul nourishment, and a connection to ancient roots.

The term "classical" is far more inclusive than a generation ago. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven are only part of the rich musical palette of today's concert music. Composers who would once have been considered fringe for their political, social, or religious concerns are now embraced by orchestras across the country. Meira Warshauer, a composer with many commissions and works to her credit, exemplifies these new developments and speaks authentically from her Jewish identity and deeply felt spirituality. Her works reflect her fascination with Jewish, classical, and world music, and her admirable skills as a composer. She uses the power of pure music to evoke deep feelings of peace, beauty, reverence, and gratitude in which life is affirmed. And while she focuses her works on Jewish themes, her music reflects the enormous width of world music with a generous helping of Coplandesque grandeur.

Warshauer's newest album draws listeners into a lush symphonic world under the able baton of Petr Vronsky leading the Moravian Philharmonic. In it, Warshauer presents two works:

Living Breathing Earth, the symphony whose title also graces the album, and *Tekeeyah*, scored for a shofar-trombone soloist and orchestra. Both works inhabit an accessible and rich sound world. They have a contemporary feeling, with driving rhythms and colorful percussion. And both works incorporate the strong Jewish themes Warshauer explores in most of her compositions.

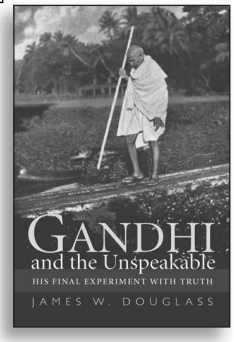
The first piece in the album, *Living Breathing Earth*, comes in four movements and follows a fast/slow/fast/slow progression. The first movement, "Call of the Cicadas," is extremely dynamic and exciting—an introduction portraying world-shaping energies. Strings imitate the lush sounds of cicadas, and varied percussion instruments maintain a pulsing, driving rhythm. Delicate melodies are woven together to create a sort of paean to the fertility of our fragile earth. Warshauer has a wonderful ear for the



varied timbres of the orchestra and she leads the ear from soft, delicate sounds to powerful rhythmic unisons.

The second movement of the piece, "Tahuayo River at Night," is a profoundly peaceful and restful work that calms the heart and rests the soul. Lovers of Aaron Copland will hear echoes of his *Appalachian Spring* harmonies and tinges of Mahler's adagio movements. Its cyclic nature builds up to a gorgeous climax and then exhales into a soft ending.

The third movement, "Wings in Flight," evokes bird flight with graceful melodies and harp accompaniment. A gentle pulsing keeps the music ever-flowing and shows Warshauer's love of percussion and arching melodies. The last movement, "Living, Breathing Earth," recalls elements of the opening as well as themes from the second,



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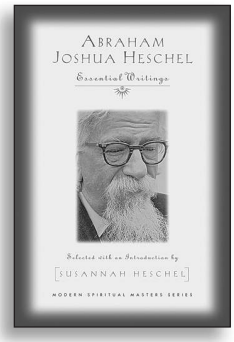

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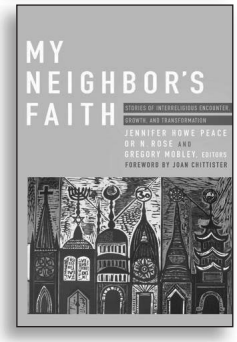

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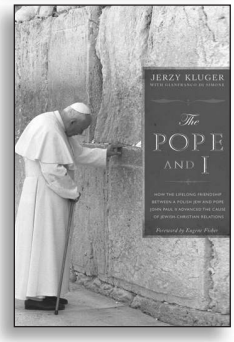

The Pope and I
How the Lifeling Friendship between a Polish Jew and John Paul II Advanced Jewish-Christian Relations
JERZY KLUGER with Gianfranco Di Simone
Foreword by Eugene J. Fisher
Highlights the surprising confluences of history, politics, and religion sealed by friendship and mutual respect.
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slow movement. The orchestra seems to be inhaling and exhaling with alternating powerful chords upon which the composer quilts ever-changing timbres and rhythms. This movement comes to a poignant and powerful climax, summing up the entire symphony, leaving the listener in an exalted and celebratory mood.

The second work on the album is *Tekeeyah,* the Hebrew name for the long tones played on the shofar during the Jewish High Holidays. Warshauer writes in her program notes about the three distinct patterns in which the shofar is sounded: "*tekeeyah*, a long tone; *shevarim*, three shorter tones; and *teruah*, at least nine staccato or short notes. *Tekeeyah g'dolah*, a very long *tekeeyah*, concludes the sequence on Rosh Hashonah." Warshaeur incorporates all three in this composition.

Tekeeyah opens with the aptly named "A Call," with a slow and mysterious texture. Breath sounds fuse with gongs, all surrounding the low, haunting call of the shofar. Warshauer alternates winds and strings in another evocation of the cycle of breath. The piece's second movement is called "Breaking Walls." The shofar player, virtuoso Haim Avitsur, switches seamlessly to trombone, starting with its lowest sounds and reaching into its upper reaches as the piece becomes filmic in its drama. This middle section is full of Warshauer's signature pulsing textures and varied orchestration. The raw call of the shofar returns to round out the movement. The final section, "Dance of Truth," celebrates the nine short sounds of the teruah sounded by the shofar during the Rosh Hashanah service; it features a solo by the shofar and concludes in an exciting climax—just as the service ends with the final tekeeyah.

In her program notes, Warshauer writes movingly about the shofar's symbolic significance to Jews:

> The shofar calls us. It calls us before we are born. It calls us to enter the world. It is our touchstone as we move through life's challenges. It helps break through walls we construct around our essence. Those protective walls may be the very ones that keep us from our true knowing. The shofar calls us to return.

Warshauer's earlier album, *Streams in the Desert*, features her re-creation of the *Shacharit* (morning service). A narrator leads the listener through the piece. Warshuaer writes in her notes, "The Sabbath morning service is a spiritual journey of praise, revelation, prayer, and exultation."

Like any true work of art, Warshauer's work casts the familiar in a new light. For Christian and even Jewish composers, the Catholic Mass has served to inspire countless symphonic and choral works—composers in the twentieth century ranging from Stravinsky to Bernstein have tried their hand at reinterpreting this ancient rite. Very few works inspired by the Jewish liturgy, however, have been accepted into the classical canon. Warshauer's works deserve to be included in that canon.

The majestic *Ahavah* (love) is also on this album. The piece calls for large forces—mezzo soprano or alto soloist, full choir, and orchestra. The text of the full Sh'ma prayer is divided into three large movements. In the first movement, "Listen and Love," the soloist beautifully soars above the choir and orchestra while the choir intones a three-note chant of the word "ahavah" that becomes a kind of soul mantra. The second movement, *Hishamru* (beware), is spiky, rhythmic, and reminiscent of early Stravinsky. Warshauer's expert handling of orchestral colors paints an ominous sonic landscape that highlights the admonitions of this movement, which warns of what befalls those who do not align themselves with the divine purpose. The last movement returns to the comforting golden hues of the opening as the Sh'ma completes the promise of divine love.

This music has the potential to touch everyone from classical music aficionados to appreciators of world music to people new to these genres: Warshauer's work is the kind of music that nourishes the soul, expands the heart, and gives us the repose and nourishment to continue our work in the world. ■

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distorted vision of Islam that has been imposed on the tens of millions of decent Iranians.

Indeed, fundamentalisms of every sort—Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.—would have far less appeal, and their power to sway national elections would diminish. The use of nuclear weapons against the West would seem far less plausible, suicide would seem far less attractive, and hope would feel more available.

When presented with these arguments, many skeptics say, "Well, fine, but it's unlikely that our government would agree to move in that direction." This is a fundamentally different kind of objection—one based not on a problem with "the other" but on a problem with us and our own political structure.

And this brings into clearer focus what is so terribly dispiriting about the choices Obama has made while in office. He has been up against a contentious Republican party and

disloyal Democrats in Congress, and there have been real limitations on what he might have accomplished even with a Democratic majority in Congress. But there was no constraint on his ability to use the presidency to challenge the worldview of materialism and militarism fostered by both parties since the ascent of Reagan in 1980. Instead, President Obama has pushed from public discourse progressive ideas he could have championed. This approach was evident when he refused to allow a national health plan with single-payer features to be considered in the gatherings he held to discuss health care reform. It was evident in his failure to explain to the American people what his good friend Rashid Khalidi had explained to him—the legitimacy of the Palestinian national movement, despite its many failures and distortions. It was evident in his failure to challenge the role of banks and Wall Street. And it was manifest in his pandering year after year to AIPAC while ignoring the progressive Jews who were in the forefront of his efforts to be elected in 2008.

Some skeptics are willing to grant all of these points but still insist that it is too far-fetched to imagine a politics being built around this vision and that, in any event, such a strategy would take too long to address the "present emergency with Iran."

The short answer here is that *there is no present emergency with Iran*, except if the United States and Israel create it. Iran does not have nuclear weapons now, and if its leaders had nuclear weapons, there is little reason to believe that they would be willing to risk the virtually certain mass destruction that a nuclear Israel, backed by the United States, would inflict on Iran, ending not just the Islamic state but also burying the great history of the Persian people.

Given that there is no imminent emergency, we can focus instead on spreading a vision of politics that speaks to the deep human need for a society organized to facilitate love, caring, kindness, generosity, and ethical and ecological sensitivity. Until that vision wins majority support in the United States, we must work toward it with hope rather than wallow in depression or halfheartedly compromise with our leaders' militarist and fear-based assumptions. Progressives in November 2012 might reasonably decide to once again accept "lesser evil" politics in the November elections. But they should be organizing to push for a very different agenda than that likely to emerge from a possible second term for Obama, no matter how visionary he may present himself to be in the summer and fall of 2012 in an effort to attract our votes around election time. And we should certainly not rally around any military strike against Iran if Obama decides to covertly authorize Israel to make such a strike or similar military action in the months before the election to prove that he is "strong on defense."

It may take years to change the domination worldview in the United States and Israel, but this must be a high priority for spiritual progressives. Our strategy of generosity is far more realistic than the path of violence and wars, and far more likely to produce homeland security and peace (both inner and outer) than is the path of the militarists. We must draw on a spirit of generosity even as we challenge those who cynically ignore, ridicule, or distort our perspective. The path to a world we seek must be a path of open-heartedness, respect, and love, difficult as that is at times to achieve. ■

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staying engaged with the ethical "other" and thus open to the possibility of transcendence, he identifies the Nazi vision as fundamentally materialist and pseudo-biological.

It is essential to note that Levinas, unlike the New Atheist writers, did not specifically blame Christianity for the anti-Semitism that later destroyed his family and an entire way of life across Europe. It is telling that "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" was published in a left-leaning Catholic journal that also informed the Catholic Worker movement. And Levinas turned to fellow spiritual progressives repeatedly as the threat of Hitlerism grew. Tragically, there was no time for a new movement to coalesce around this alliance.

According to Malka, in 1936, Levinas observed, "The antagonism between the monotheistic religions has subsided since Hitlerism threatens their common patrimony." Levinas wrote again of the "common threat" of the Nazi regime to both religions in a 1938 piece. In March 1939, commenting on the death of liberal Pope Pius XI, whose career he retraces as a "moment of human conscience," Levinas wrote the following astounding sentence: "In an increasingly hostile world that is being covered in swastikas, it is to the cross with its straight and pure limbs that we often raise our eyes."

However, the death of Pope Pius XI, who had condemned particularly the myths of race and blood at the heart of Nazi ideology, was in many ways an end to such hopes. At best, his successor Pius XII had a far more ambiguous role in confronting Hitlerism; at worst, he was a sometimes collaborator.

Religious aspirations, alliances, and institutions clearly failed to be the bulwark against the Nazi threat that Levinas had hoped they would be. But it is nevertheless meaningful that Levinas and other progressive people of faith understood Nazism as being fundamentally antireligious and

pseudo-scientific—precisely the opposite of the New Atheists' analysis. And it must be noted that science also proved to be no more of a bastion of reason against the Nazi urgings of the blood than did religion.

Biologist Lewis Wolpert recalls in *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief* that many distinguished German scientists, including Nobel Laureate Konrad Lorenz, supported the Nazi terror. "The use of biology to support this belief came from a doctor," Wolpert writes, and "for non-scientists such beliefs, apparently based upon science, could be very persuasive." This brings us to our final topic: the disturbing historical revisionism of the New Atheists.

The Reactionary Perspective of the New Atheists

Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens are three representative writers from the New Atheists group. The very titles of their books seem almost calculated to give offense: *The God Delusion* (Dawkins), *God Is Not Great*: *How Religion Poisons Everything* (Hitchens), and *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (Harris).

While their scholarship is sloppy and their conclusions overdrawn, their underlying frustration with extreme forms of "religion," especially after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, is certainly understandable. In *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, theologian John F. Haught writes:

> In spite of the new atheism's . . . one-sidedness, and its many exaggerations, it is not altogether without truth and value. Its importance consists primarily in reminding readers of what happens when religions take themselves too seriously, enthroning themselves in the place of the infinite mystery into which they are supposed to initiate us.

But, rather than seeing the World Trade Center attacks as the work of a small but highly motivated extremist group with a broadly anti-Western agenda, the New Atheists see religion itself as one of the enemies that assaulted Western civilization on that fateful day in 2001.

This is perhaps most evident in Harris's 2004 book, *The End of Faith*, which opens with an ominous portrayal of a suicide bomber whose "pockets are filled with nails, ball bearings, and rat poison." Harris states one of his "central themes" directly in the shadow of his portrayal of the bombing scene:

> Religious moderates . . . imagine that the path to peace will be paved once each of us has learned to respect the unjustified beliefs of others. . . . [But] the very ideal of religious tolerance—born of the notion that every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants about God—is one of the principal forces driving us toward the abyss.

In direct reaction to terrorist suicide killers and other threats that he believes religion can pose to reason, Harris decisively rejects the values of the Enlightenment, including religious tolerance. As Daniel Lazare observes in his review for the *Nation*, "[Harris] has little feel for politics and even less for the ironies of historical development. . . . Like the Ayn Randians, *The End of Faith* is an example of how atheism can as easily propel one to the right as to the left."

The New Atheism is, with Dawkins being the exception, often fundamentally reactionary in its politics. This is clear from Hitchens's support for the Iraq invasion, torture, and other repugnant stances, perhaps culminating in his 2007 statement at the Freedom from Religion Foundation: "Every Moslem you kill means there is one less Moslem to fight you."

Harris similarly tends to conflate what he calls "the Muslim world" with terror. If this unified "Muslim world" is responsible for terrorism, it is suggested that repressive actions against it are justified. Harris argues that in dealing with religious extremism, it may be necessary to employ military force, saying, "Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them."

Further, Harris intimates ominously that nuclear deterrence would not be possible with Muslims because "notions of martyrdom and jihad run roughshod over logic." Harris elsewhere notes that India and Muslim-majority Pakistan have engaged in nuclear brinkmanship. However, the far worse brinkmanship of the Cuban Missile Crisis makes it hard to see how religion fits in. So far deterrence has prevailed.

The New Atheists appear to speak from a place far too close to what Levinas would describe as their "fundamental feelings" and violent "urgings of the blood" than can be justified. They also practice historical revisionism of the most reckless kind, as writers on all political sides have noted.

Harris and Hitchens provide a bizarre analysis of Stalinism. Although the Soviet Union was specifically anti-religious as a matter of policy, the New Atheists assert that the real problem was that communism was "little more than a political religion" (Harris) that "did not so much negate religion, in societies that they well understood were saturated with faith and superstition, but replace it" (Hitchens). Harris summed up this argument neatly in a 2006 *LA Times* interview:

> The problem with fascism and communism, however, is not that they are too critical of religion; the problem is that they are too much like religions. . . . Personality cults are indistinguishable from cults of religious hero worship.

Several of the New Atheists contend that religion, which supposedly poisons

everything, is even to blame for the genocides of antireligious regimes. In a *Commentary* magazine review, Sam Schulman concluded, "For Hitchens, in short, everything religion touches is bad, and everything bad is religious—including anti-religion."

The New Atheist view simply does not withstand historical scrutiny. To take just one example, tens of thousands of Orthodox priests, monks, and nuns were persecuted and killed under Stalin, not because of any cult of personality, but because religious leaders were seen as a threat to state control. Over 100,000 were murdered during the purges of 1937–1938 alone, according to a recent study titled, "A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia."

In a similar vein, Harris writes that the "anti-Semitism that built the crematoria brick by brick—and that still thrives today—comes to us by way of Christian theology. Knowingly or not, the Nazis were agents of religion." And yet Levinas and many of his contemporaries, who were much closer to the scene and had far more at stake than Harris, saw things very differently.

Levinas and the Post-WWII Experience Rebut New Atheist Revisionism

In the view of Levinas and a significant number of his contemporaries, the religion of their era embraced science but remained one institution that helped to keep science in the service of long held values. Further, the "ultimate concerns" of most religions—a desire for justice and solidarity with humanity, including the least fortunate "other"—kept science and humanity itself in touch with fundamental values that had been discarded by both the Nazis and the Stalinists.

These values had also been discarded, in Levinas's view, by philosophers like Heidegger, who wrote happily in Germany during the Nazi years. There is no question that Levinas's emphasis on ethics and the other was a direct reaction to his disgust at where Heidegger's emphasis on Being had led him. Further, the demise of any hope in totalitarian Soviet Communism was also well understood by this generation of scholars who had experienced an ideological "atheist reason" first hand.

In *The Culture of Western Europe*, cultural historian George L. Mosse writes that after World War II and the Stalinist terror, there was a postwar "religious renaissance":

> The very disorientation of society turned men back to spiritual roots. . . . It was now argued that totalitarianism had come about precisely because men had abandoned Christianity. The postwar conflict between the West and the Communist world reinforced such an interpretation of events. Both Fascists and Communists were atheists and therefore the West must return to traditional (religious) foundations.

It was in this context that authors like Levinas, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr wrote. They acknowledged that religious institutions did not prove to be the bulwark against totalitarian society that they would have hoped for—but they were also convinced that the universal values of justice and respect for the individual that religion represented at its best still had value.

Further, after witnessing tens of millions of deaths during the mid-twentieth century, this generation of thinkers came to a very different set of conclusions about religion and religious tolerance. They believed that tolerance (particularly religious tolerance) and respect for the other were important values to be preserved in the face of the twentieth-century historical record. Few in that post-WWII generation held the utopian view of science and reason—or the dystopian view of religion—that characterizes the trendy New Atheist viewpoint.

A Way Forward Toward Transcendence

In 1934, Emmanuel Levinas identified the threat to humanism and humanity represented by the crude biological determinism and antireligious character of Hitlerism. He also identified some of his own seminal themes, namely making ethical responsibility for the other the center of his philosophy. For Levinas, the Jewish understanding of our duty to each other is also where a purely secular phenomenological experience of the other leads us: that is, to a reorientation of ourselves by way of the ethical implications of that encounter.

For believers of any kind, Levinas offers a way forward toward transcendence, which we can experience in compassion for others. For nonbelievers, he offers a system of ethics that is liberating and timely in an era when both religious people and atheists have become dangerously intolerant of the other.

As much as human beings are prone to demonizing each other, the simple historical truth is that that there are good and bad religious people and good and bad nonreligious people. And, alas, it is likely to ever be so. ■

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unity-in-community of self-giving persons-in-relationship. The Father, Son, and Spirit in this view are not three independent units (or monads) eternally bound together in a larger unity. Nor is God one independent unit with three identical parts. Rather, each person exists in dynamic social relationship with the others, and God is the relational unity in which they relate.

Similarly, the being of one person of the Trinity is not independent of the being of the others, so that one could be subtracted and the other two would stand. Nor does the being of one person stand over against the being of the others so the Father could be defined as "not the Son or the Spirit" or the Spirit as "not the Father or the Son," and so on. Rather, the very idea of *person*—whether applied to human beings or to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is redefined in Social Trinitarianism as "being in relationship." A person's relationships with the others, in other words, aren't an accessory to the person who exists apart from them. Those relationships are what and who that person is, and that person cannot be said to exist apart from those relationships. Being, then, for God as for us, means interbeing, being in relationship, so the three persons of the Holy Trinity are not merely one with each other: they are one in each other.

However interesting this might sound to you (or not), it might also seem so esoteric and highly nuanced that it can only lead to the rancorous theological quarrels and hostile excommunications that we're trying to escape. But a simple thought experiment can make clear how powerful and reconciling this Trinitarian vision of God can be.

God as Creative Relationality

First, imagine (recalling the previous paragraphs) God as a "being as communion," as a loving trinity of perichoresis, a sacred choreography of self-giving, other-receiving; honoring, being honored; fully seeing the other, fully revealing the self. Imagine an eternal one-anotherness who is by nature non-assimilating, non-isolating, non-dominating, non-eliminating, non-overthrowing, non-competing, and non-victimized or -victimizing.

Now imagine this God self-expressing in a universe. What kind of universe would this kind of God create? It would not be a universe of independent, isolated individuals or monads because God is not an independent, isolated monad. It would not be a universe of undifferentiated homogeneity (as in the domination, purification, and assimilation narratives) because God is not an undifferentiated homogeneity. It would not be a universe of unending rivalry leading to competition, revolution, and victimization either, because God is not many-in-conflict but three-in-one, unity-in-community. It would not be a universe of duality, stuck in the conflict of one versus the other, because God is one: one one-another.

Clearly, then, this Trinitarian vision of God helps us imagine a relational universe of one-anotherness, community-in-unity, unity-in-community, being-in-interbeing, where benevolence toward the other is at home, and hostility toward the other is foreign, invasive, out of place. To draw from the world of music, this vision invites us to imagine the universe as a wild and wonderful symphony, full of polyphony and surprise, expansive in themes, each movement inspiring the possibility of more movements as yet unimagined, all woven together with coherent motifs and morphing rhythms, where even dissonance has a place within higher, more comprehensive patterns of harmony and wholeness.

Finally, imagine how people in this universe would manifest trust in this triune God. Imagine in particular how people who hold this trust would relate to others who don't understand or hold it. Would they do so by dominating their counterparts and requiring them to assent to a particular vision by threat of sword or banishment? By rejecting them and isolating from them unless and until they see the light? By trying to overthrow or assimilate all their understandings into this one, robbing them of their individuality? Such actions would violate the very spirit or nature of the God these Trinitarians were supposedly being faithful to!

One could only manifest trust in what James Alison described in *The Joy of Being Wrong* as "this new vision of God as deathless, creative relationality" by manifesting undying, creative love toward those who don't share the belief. This kind of Trinitarianism, then, compels those who hold it to encounter the other with a bias against hostility and clannishness and a bias toward benevolence and otherliness.

Imagine that! Imagine that vision of the Holy Trinity and how it could convert its holders from their hostile old identities to a robust, energetic, harmonious new identity. God-with-God in community leads us to envision God-with-us in community. And that vision in turn dares us to imagine God-with-them in community. And that expansive vision invites us higher still: to envision God-with-us-and-with-them in community, which leads us further still to envision us-with-them in community. This approach to the Trinity need not be a litmus test used to legitimize us and delegitimize them. Instead, it can be a gift, offered to others like a poem, not an ultimatum—given not to require assent or dissent, but to inspire mutual love and respect.

As I try to take all this in, I go back in my memory to that balcony with my friend Sol. I see us sitting together, pondering and enjoying a sparkling sea that expands beyond all horizons. We are two men of two different religions, united in our awe at the unspeakable, expansive, profound beauty of it all. God is not a doctrine to be mastered but a mystery to be mastered by.

If we search for a doctrine that is even

more mysterious to many of us than the Trinity, a good candidate would be the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Often neglected, sometimes rediscovered with almost frantic passion, a reformulated understanding of the Holy Spirit awaits to become a powerful resource in the formation of a strong and benevolent identity for Christians. But we should be prepared for some disruption for that to occur, because in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is often associated with surprise.

The Holy Spirit and Encounters with the "Other"

I had one of those "Holy Spirit surprises" just a few weeks after September 11, 2001. I was so surprised I wanted to crawl under my chair.

A group of faith leaders in our community just outside of Washington, D.C., pulled together a series of Sunday-afternoon interfaith gatherings. Our gatherings were hosted at a local mosque—fitting, we all felt, so that Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and others could experience Muslim hospitality in the midst of all the interreligious hostility of the moment. At our first gathering, we observed the Muslim traditions of removing our shoes and of seating the men in one room and the women in another, connected via CCTV. (Our hosts graciously suspended their traditions for subsequent meetings so that we non-Muslims, "the other," would feel more at home.)

At this particular gathering, the imam invited each of us to take five to ten minutes to address this question: *What, according to my tradition, is my duty to my neighbor of another religion?*

It was a great question and all of us had the best intentions, I'm sure. The first speaker was a Sikh from India. Perhaps he became temporarily possessed by the spirit of political animosity between India and Pakistan, the native land of the imam, but whatever the reason, he managed to insult our hosts in his very first sentence, even as he raised a valid concern. "My first duty to my neighbors is not to send them off into another room as second-class citizens, as has been done to the women here today." Awkward! It got more awkward as he went on, for fifteen minutes rather than ten, talking about how Sikhism is superior to other religions.

The next speaker was a Catholic priest, a good friend of mine. He had prepared a written paper which he read . . . every word . . . in a perfectly flat monotone . . . without looking up . . . even once. It was full of quotations: quotations from popes, quotations from scholars, quotations from encyclicals, quotations from I-can't-remember-where. His ten-minute paper took twenty minutes to read. It felt like an hour. I can't remember what he said about my duty to my neighbor of another religion. But I can remember being relieved that it didn't insult anybody. Then came a mainline Protestant minister I didn't know. He also read a paper that was filled with a lot of quotations and also delivered it in an absolutely emotion-free monotone. From what I can remember, he spoke of our Christian duty to see Christ in all people. I'm sure he meant well. It's (almost) always good to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and almost always bad to illustrate a point using Hitler. He managed to do both by saying that Bonhoeffer saw Christ even in Hitler. That's when I wanted to be swallowed up by the floor. The two rabbis—one Orthodox, sitting on my left, and one Reconstructionist, on my right—physically squirmed and furiously massaged their eyebrows as if choreographed. At least the minister stuck to his ten-minute limit, I thought as he sat down. And at least it can't get any worse.

It did. The next speaker was an acquaintance of mine, a Pentecostal pastor with a good heart, even if his judgment was sometimes lacking. He started getting emotional, which the people liked as relief from the previous two speakers. The more emotional he got, the faster he talked, and the speed, combined with his deep-south accent, combined with his generous use of evangelical lingo, meant that he was incomprehensible to most of the folks in the room, for whom English was a second language. (He could have been speaking in tongues, and they wouldn't have known, or cared, as long as he didn't put them to sleep.) Soon he was shouting: "I love you! I love you all! And because I love you, it is my duty to you, my neighbors, be you Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, or Buddhist, to tell you that you are all going straight to hell unless you repent and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord, Savior, Healer, and Deliverer!"

Ah, I thought, so it could get worse. Next he was quoting John 14:6 and John 10:8, implying that all other religions were founded by thieves and robbers. Finally he started to cry, telling everyone how much he loved them and didn't want them to be in hell forever. I looked at my watch. Twenty minutes. Now I was rubbing my eyebrows. "Oh God, let the world just end now," I prayed. After about thirty surreal minutes, he wrapped it up, and I couldn't believe what happened next.

Applause! Extended, loud applause! I was so shocked, I can't remember for sure if it was a standing ovation, but I think it was. What? Were they glad he told them they were going to hell? No—I'm quite certain few had gotten beyond his style to capture his content. Were they just happy for it to be over? Maybe in part. Were they responding to his passion, emotion, and conviction? Did the "I love you! I love you all!" come through so powerfully that everything else seemed unimportant? Yes, I'm sure that was it.

I won't bore you with the rest of the speakers, of whom I was next to last. (My point was that my Christian duty is to love my neighbor as myself. That late in the game, I knew that the best way I could practice what I was preaching was by being mercifully brief.)

Everyone managed to rally by the end of the hosting imam's closing comments, and all considered the gathering a success, and I suppose it was, in the sense that we all managed to be polite and respectful of each other in spite of our massive displays of awkwardness, insensitivity, and cluelessness. Ten years later I'm cringing as I remember all this.

Channeling a Spirit of Love

In the days that followed, I kept thinking about my Pentecostal friend. I kept thinking about the applause he received after he spoke. No, I wasn't jealous. But I knew the response was significant, and I wanted to understand it. Here's part of what I gradually came to realize: for him to be himself, to pour out his heart, to unleash his emotion—even more, to rouse his emotion, and to do so in the presence of others of different faiths—that was just the gift people needed in the aftermath of September 11. People needed to cry and shout and vent, not maintain a monotone of surface calm. They needed to rouse themselves toward something other than hostility or fear. In spite of his theological content, that's what this preacher managed to model that Sunday afternoon. I came to believe that my Pentecostal friend did something magical that day—not for me, because I was feeling so utterly responsible for how things were going, but for the majority who (thankfully) couldn't understand what he was saying. He made space for them to *be* human, to *feel* human, to feel *alive*.

And in that very human connection, he communicated real love for the people in the room. He made eye contact with them, not just his manuscript. He wasn't just faithfully representing a tradition or dutifully fulfilling an assignment as some of us seemed to be doing: he was speaking with fervent, sincere love as a human being to human beings.

In so doing, I think my friend revealed three of the deepest secrets of Pentecostalism: humanity, vitality, and sincerity. When my friend spoke, he wasn't a "human thinking" addressing "humans thinking": he spoke as a *feeling human being* to fellow *feeling human beings* of flesh and blood. He addressed us as human beings who, like him, want and need to stand, shout, laugh, cry, vent, be roused, clap, and . . . feel alive. And that vitality—so different from the religious gravity that was all too common among us—became a manifestation of good news: the possibility of something beyond routine existence and heads-down survival, the possibility of joyful vitality and conviviality. And when humanity and vitality are focused outward in sincerity and love for others, the condemning content is overshadowed by the spirit, the Holy, vital, loving Spirit.

Pentecostalism in its first dynamic century has helped us see (among other things) what the Spirit can do at the end of long church services with lots of loud singing and louder preaching. In the next century we must discover what the Spirit of God can do outside church services altogether, in the world at large—spreading humanity, vitality, and sincerity in the worlds of business, politics, art, and culture—not to mention the arena of interfaith reconciliation. For that to happen, for us to debug and reboot Christian theology as a benevolent rather than hostile program, we're going to have to give the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—what theologians call pneumatology—a second thought. And a third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh, too.

The Holy Spirit Is Open-Source

Our first thought of the Holy Spirit, of course, is the realization that there is a Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is God-in-us or God-upon-us or God-among-us everywhere and anywhere.

Our second thought of the Holy Spirit flows from the first: that the Spirit is ubiquitous—everywhere, always, in all creation. I am reminded of this passage by Paul Knitter from *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*:

> In a very real sense, according to Christian experience and symbolism, the Spirit is given with creation, indeed is the instrument or the power of creation. She is with us from the beginning, grounding and connecting every living being. I can rest in her . . . Utterly mysterious, totally unpredictable, filled and directed by love/compassion, she is the womb in whom I rest and from which I issue moment by moment.

That leads to a third thought, logical and hard to dispute, but too-seldom acknowledged: the Holy Spirit preexists all religions, cannot be contained by any single religion, and therefore can't be claimed as private property by any one religion.

That means that Pentecostals don't own the Holy Spirit, nor do Christians, nor do monotheists, nor do theists. According to Genesis, the Spirit was active in creation before there were any human beings, not to mention any religions; according to David, we cannot flee from the Spirit even in the grave; and according to Paul (quoting a Greek poet), all human beings live and move and have their being in the Spirit. So we can say that the Spirit is open-source rather than proprietary, and that people (and macaws and bonobos and tortoises and parrotfish, for that matter) are bumping into the Spirit at every turn, whether they acknowledge it or not.

That leads to a fourth thought, even more surprising: *what we call the secular is actually the realm or domain of the Spirit*. As Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong and Catholic thinker John Sobert Sylvest have explained, the secular—literally meaning the world, the realm outside of church control—isn't profane. Rather, properly understood, it is sacred because the Spirit is and has always been active there, evoking light

from darkness, order from chaos, fullness from void, life from lifelessness, actuality from potentiality, and potentiality from actuality.

If the secular is sacred, that means the Spirit is at work in what we call secular work in the secular world (a redundancy, by the way). So the scientist studying interstellar dust is investigating the domain of the Spirit, and the Spirit gently "hovers" over his neurons as they fire a hypothesis into being. The same is true of a paleontologist excavating a fossil, an executive developing a marketing plan, a stone mason fashioning a chimney, a father changing a diaper, a mother planning a vacation, an engineer designing a solar panel, and a bookkeeper wrestling with a budget. And that's as true for a Muslim astronomer, a Buddhist paleontologist, a Sikh executive, a Hindu stonemason, a Jewish father, a Jain mother, and an atheist engineer as it is for a Christian theologian. What will differ is not the presence and benevolence of the Spirit, but the awareness and responsiveness of the individual.

Religion: An Imperfect Response to Encounters with the Spirit

These second thoughts lead to yet another: if the Spirit is ubiquitous and all people are encountering the Holy Spirit simply because we live, move, and have our being in the Spirit's domain, we can understand human religions—all human religions, including our own—as imperfect human responses to our encounters with the Spirit who is present in all creation. That is not to deny the presence of divine revelation in any one religion, nor is it to affirm that all religions are the same. Instead, it is to propose that each religion, based on its unique location and history, would have a unique and evolving perspective from which to encounter the Spirit in a unique way. That would mean that differences between religions would not necessarily mean contradictions. They could simply mean additional data, expressed in different systems of imagery and language, based on differing encounters with the same Spirit of God, present in all creation across all time. Not only that, but in light of the wildly different local conditions in which they encounter the same Spirit, we might interpret some religious differences in a new light: rather than saying different (contradictory) things about the same thing, various religions could sometimes be saying different (complementary) things about different (complementary) experiences entirely. Yes, differences can be contradictions, but they can also be expansions, corroborations, elucidations, connections, corrections, or translations, all contributing to rich and needed conversations.

What would that mean for Christian identity? It would mean at least three things. First, we Christians can make a strong claim to have received a real revelation through real encounters with the Holy Spirit in specific locations and at specific times in creation. Second, we have something unique to offer members of other religions, based on our unique and real encounters with the Spirit. And third, it would mean other religions have something to offer us as well, based on their real and unique encounters with the Spirit. To refuse to receive those gifts would be tantamount to dishonoring the Holy Spirit's work beyond our group's own experience. These second thoughts would prepare us for one more.

If the Holy Spirit is ubiquitous and secular, active in all creation, not just the church, and if everyone in creation can't avoid encountering the Holy Spirit, and if all of our religions contain localized responses to the Holy Spirit (along with lots of other components, such as expressions of rivalry and fear), and if each religion has treasures to give and treasures to receive from the others, then we would expect the Holy Spirit to be moving people in each religion to offer their gifts to others, and to receive the gifts offered by others. In other words, we would expect the one Holy Spirit to be moving, working, "hovering" over each religion—and in a sense between religions, or at the boundaries between them, inviting people into conversation, even communion, across the boundaries that have in the past separated them.

And that Spirit-work would apply to us, right now. We would expect that in my writing and in your reading of it, the Holy Spirit would be at work, hovering over us, seeking to lead us out of the slavery of hostility and conflict and into the promised land of benevolence and communion.

In a strange, messy, imperfect-but-real way, that's what I believe the Holy Spirit was doing that 2001 afternoon in the mosque. It happened through all of us, I think. Our shared desire to be together and to communicate intelligently with one another expressed something of the Holy Spirit. But through that Pentecostal preacher—through him, and no doubt in spite of him to some degree—the Holy Spirit most powerfully conveyed love. Predictably perhaps, his words said, "I'm in; you're out. To be in, you must join my religion and believe what I believe." But his actions and his manner spoke more truly: "I love you. I care about you. I'm pouring out my heart to you—in spite of our differences. I'm holding nothing back. I'm taking a risk. I'm being real. I love you." When the people felt that sincere, uninhibited, overflowing, outpouring love—the primary fruit of the Holy Spirit—the walls came down, and they erupted in applause.

Trinity and Holy Spirit—these are only two sacred Christian mysteries and doctrines that have been used in the past to erect walls of insider-outsider hostility. But if we give them a second thought, if we rediscover them in a fresh light, they hold great promise for dissolving those walls, inspiring Christians to encounter the other as beloved neighbors, as spiritual relatives—not as threatening strangers or rivalrous enemies. ■

CHODOS *(continued from page 16)*

encounter us through a data profile, and they tailor their interactions with us to match that profile. And as the profiles become more and more elaborate, everyone involved begins to believe that they tell the whole story. If something is missing, or difficult to access, what is needed is more information.

It is Gottfried Leibniz's principle of "the identity of indiscernibles" all over again. If it can be said of two particles that they are in the same place at the same time, and that all their qualities and properties are the same, then Leibniz argued they must indeed be the same particle. They would be "indiscernible" because no property would be true of one that was not also true of the other. But the notion that a person has a list of properties that can be measured in the same way as those of a particle is something that even Leibniz himself would have laughed at. Yet today, we are not laughing at this idea: we seem to believe it!

The sense of privacy disintegrates when the sense of mystery disintegrates: if we want our privacy back, we have to regain our sense of mystery. But the loss of the sense of mystery may be one of the great catastrophes of the postmodern period, and it may not be reversible. Legislation by itself will never work.

And here is the irony of it: when the sense of mystery is displaced by the illusion of total information, the real bonds that hold the community together are not strengthened—they are weakened. For it is the sense of mystery that draws us into the never-ending enterprise of seeking to come closer to each other, and it is the sense of mystery that nurtures our sense of wonder and so inspires us to dance together in the space of shared imagination. ■

LEVY-LYONS *(continued from page 18)*

our commitment did not extend one iota beyond their usefulness to us.

The field of political philosophy offers useful critiques of this kind of rights-based classical liberalism. Utilitarians like John Stuart Mill would limit individual freedom where it interferes with the goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Communitarians like Michael Sandel lodge a more nuanced metaphysical complaint: that an individual "self" doesn't actually exist prior to or outside of its social context; that we are dated, situated, and constituted by our communities in such a particular way that our interests could not possibly be thought to be separate and independent from theirs. I find these arguments important, even exciting at times, but their critiques all ultimately miss something crucial. They miss what's at stake spiritually.

Too Much Politeness, Not Enough Love

In his article, "A Missing Presence," Edward Farley describes the lackadaisical feel of a typical Protestant church: "If the seraphim assumed this Sunday morning mood, they would be addressing God not as 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' but as 'nice, nice, nice.'" Farley, like most religious and spiritual seekers, is not only interested in the value of community generally, but wants to know about each particular community: what does it *feel like*, what does it *mean*, and why does it *matter*? What does a community feel like that is always contingently constituted and re-constituted by individuals freshly choosing to be there? What does a community feel like if the only glue that holds it together is a paradoxically shared commitment to personal autonomy? What does a community feel like if the only medium of social exchange available to its members is politeness? Well, it feels like so many of our liberal communities do these days: nice.

It's one thing for the weather to be nice or for your checkout clerk at the grocery store to be nice. But "nice" fatally undersells what a religious or spiritual community can and should be. "Holy," as the seraphim traditionally put it, gets a lot closer. I believe that a religious community is called to embody holiness in the quality of the relationships it comprises, meaning that God or Love is present and radically alive in those relationships. The electricity in a room where this kind of community is gathered is unmistakable and incomparable. I've experienced it only a few times in my life, in both Jewish and Christian contexts. Each time there is a palpable sense of the infinite and the eternal, the past, present, and future radiating outward from the space. Each moment of connection between people becomes holy as we lock eyes and recognize the image of God in one another. The images are vivid: Amid the joyful throng, a service dog dozes on the floor. Jasleen holds hands with her grandmother, singing with abandon. A man touches a stranger with his *tallit* (prayer shawl) and kisses it as if the stranger were a Torah scroll, saturated with God's presence.

Many of our religious traditions teach that God is most present or even only present in relationship or in community, hence the *minyan* (prayer quorum). In Parashat Teruma we find a literal articulation of this concept. God is instructing the Israelites in the building of the Mishkan, or dwelling place of the Holy One. Within the Holy of Holies they are to build an ark to house the Ten Commandments, and on top of the ark, fashion two winged humanoid creatures—cherubim—facing

one another with wings interlocking. "There I will meet with you," God says, "and impart to you—from between the two cherubim—all that I will command you." What a beautiful teaching about the power to be found in the place where people face one another. Not only does it suggest that God "meets with" us there, but that it is from this space that God imparts ongoing commandments—real time instructions regarding our religious obligations. In relationship and in spiritual community, we can discern the right path with a clarity that we could not achieve alone.

In religious literature we also find the ideal of community as a spiritual-political end in itself. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called it "the Beloved Community"—the community of the Promised Land, radically inclusive and rooted in love. It is a community in which marginalized voices are elevated and its members have a serious investment in one another's welfare. In "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," King writes:

> The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. . . . It is the love of God working in the lives of people. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.

This kind of love may indeed be the salvation of our civilization. It is certainly a countercultural love in that it refuses to be instrumentalized in the service of secular ends. It excludes no one; it is impractical, uneconomical, and undiscriminating. A community that can embody this kind of love, even partially, even sometimes, challenges the culture of domination. It destabilizes capitalism's foundational assumptions of, in the words of legal theorist Peter Gabel, "an inherent antagonism between self and other." This is why the words "nice" and "polite" do not even begin to describe the urgent work of community. The urgent work of community is to actualize God's immanence in this world.

This kind of community is hard to come by. It takes spiritual discipline, wise teachers, and the crucible of a live, frustrating collection of flawed humans to practice within. It takes inviting these flawed humans over for lunch, getting involved in their human problems. It takes the humility of admitting that ancient wisdom traditions as well as contemporary ones may have something to teach you. It takes a willingness to sometimes—even often—set aside one's private agenda and preferences for the good of the collective.

And what do you get in exchange for these sacrifices and all this hard work? You get to not be alone. Really, deeply, not alone. You get to know that, as you have a stake in your community's welfare, your community has a stake in your welfare—not just a polite interest, but a real stake. You get to trade in a nice life in which the highest value is freedom for a holy life in which the highest value is love. Most of all, you get the deep sense of purpose that comes from participating in something much, much larger than yourself. Because of course the Beloved Community is a vision larger than any one shul or ashram or church or political party, larger than one election cycle or one lifetime. It is a holy vision of the Promised Land of peace and justice—a time and a place where all of creation is united through love. Sounds nice, doesn't it? ■

JOHNSON *(continued from page 23)*

faith, rooted in humility before the unknowable mystery in which we live.

"Citizens of modernity, consumers of violence as spectacle, adepts of proximity without risk, are schooled to be cynical about the possibility of sincerity." That's Susan Sontag, who as a New Yorker knew whereof she wrote. "Some people will do anything to keep themselves from being moved. How much easier, from one's chair, far from danger, to claim the position of superiority."

Whatever one may write or say of the Burners, they, or at least their organizers, are not in their chairs. If at a time of declining resources, peaceful change is possible, it will manifest itself not, judging from their dismal outcomes, through global climate conferences, but through a new generation teaching itself (they are not learning this from their elders) the many ways that less is or can be more. Is it possible, is it imaginable that Burning Man could be one means to that end?

Action and Humility

Burning Man's organizers understand the power of ideas, which are so much stronger than armies. And what is their primary motivating idea? That action trumps thought. The last and thus most privileged of Burning Man's guiding principles reads, "Immediate experience is . . . the most important touchstone of value in our culture."

It is an ancient delusion, rooted more in wishful thinking than in fact, that enlightenment resides in unmediated experience. A creature that does not labor to learn and sustain the discipline of paying attention is soon a dead creature. This fact applies to human beings, however our technology—from the pointed stick used to plant the first seed to the iPhone—enables and encourages us to live oblivious to the facts of life, including most particularly

death. Thus does Burning Man subscribe to and extend the era of flash and dazzle over pause and think.

All the same, the last of the ten principles continues, "We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and . . . a natural world exceeding human powers," a phrase that the Burning Man website invokes elsewhere and that reveals a humility not often encountered in the rhetoric of left-wingers or libertarians. What are the implications of this humility? My post-Burning Man dreams feature not flaming globes and Thunderdome but the Dust City Diner and a slow waltz at 2 AM with an old friend wearing a cutaway. The flaming globe and Thunderdome exemplify artists beating our chests; the Dust City Diner and the starlight dance exemplify artists reaching out. It's the difference between art as narcissism and art as an expression of love.

And art that springs from love just might be one version of a moral equivalent of war, an outlet for all that testosterone that otherwise expresses itself in battle. Love roots itself in desire—not for combat but for communion, in which a grilled cheese sandwich can serve as an entirely adequate Eucharist.

Subverting the Culture of Empire

We must see the tawdry excess for what it is—bread and circuses—and in that same moment see through it to what lies beyond: the desire to know and be one with each other, in union with what we once had the courage or temerity to name.

I am perforce aware of the resistance evoked by that Name, of the horrors perpetrated ostensibly in its service, the abuses that have been heaped upon it, the cliché it has become. As a younger, angrier man I rejected it—why name the unnameable? In midlife, possessed of experience and memory, I encounter the answer: we do not remember or even perceive the nameless. To name the gods is to seize fire from their hands and, equally important, *to assume responsibility for its use*. To reject the Name was once my greatest act of courage, but these days I find a greater courage in reclaiming the word—one of the infinite names for that aspect of a "natural world exceeding human powers."

A double rainbow shines above Black Rock City at Burning Man in 2007.

Neil Girling (theblight.net)

The old myths are sufficient—the patterns are archetypal and repeat because history describes not a line but a circle or, more aptly, a spiral, turning back on itself. The youngest child at the sacred meal must ask the prescribed questions. The Christmas crèche must always have its holy infant, its ox and lamb, its hovering angels and its three Magi. The Yaquis of Arizona must every year strip their elaborate masks and pile them on the burning pyre, after which they must crawl in supplication to the Deer Dancer and the Virgin.

But as powerful and enduring as our need for myth is the need to reinvent it, recutting the old patterns to the cloth of contemporary life; and so every year we build the Man, and every year we put Him to the torch.

And so we arrive at the timeless, essentially religious questions that live at the heart of the "modern malaise" that Burning Man's organizers seek to solve. Is history linear or round? Must we repeat our mistakes in different guises and settings? Or can we learn from them and progress? But how do we define progress? Ever fancier gewgaws and gadgets (at least the boys are building art instead of bombs)? Or a deeper and broader understanding and practice of myth and ritual (the Dust City Diner)? Is Burning Man just another means of extending the adolescence of empire, where people who, denied conquest and exploitation, resort to the Nevada desert to play out their fantasies? Or is it a good-faith effort in sagebrush country—heartland of white man's exploitation—to subvert and transform the culture of empire through "leave no trace"?

Less Is More: A Gesture of Faith

A year and more has passed since I attended Burning Man, but a visit to the webpage suggests not much has changed. A "sister nonprofit," the Black Rock Arts Foundation, is continuing its program of small grants (maximum $1,000) to worldwide projects that in many ways meet the festival's ideals more closely than does the festival itself, e.g., a Guatemalan school built from recycled plastic bottles. It uses

its website to mobilize volunteers in response to various natural and man-made disasters. Burning Man's latest do-good project is undertaking to revitalize "a depressed San Francisco neighborhood" without displacing its low-income residents—or so organizers claim, though the website is vague on how this is to be accomplished.

Among the fifty thousand, the artists and writers seem best prepared to do the slog labor required to turn the wheel. But Burning Man presents no apparent challenges to transnational corporate rule or wars of aggression aimed at maintaining the economic power of a declining empire. In fact the festival is remarkably apolitical, perhaps because many of its principals derive their prosperity from corporate institutions at the heart of our empire (Lucasfilm, DreamWorks, Google, Pixar).

Often I find myself wondering if its organizers could take the bold step of declaring "Burning Green" as the theme of a particular year—say, Burning Man 2013. For that one year the festival could ban generator-powered installations and limit RVs to one per site. What would happen if the festival made such an emphatic statement about our need to wean ourselves from fossil fuel–powered spectacle? *That* would be the ultimate gesture of faith in the festival's capacity to transform and adapt the culture of empire.

Until the organizers make such a dramatic gesture, I have a hard time taking their aspirations seriously, even as I have faith that simply declaring those aspirations gives the next generation a goal to which to aspire. In this sense Burning Man could be read as a paradigm for the whole of our energy-hogging society: Anybody can talk the simple life talk. But can we walk the simple life walk?

We may repair our past and redeem our future—if we can—not through education alone but through a disciplined imagination rooted in humility before the "natural world exceeding human powers." ■

WILDSTREAK *(continued from page 26)*

of a character is affected by the player's unavoidable absence. For a writer like me, that can be very distressing.

Some of the people I've grown the closest to in the games are physically disabled people who describe these fantasy worlds as a wonderful escape. The games, several of them have told me, make their lives better, giving them a way to connect with others that can add great joy to their lives. I am among that group of disabled players now, though I wasn't when I first came into the games. Even when suffering with chronic pain from a condition that, barring a miracle (and I do believe in miracles!), will eventually leave me crippled, in the games I find myself laughing out loud in earnest with my online friends. There have been times in my life when my online friends were the only ones who stuck by me when my real-life friends and family turned their backs. For those of us in this group, I hope the game developers find a way to allow us to submerge even more deeply in these created worlds so that the pain of our bodies can be forgotten for a while.

Elves, Paladins, and Spiritual Healing

One of my most interesting characters was a blood elf death knight who was also a priest in an alternate universe. His name was Zaraek Starstriker.

A fundamentalist Christian man was behind the female elf who played my male elfin character's girlfriend. He also played her elfin guardian. A good writer and a good soul, he made a point to reach out to people and bring a little light into their lives. I still keep in touch with him through Facebook and Yahoo chat.

I was hesitant about creating a death knight character. Previously I had mainly played priestess characters, but I was finding that approach to ministry too obvious. I tried to be subtle, creating my own scavenger hunt and trivia games in the general chat channels to draw the players into spiritual discussion. This worked to a degree, but I thought that offering parables and allowing my readers to discover new truths as my characters did would be more effective. I needed to leave a bread-crumb trail rather than wallop the players with Christmas fruitcake to make them see stars.

One of my companions was a Wiccan woman, another great writer who played the leader of an evil guild, a female elf who threw my paladin death knight off the back of her skeletal dreadmount while in air and left him for dead. She was a lot of fun!

The role-play with her also allowed for exploration of some profound spiritual concepts. She told me once that my character revealed the most Christlike personality she had ever encountered. Through our role-play, her perception of the true nature of Christ was enriched and deepened. It was very satisfying to be that bridge for her from Tammuz to Christ.

During that time, unfortunately, she was also being judged and harassed by a fundamentalist Christian player. After standing up for her, I started getting threatening messages from people I barely knew. I left "World of Warcraft" because of this and went to "EverQuest" to continue the online ministry.

On "EverQuest," I played a dark elf who was raised away from the evil home city in a seaside shack. Because of that

upbringing he was goodhearted, unlike his brethren. When I joined a role-play guild, I met another excellent writer who played an Arasai (evil faerie) who had a thing for dark elves.

What is clear to me from the years of work I have been doing as a vigilante online healer is that the powerfully linked consciousness of the Internet can serve as a portal to other dimensions. Many writers have experienced the sensation of having a character "come alive." Now, with the technology and energy of the Internet behind the creation of an avatar and the focused attention of multiple consciousnesses into a perceptual space—along with the added intensity of higher emotions elicited through role-play—a bridge to another dimension can be created. I have experienced this personally. Computer role-playing is essentially a training mechanism for channeling. It's dangerous because it makes it easy for people who do not have the highest good of all in mind to do so unconsciously. Christopher Kilham, an ethnobotany lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, offers a helpful description of this linked consciousness:

> The World Wide Web is at least an exteriorization of the human mind, and represents virtually every conceivable mental state or manner of expression. With online gaming, the psyche is tapped directly into a potent desire/greed/competitive cycle, much as in the offline world of business. Little explored and not much discussed is the likely electro-psychic connection of the computer user and the vast web of machinery itself, and how the pulses that transmit messages in the Web also directly affect neural processing and brainwave activity. We are tapped, Matrix-style, into the vast feeder emanating from the global connectivity scheme, and our psyches are becoming saturated with an endless and complex bit-stream. As with other activities, what we choose to connect to fashions our consciousness.

I am reaching out for partners in this work, looking for others of like mind and experience to help, but I must advise caution also. In the end, you really *don't* know whom you're talking to on the Internet. You may be talking to a ghost in the machine. ■

HOLLAND *(continued from page 30)*

Following the summer intensive, most dialogue programs implement at least one year of in-country follow-ups to reinforce what the youth have learned at camp. Depending on the program, the follow-ups may include continued dialogue, online communication, joint cultural projects, or community presentations, such as the films made by youth involved in Building Bridges for Peace and Peace It Together.

A third component of many youth dialogue programs is the opportunity for past participants to return as young leaders for future summer intensives. Some young leaders also become trained as dialogue facilitators. Creativity for Peace prepares its returnees for collaborative leadership, with Palestinians and Israelis co-facilitating as a team. This mirrors a dialogue norm that is considered essential by many of the dialogue program directors with whom I spoke: the adults facilitating dialogue must represent, proportionally, the ethnic makeup of the youth in the program.

Many U.S.- and Canadian-based dialogue programs include North American youth in addition to Jewish Israelis, Palestinian Israelis, and Palestinians from the occupied territories. One program, Middle East Peace Camp for Children, only serves youth who live in the United States; the youth come from the Jewish, Arab, and Middle Eastern families living in the Seattle area. Another unique component of this program is that it serves children ages five to eleven, unlike most programs that work only with teenagers and young adults. Former campers can come back as teens, in the role of camp counselor or leader.

None of the programs I researched promote a political or religious ideology, although one might argue that the commitment to peace is both religious and political. Most programs do, however, include attendance at the religious services of each of the represented groups. Of the program directors with whom I spoke, only Noah Silverman of Face to Face/Faith to Faith, based in New York, describes his program as distinctly grounded in religious values: Jewish, Muslim, and Christian participants are encouraged to understand their faith's teachings about the moral value of peace, the hard reality that some of their religious traditions contribute to violence, and the responsibility to wrestle with this ambivalence in order to work for peace in the world.

Celebrating Our Cultural Kinship

What strikes me most profoundly when I visit Creativity for Peace is how much all of these women and girls look like they could be related to one another. I try but, for the most part, am unable to determine who comes from the West Bank and who from Israel. I am tenderly aware that most of the girls also look like me, with dark, wavy hair, olive skin, and Semitic features. More than any other experience I have had as a Jewish woman, this experience reminds me viscerally of how Jews and Arabs are, at our core, from the same people.

This reminder of our common ancestry is aligned with a belief I hold

deep in my heart: that Arabs and Jews will, in the end, choose to save each other rather than continue their mutual destruction. One of the tragic ironies of the seemingly endless conflict in Israel and Palestine is the rich history, cultural kinship, and shared values of our two peoples. Our language, music, food, ethics, traditions, religious tenets, and love of family and land are so similar. Once, we even lived as neighbors in peace. The history of our cooperative coexistence has been lost amid the ongoing danger and geopolitical divisiveness of the region. Instead, our differences have been emphasized, and there has been a blind acceptance by both peoples of the assertion that we each wish the demise of the other. Although real animosity and fear have grown, understandably, in the toxic environment of so much violence, many public opinion polls show that the majority of Palestinians and Israelis do want peace with each other and believe they can live peacefully together.

As Amira says, "The hate is between the governments, not the people." It is the people who, in the end, will have to demand that their leaders and their extremists stop the violence in both directions. The Israeli and Palestinian youth involved in dialogue across the world are moving beyond their pain, recognizing their similarities and appreciating differences, building bridges toward peace, and leading the way toward shared respect and neighborly coexistence.

Beyond Our Primitive Defense Mechanisms

On its face it seems obvious that when people truly see, listen to, and value each other, they are less likely to hurt each other. However, there is a deeper level, beyond external interaction, at which respectful and meaningful relationships—across conflict—have even more penetrating impact. In "Holding the Wound, Holding Out Hope," a March 2011 article on *Tikkun*'s web magazine site, I outlined the neuroscience of the social engagement system, an aspect of our autonomic nervous system that has evolved in mammals to provide safety and survival. As Stephen Porges, author of *The Polyvagal Theory*, has pointed out, this evolved capacity provides a foundation of resilience that can prevent trauma from causing great harm in the first place, and a mechanism through which we best heal from the debilitating effects of trauma when they do occur.

The social engagement system is one of three response systems that provide adaptive and behavioral strategies for survival. These strategies are *immobilization*, enabling us to freeze, appear dead, or dissociate from pain, terror, and horror; *mobilization*, enabling us to fight or flee; and, at the highest level, *social engagement*, enabling us to connect with our pack as a means to feel safe, remain calm, and access higher brain functioning to resolve situations.

Social engagement, including facial expression, eye gazing, vocalization, and listening, dampens the effects of the fight-or-flight responses, enabling social interactions that regulate and calm the agitation, fear, and anger typically evoked at points of danger. This communication settles the moment and lays down a template for more regulated behavior in the future. When the stress response is regulated, we are able to settle, and thus access higher levels of brain function, which govern and increase our capacity for critical thinking, creativity, transcendence of violence, and compassion. From these heights of wisdom, we can seek more peaceful, just, and sane solutions to the conflicts or dangers that we face.

Our more primitive defensive strategies, which in some situations of immediate attack do allow for survival, do not provide effective long-term defense or protection. Instead, their tendency to evoke similar defensive strategies in the other leads to a vicious cycle that escalates fear, despair, hatred, and violence. Although some situations within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict certainly qualify as immediate attack, the more persistent and devastating dynamic is the ongoing, intentional, often planned destructiveness between Israelis and Palestinians. If the most prominent component of negotiated peace agreements continues to be verbal and weaponized posturing on both sides, there is no doubt we will *all* remain driven by our more primitive defensive mechanisms. Continued reactivity to the violence and to each other will prevent this conflict from ever coming to an end. Alternatively, hateful doctrine, checkpoints, security walls, and suicide bombings become increasingly unnecessary when we instead cultivate strong and respectful relationships within which safety can emerge. Mutual awareness of the stories, heartache, dignity, and needs of the "other" creates an environment in which both peoples, together, can generate real solutions. It is the beauty of our neurological design that, the more we experience something, the more capable we become of engaging in it again. Therefore, the more time spent in social engagement, the more it becomes the stronger neurological response pattern, rising above primitive defenses.

Another important aspect of social engagement broadens our ability to live cooperatively: not only do social interactions, such as facial expression or voice tone, regulate bodily states, but bodily states, such as heart rate or emotional responsiveness, also regulate social interaction. Soothing interpersonal communication can promote a feeling of calm and safety. Likewise, activities or experiences that are enjoyable or help regulate internal physiology can positively affect our sense of safety and connected relationship. This bidirectional flow of social engagement allows greater complexity for the support of regulation and safety.

Many youth dialogue programs have woven both safe social interactions *and*

regulating activities into their daily routines. Rula, a Palestinian living in Israel who attended Creativity for Peace, says this aspect of the program felt helpful to her: "Doing art you forget all the borders between all the girls." Indeed, the shared laughter, singing, hula hooping, and yes, even chore completion of the girls whose smiles greeted me when I helped prepare their lunch are indicative of the complex foundation being created to bring about real change in the experiences and relationships between people who once considered each other enemies.

Our perceptions of safety and threat are set in place beginning in utero and may be strengthened or newly developed all through our lives. Our perceptions come via direct and intentional interactions with those around us, such as a mother's cooing or a father's gentle touch, and from social, cultural, and environmental experiences, such as music, ritual, or the smells of a favorite food. Our perceptions come to us primarily through our senses—visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, kinesthetic—and register primarily outside of conscious awareness. This is why a war veteran can hear a car backfire and, without conscious thought or decision making, be flat on the ground in seconds, ducking for cover. This is also why the smell of baking bread can bring a warm and powerful feeling and sudden tears for a long-beloved grandma. Our perceptions of safety and threat emerge from positive and painful experience, both love and violence having the potential to penetrate deeply.

Because our perceptions of safety and threat are mostly registered unconsciously, we often react to life's situations from these old perceptions, with neither awareness of why something has affected us, nor any assessment of our reaction. Typically, these reactions are old patterns of self-protection, which may or may not be appropriate or useful in the current situation. Many times, this failure of conscious choice about what would be most productive in a present situation leads to our retraumatization. Also known as trauma reenactment, this repetition of old, retraumatizing patterns not only clouds our evaluation of current situations but also complicates our ability to heal old trauma or find new ways to respond to threat and safety. When we look at the amount of trauma suffered by both Palestinians and Israelis, not just at the hands of each other, but for generations, it is clear that both peoples continue to reenact traumatic patterns, traumatizing self and other anew. Is it any wonder, then, that Israelis and Palestinians have struggled to move beyond primitive defensive strategies as their primary ways of reacting? Trauma reenactment yields little opportunity or desire to respond differently. Peace, then, feels like an impossibility.

Youth dialogue programs provide support for individuals to cease their patterns of trauma reenactment, offering real opportunity for change. By developing an approach that draws upon and strengthens the social engagement system, these programs provide both the safe relational container and the sensory, experiential, and everyday life activities that help heal and transform trauma. They gently and powerfully help youth to build new experiences, and thus new perceptions. These programs make conscious both the previously unconscious perceptions formulated in trauma and the newly formed, peaceful perceptions formulated in connection. By making these perceptions conscious, in the context of safe social relationship and physiologically regulating activities, deeper, more long-lasting change is possible. Again our neurological design serves us well, as the reinforcement of new perceptions takes precedence over trauma reenactment. Indyke might call this "peacemaking from the inside out."

The Courage to Stand Up

Although the numbers of youth who have participated in transformational dialogue are small, relative to the population of Arabs and Jews around the world, there is hope that the transformation nonetheless has impact. The back of the Creativity for Peace T-shirt says: "The courage to lead. The promise of change." The three young women connected to Creativity for Peace whom I interviewed each described how they apply what they've learned in their present-day lives.

"When you go back to reality at home, it is hard," Rula says. "You see the ugly truth." Attending Tel Aviv University, she is the only Palestinian in her class. "There is a wall. I feel different. Even if I don't like or agree, I try to see the other side. I learned in camp that even if it is hard, understanding the other side is easier . . . it is easier to love than to hate."

Sivan participates in a study group with other Jewish Israelis to better understand the Nakba, the 1948 Palestinian exodus. In Arabic *nakba* means catastrophe. The study group's goal is to learn what was not taught to them in "regular Israeli schools." Sivan says she tells her Jewish friends, "You believe what the news tells you, but they [the Palestinians] are really like you and me."

Amira speaks of a Palestinian Studies course she is taking at her university: "The professor started to talk about the Jewish people, saying that Israeli teachers teach their students to hate Arabs." At camp, Amira says, the girls talked about this, and she learned that many Israeli schools do not teach hatred toward Arabs. "Because I knew the truth, I asked the professor if I could speak. I told him, 'What you are saying is not true.' When you say the truth, it affects other people. . . . Before camp I would have never had the courage to stand up and say these things."

Because dialogue takes individuals deep into the emotion and suffering of self and other, the transformation is real

and long-lasting. In reality, it would not be that difficult to incorporate compassionate dialogue into our schools, communities, and religious institutions. Nor would all outreach have to come in the form of intense dialogue. The film projects created by the youth at Peace It Together are shown in their communities back home, with the hope of catalyzing mass audiences. A Michigan-based program called Pathways2Peace offers "Reuniting the Children of Abraham"—a multimedia package for purchase by schools and other groups across the globe. The "Teaching Tolerance" curriculum, designed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, has long been available to schools throughout the United States. Peer mediation, taking place in schools all over the world, has a proven approach to resolving conflict and teaching children how to listen and have compassion for the "other." And Parents Circle Families Forum, based in Israel and the West Bank, has a high school program called "Dialogue Encounters" that brings two forum members, one Israeli and one Palestinian, to classrooms in Israel, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank to talk to students about the possibility of peace and reconciliation. Close to 40,000 students are reached each year. As we examine the increasing effectiveness of programs such as these and others, it becomes clear that if the youth lead the way, eventually adults and our governing bodies will follow.

If we are serious about creating a more peaceful world, perhaps the most powerful thing we each can do is acknowledge our own painful experiences and the potential for trauma reenactment. We have the responsibility to monitor our emotions, responses, and potential reactivity, remaining cognizant of whether we are responding from our more primitive defenses or from our capacity to create connection, safety, and wiser solutions. If we are able to operate primarily from social engagement, we can be great peacemakers in our world. If we are unable to do so, we only add to the trauma and confusion, making peace that much more difficult to achieve.

As a Jewish woman, I am all too aware of my own threshold of emotion just beneath the surface. It is the pain of my grief and horror at what my own people suffer currently and have suffered over the centuries, and how I inherited that suffering through the stories *and* the unconscious perceptions of my ancestors. My pain is also of a grief and horror that my people are now the ones inflicting suffering upon another dignified people. To face and hold the suffering of both Palestinians and Israelis requires a deep strength and honesty that I struggle daily to maintain. Yet facing and holding the suffering is, I believe, the only way to transform the suffering and move in the direction of peace.

After saying goodbye to the girls and women of Creativity for Peace, I took a long walk amid the red rock expanse of New Mexico and wept. Within my own painful mix of emotions were tears of joy for the beautiful healing I had just witnessed—the welling up of hope that these girls and women, Israeli and Palestinian, so like me, so like each other, are forging, courageously and willingly, a new path of peace. ■

BERMAN *(continued from page 33)*

messianic, world, they declare, they would support a purified state.

From a progressive perspective, the foregrounding of the statism/anti-statism conundrum in the Israeli and Zionist past and present serves at least two purposes. First, it serves to remind us that the "legitimacy of the state" has always been in question for Zionism and that uncritical acceptance of that legitimacy is merely one position among many. Revival of the rich traditions of progressive Zionist skepticism about statism has long been recognized by many as key to critical thinking about the current situation. That some of the most important Jewish intellectuals of the past century were central to these traditions provides crucial anchoring for current progressive thought and action. Secondly, however, both historical and contemporary analysis shows that the line between statists and their critics does not necessarily track the line between right and left positions on the key moral issues that Zionism and Israel have faced and continue to face. Far from it: the polemics between statism and anti-statism divide all camps, left and right, religious and secular, even Zionist and anti-Zionist.

Rav Kook: Statist?

One way of appreciating the complexity of these issues, as is so often the case in matters relating to Zionism, is to look at a passage in an essay by Rav Abraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook, that spiritually paradoxical, culturally Modernist, intellectually cosmopolitan figure who was transmogrified into the ideological inspiration of the settler movement through what was arguably a tendentious appropriation of his views by his son Zvi Yehuda. Kook's key 1920 work, *Orot*, contains a chapter discussing "*le'umiyut Yisrael*," a phrase which, significantly, is used by Kook to signify both the "nationalism" and "nationality" of Israel. This chapter is often quoted for the proposition that Kook gave metaphysical, even divine, value to the "State of Israel" (which did not, of course, yet exist). Its most cited passage finds Kook declaring that this notional "State of Israel" is the "foundation of the throne of God in the world." Taken

alone, this quote seems to embody an exceptionalist Jewish statism in its most extreme form. Unlike all other states, which cannot embody "supreme human happiness," the "State of Israel" is the "highest level in the ladder of happiness." Unlike all other states, which are merely utilitarian, nothing more than "large corporations," the "State of Israel" is an end in itself, indeed the supreme end. Most readers of this passage, however, neglect the fact that, in the preceding paragraph, Kook gives a much more complex understanding of Jewish nationalism that demands a complete rethinking of his putative statism.

The discussion in that prior paragraph is grounded in the talmudic positing of two Jewish messiahs—the "Messiah son of Joseph" and the "Messiah son of David"—with the former fated to be killed before achieving the redemption. Kook associates these two messiahs with two kinds of nationalism; the first particularistic, the second universalistic. The "Messiah son of Joseph," the doomed messiah, embodies a "constricted nationalism," a nationalism marked by the "deficiencies of excessive particularistic love." This kind of "self-enclosing, self-isolating" nationalism is not, however, the "ultimate goal." Even though it may constitute a necessary phase, it needs to give way to a universalistic nationalism, whose aspiration is to "unify all the dwellers on the earth into one family." Kook is fiercely emphatic, moreover, that the transition from particularistic nationalism to universalistic nationalism cannot simply be a smooth, linear evolution. On the contrary, Kook portrays it as a dialectical, even violent, rupture. Particularistic nationalism must suffer "destruction" (*harisah*) and "annulment" (*bitul*); the embodiment of the "Messiah son of Joseph" is, therefore, "destined to be killed" (*'atid lei-hareg*). Indeed, Kook calls this particularistic nationalism "evil" (*ra'*), associating it with the "evil inclination" (*yetser ha-ra'*) itself. There are even sources in the Jewish tradition, with which Kook may have been familiar, that identify the "Messiah son of Joseph" not only as a failed messiah, but as a false messiah—specifically, as Sabbatai Zevi, a figure whose portrayals in Zionist polemics range from rejection as a national traitor to veneration as an inspiring precursor of modern Jewish nationalism.

This discussion requires a thorough rethinking of Kook's supposed glorification, even divinization, of the "State of Israel." Any "State of Israel" grounded in a particularistic, "constricted" nationalism was destined to suffer "destruction," "annulment," and "killing" in order to give way to a state grounded in a universalistic nationalism. Kook's dialectics would thus be the reverse of that which many of his self-proclaimed followers today advance: their anti-statism is grounded in the idea that the current state, grounded in universal legal principles, must give way to a state of Halachah, not subordinate to extra-Jewish values such as international law or human rights. Or as the saying goes: *b'li Bagatz u-B'Tselem*—"without the Supreme Court or B'Tselem" (a key Israeli human rights organization concerned with the rights of Palestinians), and certainly without the United Nations or the International Court of Justice. For the Kook of *Orot*, the valorizations were radically different: it was precisely the particularistic state that would give way through a catastrophic "destruction" to one grounded in a concern with all "dwellers on the earth." For Kook, this would be the truly religious state, whose chief concern would be the proclamation of God's unity. (I am not, of course, implying in any way that Kook would have sanctioned human beings taking up arms to achieve this predestined "destruction"!)

With this discussion, we have reached a supreme irony about the "delegitimization of the state" debate. The authority who is often cited for bestowing the highest conceivable legitimacy on the "State of Israel" can be better viewed as having prophetically denounced the reigning ideology of some of that state's founders, and of many of its most vociferous contemporary "pro-Zionist" supporters, as something inevitably headed for "destruction." A universalist critique of the legitimacy of one form of the state, grounded in anti-particularism, can thus be found at the very heart of supposedly statist Zionist ideology in the writings of one of its key inventors.

As Gershom Scholem wrote, the Jews are not, or should never be, a *Staatsvolk*. A battle against the delegitimization of the state should never serve as our rallying cry, for we know all too well the dangers of the "idolatry of the state." As Scholem wrote of Zionism's moral challenge in 1931, in words that retain an uncanny resonance in today's situation, "Either it will collaborate with the imperialist nations or it will cooperate in the fire of revolution of the Awakening East." Rather than being preoccupied with legitimizing the existing state, the young Scholem and Kook would tell us, we should be concerned with building a "free society," uniting all "the dwellers on the earth," or at least all the dwellers in the land from Jordan to the Mediterranean, into "one family"—in whatever political form that might take. ■

GRAY *(continued from page 36)*

Prohibition put the Al Capones of this world out of business. Furthermore, if Budweiser has distribution problems with Coors, its leaders don't put thugs with guns onto the streets to resolve them. Instead they file a complaint in court and have it peacefully adjudicated by judges like me.

In a similar fashion, how much risk-taking can an adult purchase from a teenager for $50 in cash? And how much corruption can a major drug dealer purchase from government officials, or anyone else, for $1 million in cash? The answer to both questions is, quite a bit. But this type of corruption caused by the

huge amounts of available cash in today's illegal distribution of drugs would virtually disappear. Why? Since the price of the drugs would be cut in half and it would still be illegal to buy, use, sell, or possess drugs not purchased from the government outlets, illegal dealers would lose a great deal of their present market. And that would run most of them out of business (if cutting the price in half were not sufficient, the price could always be reduced further). The proof is that we do not see Mexican drug cartels planting illegal vineyards in U.S. forests to compete with Robert Mondavi!

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, during the year 2010 alone, 5,800 metric tons of opium (which is used to make heroin) and between 1,500 and 3,500 metric tons of hashish were grown in Afghanistan. Many of the profits from the sales of those drugs went to fund the operations of the Taliban. Thus, following the above logic, repealing Drug Prohibition would deprive the Taliban and most other terrorist groups of a great deal of money.

This approach would seriously reduce the flow of drugs into our country because there would not be a market for them. Furthermore, drug dealers would not have the money to purchase guns here and smuggle them south of our border. In fact there would be a reduced need to do so.

Most drug-related health risks are caused by the unknown strength and purity of the drugs and by things like HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, which are transmitted by unclean needles. We know these are relatively easy problems to resolve. The repeal of Alcohol Prohibition virtually eliminated the "bathtub gin" impurities problems, and the FDA resolved its own dosage issues with over-the-counter and prescription drugs years ago. While I was on the bench, I was often faced with situations in which drug dealers had intentionally laced marijuana with methamphetamines to hook their customers. Although cigarettes are harmful, at least they are not laced with methamphetamines.

Since many of the losses of our civil liberties in things like search and seizure, asset forfeiture, and perjury from law enforcement officers have come from cases involving drug offenses, that trend would be discontinued. And since illicit drug dealers would be out of business, and drug users would not automatically be criminals, the numbers of people we incarcerated would be materially reduced. Furthermore, regulated drug legalization would restore more respect for our nation's laws, since we would no longer be arresting sick people for the use of medical marijuana or trying to enforce laws that make millions of people automatic criminals for simply smoking marijuana.

The last goal addressed by regulated legalization is the issue of crimes committed by drug users—both those committed to get money to purchase drugs and those committed while under their influence. I believe that with the price cut in half, drug-addicted people would only need to steal half as much to get their drugs. Some have argued that if the price were reduced, people would simply use more drugs. However, several countries, including Holland and Portugal, have found that decriminalizing drugs has made drug-addicted people much less fearful of their own government. That has, in turn, resulted in more people coming forward to seek drug treatment. Since those governments are saving money they previously spent to investigate, prosecute, and incarcerate drug users, more money is available to pay for drug treatment. In addition, those governments found that when drug addiction is treated as a medical issue, the usage of drugs is deglamorized to the extent that younger people are not nearly as likely to go down that road. For all of those reasons, drug crimes and drug abuse in those countries have been materially reduced.

Crimes committed by people under the influence of drugs would still be prosecuted, just as with alcohol-related offenses. Holding people accountable for their actions, instead of for what they put into their bodies, is a legitimate function of a criminal justice system (although an ideal system, modeled on principles of restorative justice, would focus more on the social, economic, and emotional forces that push individuals to crime in the first place).

Last, ending Drug Prohibition would generate large amounts of sales tax revenue—which could then be invested in struggling communities where individuals with poor access to education, health coverage, and job opportunities become involved in crime and acts of violence. In addition, the repeal of marijuana prohibition specifically would allow us to reclaim the enormously important and profitable production of industrial hemp. Manufacturers can get four times the amount of paper pulp from an acre of hemp that they can from four acres of trees, and it takes twenty years to grow the trees and only one season of seven to nine months to grow the hemp. All we would need to do is to change the laws such that marijuana under a THC level of 0.3 percent, which would be unusable for smoking, was regulated just like cotton. Since today our merchants import about $1 billion in hemp and hemp products from Canada alone, imagine the industry we could revitalize.

In short, there is arguably no one act that would make the world a safer and more prosperous place for our children and us than replacing Drug Prohibition with a program of the regulated legalization of drugs.

Harm Reduction in Switzerland

Fortunately, there have been some definite signs that people around the world are beginning to understand the causes and effects of current drug policies. These realizations, along with the fact that many of the options used by nations such as Portugal and Switzerland are working far better than U.S. drug policy, are evidence that we will see some positive changes in the not-so-distant future.

The most effective way of achieving positive change is to let reluctant people know that it is all right to discuss drug policy: just because we discuss alternative options to our present failed policy does not mean that we condone the use of any of these drugs.

Let's begin the discussion of options with the critically important thought that it made as much sense to put gifted actor Robert Downey Jr. in jail for his heroin addiction (I applaud him for continuing to recover from it) as it would have to put Betty Ford in jail for her alcohol addiction. It is the same thing: a medical problem. But if Robert Downey Jr., Betty Ford, or you or I drive a motor vehicle while impaired by any of these drugs, we should be prosecuted. What's the difference? Operating that vehicle while under the influence puts other people's safety at risk.

Switzerland's policy is highly pragmatic. The Swiss people realize that drugs like heroin, harmful as they can be, are here to stay. They further realize that health care professionals are better equipped than the police to address drug addictions. In the late 1990s, Switzerland established medical clinics that were staffed by health care professionals who worked with heroin-addicted people to try to make clients' lives better and safer. That meant that, after giving newcomers a medical checkup and taking a blood sample to determine the level of their addiction, health care workers would give them a prescription for heroin that could be filled at a pharmacy at competitive prices.

What were the results? Crime went down in the neighborhoods surrounding the clinics, and so did drug usage. Clients knew that if they were ever arrested for selling drugs or for another criminal violation, they would be dropped from the program, and that would make their lives much harder. It is not easy to set up and carry out a burglary, find a "fence" or buyer of stolen goods to pay you 10 percent of the value of whatever you stole, and then find your supplier of drugs. Being on a medical harm reduction program makes addicts' lives much easier, so they tend to stay away from crime. Thus fewer people sell drugs in the communities, and fewer people buy and use them.

But that is not all. The number of employed clients increased by about 50 percent. Many were able to support themselves and their families. None of them overdosed or contracted the AIDS virus, hepatitis, or other blood-born diseases. Most were becoming appreciably healthier. And as increased relationships of trust developed with the medical staff, more and more of the clients started requesting and receiving treatment to get off heroin entirely.

With results like this, can you think of any reason why we should not have similar medical intervention programs anywhere needed in our nation? The Swiss government is now totally behind this program, and so are most Swiss voters: in 1997, an initiative to repeal the program failed by more than 70 percent of the vote. In fact, the only reason that people have been able to argue against the Swiss program is that "it sends the wrong message to our children." But I believe our children are smart enough to understand that locking up people who are not harming anyone but themselves is simply the wrong way to go. In addition, no one can make me believe that Swiss parents love their children any less than we love ours.

Decriminalization in Portugal and Beyond

Portugal has also done major work to create new drug policy options over the last ten years. In 2000, Portugal realized it had the largest drug problem in the European Union, so government officials did something smart: they recruited a commission of (nonpolitical) experts, asking them to investigate the situation and come back with some recommendations. And that is what happened. After a year, the panel reported that Portugal faced two substantial problems. First, problem drug users were afraid of their own government. If they brought their problems to the government, they would be punished, so they took their problems underground. Second, the government was spending so much money on the investigation, prosecution, and incarceration of problem drug users that it didn't have enough money left to use for drug treatment.

In response to this report, in the year 2001, Portugal decriminalized all drugs. Although it is still illegal to possess or use any of these drugs, the police refer the offenders to a regional Committee for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction. These committees have the power to impose warnings and administrative sanctions such as fines, restrictions on driving permits, and referral to treatment. But in most of the cases, the committees give no punishment except to those who continue to make a nuisance of themselves to others.

What were the results? The Cato Institute found that drug usage nationwide basically remained the same. That finding in itself shows that the argument frequently used by our nation's drug czars that if we were to change our approach we would become a nation of "drug zombies" is not only untrue, it is also insulting and even silly. But problem drug usage, which is to say usage by people who are causing real harm to themselves or others, went down by 50 percent because problem users were being helped instead of punished by the government. Of equal importance, the Cato Institute found that the use of drugs by young Portuguese people in particular actually declined under this new system.

The Portuguese approach is now being used in many other countries, such as Mexico, and personal possession of any drug is no longer a violation of law in Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, or Latvia. Sanctions have also been relaxed in some

places in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Australia.

In addition to the beneficial impacts on crime, health, and overall drug usage, moving away from our policy of Drug Prohibition would reverse many unintended consequences of this policy. For example, it would enormously reduce harm to the mentally ill people in our communities. Many emotionally fragile people self-medicate by using illicit substances. As a result, the largest "mental health facilities" in most communities are county jails. Not only is jail the most expensive option that we can use to address this problem, frequently it is also the most harmful to the individuals being jailed. People often can overcome an addiction, but they cannot overcome a criminal conviction or what happens to them while they are in jail.

The Erosion of Civil Liberties

Drug Prohibition has resulted in a greater loss of our civil liberties than has anything else in the history of our country. It may be that some people in our country (misguidedly) would be willing to trade some of our civil liberties for progress in reducing the harms presented by the presence of illicit drugs in our communities. But most of the time, when I make a presentation about drug policy, I begin by asking the question, "How many of you believe we are in better shape today than we were five years ago on the issue of drug abuse and all of the crime and misery that accompany it?" Almost never do people raise their hands.

Just by tracing the decisions of the United States Supreme Court on drug cases, we can demonstrate that we have lost many of our constitutional protections under the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments during the last forty years due to the war on drugs—without showing any progress in that war. We have fewer protections against being searched in our homes or cars or anywhere else, more limitations placed upon our speech, and fewer protections against our property being seized by local or federal governments as a direct result of these drug laws. So why are so few people spreading the alarm?

What Next?

With all of these failures and vastly negative unintended consequences, why have we continued to perpetuate this failed and hopeless system? The answer is twofold. First, many people are willing to continue with this system "for all of its defects" in an effort to keep children away from a lifestyle of drug using and drug selling. But the irony is that this policy has made all drugs more available to children, and the lure of drug money has beckoned many youth into the drug lifestyle that we have been trying to fight off. So this policy has completely failed our children.

The second reason is money. Several years ago, on two separate occasions, I met alone with two sitting members of Congress in Orange County, California. Each time, one of the congressmen brought up the subject himself with words to this effect: "Almost everyone in Washington realizes that the war on drugs is not winnable, but it is imminently fundable. And Washington is addicted to the drug war funding." In other words, we can't look to the government to lead the charge for change. It will instead have to come from us. Fortunately, our leaders are really good at followership, which is to say that they will follow the votes. So if we show them by our votes that we favor programs that work, like those outlined above, they will endorse these programs as their own. And this will be true even if it reduces some of their campaign contributions, because politicians will follow the votes.

Presently, we have a movement in California to put an initiative on the ballot in November 2012 that will change the marijuana laws to reduce the harms of drug money, make marijuana less available for children, revitalize the hemp industry, take money away from juvenile gangs and Mexican drug cartels, and redirect that money into helping to repair roads, pay firefighters, and educate our children. It would even allow individuals to grow their own marijuana, just like wine grapes. You can read the exact language at regulatemarijuanalikewine.com and find speakers on this topic at leap.cc. You will see that we have endorsements from people like former Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief Steve Downing, singer Kenny Loggins, California NAACP President Alice Huffman, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson, NORML founder Keith Stroup, former Seattle Chief of Police Norm Stamper, and many others. You will also see that our initiative only addresses marijuana at this point, because, honestly, that is the only substance the public is ready to support at this time. But we hope we will soon be ready to follow in Switzerland and Portugal's footsteps with further efforts at drug medicalization, decriminalization, and regulation.

There are efforts to place similar measures on the November ballots in Washington and Colorado, and they would need substantially fewer signatures to do so. And, gratifyingly enough, even though we in California did not consult with activists in other states about the type of initiative we were all seeking to pass, each of the measures is quite similar. So that gives us further reason to believe that we are on the right track.

Passing this initiative would start the process of achieving the ten goals outlined above. I believe that within two or three years after this initiative passes, this approach will be so effective that it will sweep the country. Everybody will look back and be aghast that we could have perpetuated such a failed system for so long. Please join us in this critically important effort! ■

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Bamian: A Photograph from *Tricycle*, 2000

The boy with the beautiful face of central Asia
like an almond stood on its tip (the nose and cheek-curves
almonds within an almond) stands guarding
the almost featureless images of our larger nature,
Pheidias by way of Alexander. . .
Not his religion, even, but his ancestors',
and so worth respecting; worth disrespecting, to his enemies,
because he, a Hazara, is Shiite, and they're Sunnis.
The semi-automatic cradled in his hands
seems hardly a weapon, capped with a pagoda-
or minaret-shaped cone. . .

Two sides of the world's vise
closing on him. Ours will be bad enough,
but for now it's benevolent, bringing medicines
and a needed witness. As for
the others. . .
Genghis Khan, in his time, killed everyone
in this narrow valley. Before the end,
someone like this boy will bury the guest-books, with the names—
hippies I knew from the '60s, who smoked a bong
on the Buddha's forehead—out in a fallow field.

Hindus will spill pig's blood on the floor of a mosque in Delhi.
His tribe, returning, will bow to the empty caves.

—Alan Williamson